18 BiAS - Bible in Africa Studies

Masiiwa Ragies Gunda

ON THE PUBLIC ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN ZIMBABWE

Unpacking Banana's "re-writing" call for a socially and contextually relevant Biblical Studies

University of Bamberg Press

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Études sur la Bible en Afrique
Bibel-in-Afrika-Studien

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Volume 18

edited by
Joachim Kügler, Masiiwa R. Gunda, Lovemore Togarasei,
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In cooperation with
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University
of Bamberg
Press
2015

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Bibliographische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliographie; detaillierte bibliographische Informationen sind im Internet über http://dnb.ddb.de/ abrufbar

Herstellung und Druck: Digital Print Group, Nürnberg
Umschlaggestaltung: University of Bamberg Press, Anna Hitthaler
Umschlagfoto/Deko-Graphik: J. Kügler
Textformatierung: J. Kügler & I. Loch/M.R. Gunda

http://www.uni-bamberg.de/ubp/

ISSN: 2190-4944
ISBN: 978-3-86309-298-6 (Druckausgabe)
eISBN: 978-3-86309-299-3 (Online-Ausgabe)
URN: urn:nbn:de:bvb:473-opus4-255608

IN MEMORY OF

CANAAN SODINDO BANANA

MAY HIS SOUL REST IN PEACE

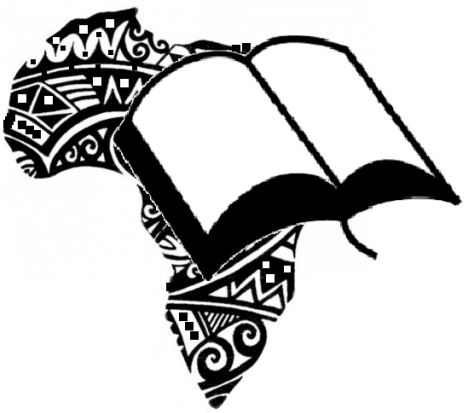
TO SHUVAI

MY BELOVED WIFE AND THE BOYS

TAKUDZWA AND ANOTIDA

AND TO ALL THOSE WHO SEARCH FOR JUSTICE,

EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IN THIS WORLD



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Acknowledgements

This book has its origins in my passion for justice and fairness in human relationships coupled with a sense that Canaan Sodindo Banana, the first President of independent Zimbabwe was treated unjustly and unfairly towards the end of his life. The passion for justice and fairness was central in my decision to study the manner in which the Bible was used in the Homosexual discourse in Zimbabwe in my PhD thesis. In the process of doing that study, I first encountered Banana, the outcast, the rejected. For having been accused and convicted for "engaging in unnatural acts with other men", most of Banana's political, academic and religious colleagues deserted him. It was then that I first realized that it would be interesting to gain a deeper understanding of this man, as a tribute to him, even if only post-humously. After completing my PhD, I dedicated time to study the works of Banana and being a biblical scholar, I was immediately attracted to his article "The Case for a New Bible" in which he called for the re-writing of the Bible as a way of solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. I therefore set out to investigate what Banana meant by re-writing the Bible, why he thought it was that important and what he wanted to achieve by re-writing the Bible. As I engaged deeper with Banana's works, a clear strand emerged linking all his works in a clear quest for justice, equality and fairness among peoples and among nations. I am grateful to participants of the Bible in Africa Studies Conference held at Kloster Banz, Germany in 2010, where I presented the abstract of this project. The input received from Professor Gerald West, Professor Sarajini Nadar, Dr. Zorodzai Dube and many other participants helped in setting this project on a clear path.

This project was made possible through the generous funding provided by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, through its Georg Forster Fund, who awarded me a post-doctoral research fellowship from October 2011 until September 2013. I am equally

grateful for the Return Fellowship granted by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation from November 2013 until October 2014. Without this generous funding, this project would have remained a pipedream. Through events and meetings organized throughout Germany, I encountered fellow Humboldtians who shared with me their own experiences and whose experiences helped me develop this work. I must thank the Foundation for not only financing my stay in Germany but making me part of the worldwide Humboldt family.

My stay in Germany was made homely and comfortable through the assistance and help that I got from my host, Prof. Dr. Joachim Kügler, the Chair holder for New Testament Sciences at the Otto Friedrich Universität Bamberg. From weekly post-graduate seminars in the University to seminars on the Badminton court as well as over Karpfen meals, this work became our obsession. His reading of the manuscript at all its stages and timely comments kept me on my toes and at it. Indeed, Bamberg has become a second home to me and my family. Besides the friendship and mentorship I have enjoyed from Prof. Dr. Kügler, I must commend the tireless Frau (Mrs) Loch, the secretary to Prof. Kügler. Any request for assistance was always given priority and through her lively office management, the office felt like home and was a nice place to work in. Materials unavailable in the library were promptly ordered and availed to me whenever I asked and for that I am truly grateful. Prof. Ezra Chitando has been there for me through it all, taking time from his busy schedule to read this manuscript several times and for willingly engaging me on various issues that I have dealt with in this project. I am extremely grateful for his continued mentorship. I am equaly grateful to Dr. Adriaan S van Klinken for critically reading through this manuscript and making important comments and even pointing me towards issues that I had not explicitly dealt with. Thank you all for your input into this project. Many other colleagues have made various contributions to the successful completion of this project, especially the "Zim-German Religion-Bible circle" of Dr. Nisbert T. Taringa,

Dr. Canisius Mwandayi, Dr. Francis Machingura, Dr. Obvious Vengeyi and Joram Tarusarira. I am grateful to be part of this circle. Their contributions are always pushing the argument and therefore opening up new possibilities.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the support that I have received from my family. The Gunda Family continues to give me reason to continue working, thank you my brothers and sisters. The Chitiyo Family for the support and gift of wife you gave me and the Mapika family for always being there for us. For the thoughtful engagement with my ideas and writings, thank you Mr. Mapika. Marshall Ruwona and Family as well as Passwell Chikomo, you guys are the meaning of friendship! Without your support I would not be where I am today. To Shuvai, my beloved wife and our boys Takudzwa and Anotida, I am grateful for your love and companionship. I cannot wish for better friends! Without the selfless support from my wife, who chose to suspend her own career to be with me in Germany, while seeing very little of me even as we shared the same roof, this project would not have come to this happy ending. I am truly and sincerely grateful not only for your love but for your informal critique of this work, which always seemed to extend the horizons of what was possible.

General Introduction

> The support by some Church leaders of a qualified franchise along with the attendant Land Apportionment Act was a paradox of the greatest magnitude and in no way could it be reconciled successfully with the tenets of justice as expunged [articulated?] upon in the New Testament, where equality of humankind before God is stressed (Banana 1996:94).

Suggesting that religion or sacred texts such as the Bible can play a significant role in the quest for establishing a just society appears to be a contradiction in terms, especially because religion and sacred texts have been among the worst culprits of human on human exploitation over the course of human history. From ancient civilisations from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Greece and into Roman civilisations, religion and sacred texts have had varied functions. The rise of Christianity and its development into a dominant religion with its sacred text, the Bible, has not been immune from the connections with exploitation and injustice. The role of Christianity in the colonization of sub-Saharan Africa has been a major theme for African studies for the past half century that for some it is difficult to see anything positive from the works of missionaries. While during the height of colonialism, missionaries would have been seen as saints, paragons of piety and even willing martyrs (Andrews 2009, Pierard 1993:469), in the past decades, especially after the demise of colonialism in Africa, the evaluation of missionaries has changed. Instead of godly martyrs, historians now described missionaries as arrogant and rapacious imperialists, while Christianity became not a saving grace but a monolithic and aggressive force that missionaries imposed upon defiant natives (Andrews 2009, Sherlock 2008:13-20, Tiberondwa 1998). Communities were dispossessed of their lands, which were parceled out to colonizers and missionaries. Some missionaries collaborated with their colonizing kith and kin against indigenous people. Many missionaries willingly served as military chaplains for settler armies against the local people, some

even participated in the burning of granaries of indigenous people to force them to surrender in wars against colonizers (Zvobgo 1996). The colonial experience is, indeed, a sordid one for indigenous people and there is evidence that the Bible was co-opted into the colonial system of exploitation and plunder.

The experience of the religiously sanctioned violence is not unique to African communities. Europe responded to the same situation through the separation of Church and State since religion had been the biggest sponsor of war and strife across Europe in the middle ages (Straumann 2008, Norman 2002). These developments, that is, the association of religion and exploitation in the colonies as well as the separation of church and state in Europe led some to optimistically predict the end of religion at the time when colonialism was facing its demise. Prominent people

> [S]uch 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... Africa's most dramatic Christian growth occurred after decolonization" (Shah 2008:x).

Such predictions, however, have been proven false because instead of declining, "religions are thriving all over the world" (Meyer and Moors 2006:1).

Since these predictions and the end of colonialism, religion has become a renewed force, recognized as an important factor in the modern world in all aspects of life; cultural, economic and political (Forrester and Kee 1993). In spite of the complicity of the Bible in the colonization of Africa, "Christian faith continues to grow in Africa, particularly among the poor marginalized" (West 1995:447), and "the separation of the 'two kingdoms' [Heavenly (Church) and Earthly (State)] stand little chance in Africa" (Ranger 2008:5). Ranger's observation is critical because it acknowledges the intertwined-ness of life in African societies. In Zimbabwe, especially among the Shona, the past, present and the future are

all inseparably connected, the spiritual and the mundane, the sacred and the profane are all intrinsically connected. The private and the public impinge on each other continuously. It is, therefore, unthinkable that religion and state can rigidly and effectively be separated. Against the wisdom of the predictions, the challenge is to understand why religion has continued to grow and whether that has anything to do with economic and political contexts of the different nation-states in Africa (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:2). The reality of Zimbabwe as a highly religious country, predominantly Christian and the widespread existence of injustice, inequality, inequity and unfairness in the manner citizens are treated calls for an investigation.

This work engages Canaan S. Banana, the first President of independent Zimbabwe (1980-1987), Methodist Church in Zimbabwe ordained Minister, a trained teacher and Professor at the University of Zimbabwe after his political career. The central focus for this work is on the article "The Case for a New Bible" written by Banana. In the article Banana calls for the "re-writing of the Bible" in order to decisively deal with the problems between Palestinians and Israelis (Banana 1993). In the call to re-write the Bible, Banana saw the re-writing as having a role to play in nation building. While, I have deliberately decided to emphasize this article by Banana, I am actually interested in the published works of Banana such as *The Gospel According to the Ghetto*, Edited Edition (1990), *Theology of Promise* (1982), *Come and Share: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (1991) and *Politics of Repression and Resistance: Face to Face with Combat Theology* (1996). Through a socio-historical analysis of the works of Banana, I argue that there are traces of the call to re-write the Bible in his various writings both pre-dating the call and succeeding the call itself. Therefore, the call to re-write the Bible should be understood in the context of feelings of betrayal and frustration on the slow pace or outright stagnancy in the quest for a peaceful world characterized by justice, fairness, equality and equity.

This work begins with the assumption that the concept of "re-writing" as espoused by Banana is pregnant with meaning. It is, therefore, pertinent to unpack this concept but most importantly this study should consider whether the call is an end or a means to an end. It is also important to investigate the supposed aim of such a project: what was it supposed to achieve? In focusing on the idea of re-writing, I am greatly indebted to the work of Stephen Ellis and Gerri ter Haar (2004) who argue that often religious ideas are ignored in the quest to understand the relationship between religion and politics in Africa. Scholars often focus on religious institutions and how they are involved in the democratization process in Africa. In their book, Ellis and ter Haar focus on religious ideas and how they inform, affect, and influence African politics. The idea of "re-writing" is directly connected to the "Word of God", that is, the Bible, which is "revered everywhere across the ecumenical church" (Fergusson 2013:9). This is particularly true in the Zimbabwean context where the Bible is highly regarded by Christians from across the various strands of Christianity.

Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses

What is the role of the Bible in nation building and the search for a just and democratic society in Zimbabwe? Put differently, can the Bible, as it is, be an agent of justice, equality and fairness in Zimbabwe? These questions point towards the need to analyse and evaluate the role that the Bible plays and can play in the search for justice, fairness, equality and democracy in Zimbabwe. The problem arises from the realization that our society is "marked by war, poverty, injustice, and all kinds of destructive conflicts" (Katongole 2011:190) that must be reversed or eradicated for the benefit of the exploited masses (Gunda 2009). While in the 1970s scholars had predicted that these ugly and undesirable elements in society would be eradicated when people revolted against religion that has not happened instead religion is thriving

(Forrester and Kee 1993). This study is about the quest for justice, equality, fairness and democracy in a society in which "Christianity plays a substantive and pervasive role in shaping the minds with which people address questions of modernity, authority, and the peaceful running of society" (Mukonyora 2008: 159).

In developing this study, I will analyse and evaluate Banana's call to re-write the Bible. What are the implications of such a call in a society that is also being challenged to "draw its ideals on good living from the Bible" (Mukonyora 2008:134)? While the initial call to re-write the Bible had no direct reference to Zimbabwe, "in the last several years Zimbabwe has been characterized by problems of growing authoritarianism, corruption, lack of freedom of expression, violence, a rapidly declining economy, and thousands of young people left unemployed" (Mukonyora 2008:131). This new environment demands that an evaluation of the relevance of the call on Zimbabwe's development is now due, if not overdue. The call must be analyzed also to evaluate whether "religions have the power to change the world and to 'birth global peace and justice'?" (Rieger 2007:300).

The statement of the problem is enhanced by an outline of the three theses that will guide this study. The first thesis of this study is that "re-writing the Bible" as suggested by Banana can only alienate Christians and non-Christians, thereby increasing rather than decreasing tensions in communities. Any attempts to tamper with the text of the Bible will be met with resistance in conservative[1] societies like Zimbabwe hence the idea of re-writing in

[1] Conservatism is a relative concept which can be used loosely and sometimes narrowly. I tend to use the word loosely to refer to an attitude that rejects or undermines developments arising in the modern world, especially on social and religious issues. I am therefore grateful to the articulation provided by Martin Prozesky (2009:241) who avers that "the phrase 'the more conservative part of Christianity' [references] members of that faith who share most or all of the following characteristics: a belief that their religion is the only means of salvation; that Christ is the only saviour; that he was born of a virgin mother; that the Christian Bible is the sole source of saving truth and moral guidance, and even—for the very conservative—of factual matters

its crude sense is not a viable option if the Bible is to make any meaningful contribution to the quest for justice, peace, equality and democracy in Zimbabwe. The strength of the Bible lies in the fact that there is a community behind the text, a community which consents to its claim to authority and which aspires for honesty, justice, equality and fairness. Losing that community will weaken the Bible and its potential contribution (Constantelos 1999:141), and may sustain a "dangerous and explosive" (Forrester and Kee 1993) environment unsuitable for justice, peace, equality and democracy. This thesis is not a rejection of the need "to critically assess the Bible's function in the public discourse" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2008:157-158), rather it is a call for a careful engagement which can bring believers on board rather than throwing them overboard.

In my second thesis, I argue that the Bible has a role to play in the quest for democracy, justice, equality and fairness in contemporary communities, particularly in Zimbabwe. This is so because "the biblical tradition developed as the community combined the value of the past with the needs of the present" (Kugel and Greer 1986:34-39). The Bible has survived because believers considered

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like the creation of the universe, being inspired (even dictated, according to some of the most conservative) by God himself , so that where biblical teaching and science are in conflict, as many of these Christians maintain is the case in connection with evolution and the story of creation in the book of Genesis, the former is to be preferred. In connection with morals, conservative Christians would typically hold that abortion, sex outside marriage and homosexuality are wrong, as are same-sex marriages, that the death penalty is mandated by the Bible and thus by God, and that husbands are divinely authorized to be in control of their families." I call Zimbabwe here a conservative society in this loosely defined manner. By conservative here, I mean that most Zimbabweans tend to be socially conservative on issues such as abortion, sexualities, and relations between the sexes. They are also largely conservative on religious issues, especially when it comes to what can and cannot be done with the Bible, which is considered a Holy Book. Suggesting a re-writing of the Bible was met with venomous responses from a variety of Christian leaders and ordinary Christians because of this conservatism.

the preservation of these writings valuable for the community's present needs. Initially, the Jews, then later, Christians, committed themselves to remember and preserve the story, which was told and re-told, written and re-written, acted and re-enacted. That led to the development of the tradition considered valuable for the present, not for its historicity but for its ability to speak to the present needs and aspirations (Bowley 1999:8, Gunda 2011:12). The relevance of the Bible is driven by the fact that its "presence in public life has not simply faded into the past, but is alive and well" (McConville 2006:1-2). Since the Bible has many followers, and since it has already been an instrument for liberation in Zimbabwe and other places, it is possible that it can again become an instrument to fulfill the aspirations of the people. I am aware that for others, the Bible has also sanctioned many bad practices, that is a downside which does not necessarily erase the other side, which I will focus on in this study.

The third and final thesis for this study is that "partial de-biblification" as well as "critical biblification" of the public sphere can usher a constructive presence of the Bible in the quest for democracy, justice, equality and fairness. Having already said the Bible has a role to play, the challenge moves to the area of how the Bible can actualize that role. This study proposes a partial de-biblification as well as critical biblification of the public sphere. This two pronged approach to the Bible appreciates that there are several different schools of biblically informed political thought. Of these, some obstruct democratic practice, while others strengthen democracy (Mukonyora 2008:135). Even though this thesis stands a better chance of being supported by ordinary Christians, it is apparent that

> Such a project is contentious from every conceivable angle. A secular world would banish the Bible from public discourse... A suspicious world regards the Bible as serving the interests of those who promote it, powerful elites, insiders excluding outsiders, and so doubts its capacity to be the vehicle of radical critique (McConville 2006:1).

While "[Jürgen] Habermas saw the emergence of the public sphere and the public decline of religion as dependent on each other" (Meyer and Moors 2006:4), we have already noted above that this has not proven true hence in societies such as Zimbabwe, religion is firmly within the public sphere. Therefore, what we seek is a society that can guarantee equality, justice, equity and fairness, "which in contemporary societies are often expressed as Human rights, Equality and nondiscrimination, and Democracy" (Taylor 2011:47). These aspirations, even when expressed from a Christian perspective, cover the interests of all, believers and non-believers. In doing all this, I am fully aware of the pitfalls.

> The challenge is even more complicated for those whose educational privileges and institutional position gives them the ability to speak and to be heard. When they try to speak in the public arena, members of the academy who appear to have surrendered their commitment to a neutral objectivity risk losing their credibility and thus their potential influence, while those who stand detached from the social and ethical demands of our time are politically ineffective (Kittredge et al 2008:1).

I argue in this study that "neutral objectivity" does not exist in contexts that are characterized by exploitation, oppression and injustice. Instead, scholars of the Bible and ordinary readers of the Bible can, through collaborative work in seeking principles and models for governance, influence public policy and national ethos. In the context of socially engaged scholarship, I concur with the observations of Nadar[2] (2010) that scholars should play a

[2] Sarojini Nadar disputed the suggestion by Gerald West that scholars must allow the ordinary readers to decide for themselves what plan of action they would take to redress their situation. West calls for scholars to be partners with their ordinary readers while Nadar suggests that scholars armed with their vast knowledge must give some prescriptions to their ordinary readers partners. I subscribe to the viewpoint of Nadar, especially in contexts where the scholar is fully part of that community and not an "outsider", a fact which may be behind West's proposal. The discussion was in the context of a conference on "The Bible and Politics in Africa", Kloster Banz, Germany (2010).

leading role in giving suggestions and prescriptions to their communities on how to proceed in the search for justice. By challenging abuses of the Bible and proposing uses of the Bible, Christians can be defenders of the rights of all citizens irrespective of their faith.

Definition of Terms

It is pertinent in a study of this nature to define some of the critical terms and phrases being used extensively throughout the forthcoming chapters. Terms such as justice, equality, fairness, equity, biblification and de-biblification are terms that are either widely used in a variety of situations thereby carrying the potential to have a variety of meanings or are relatively new thereby demanding further clarifications to guide readers on how such terms are being used in this study. This section does not seek to trace the historical developments behind these terms but seeks to highlight in what ways these terms are understood and employed in this work. Justice generally refers to the quality of conforming to agreed and standard principles of reason pertaining to what is right and wrong. From this understanding justice is done when previously agreed standards are met or surpassed and when such standards are subverted, then the opposite of justice, that is, injustice becomes the outcome. The critical linking of justice with laws has led to the development of an understanding of justice strictly in legal terms, hence in many countries, including Zimbabwe; justice is sought in courts of law. In a study such as this, however, justice is considered much broader than the supposed legal context in which it is now almost exclusively linked with. Justice is also a theological concept and is among the critical demands placed on the Israelites by God. In Deuteronomy 16:20, the Lord emphasizes the fact that the Israelites must pursue "Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you." Justice is therefore not only faithfulness to the law but obedience to God. Everyone

had an obligation to defend the vulnerable members, normally mentioned as "the poor, orphans, widows and strangers" (Ex. 23:6; Deut. 10:18). Once we bring on board the idea that justice is not invented by society but by the creator, it becomes clear also that there is a possibility that societies might actually try to subvert justice by enacting laws that are unjust thereby "engendering economic and legal injustices" (Pleins 2001:374). Conforming to the law is therefore not the best test for justice; the laws themselves may need to be interrogated. The fear of "legitimate manipulation" of justice may be behind the call such as in Exodus 23:2: "You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice." Another text that indicates that justice has a theological foundation is 1 Kings 3:28, which credits Solomon of being just because he had the wisdom of God. This study therefore reckons justice as conforming to laws in a legal and theological way. In order to fully appreciate justice this way, it is critical that we consider the other critical term for this study, that is, fairness.

Fairness can be defined as the quality of being fair, where fair means free from bias, dishonesty or injustice. While, we noted that justice is mostly understood in legal terms, fairness is largely understood in moral terms. The Hebrew term that is translated as "justice" in the Old Testament carries the notions of contemporary justice and fairness. In calling for justice tampered with fairness, this is an attempt to reach the complexity of the Hebrew "mishpat" since its notion of justice is not simply exhausted by the definition of justice as conforming to terms of laws. Laws are meant as guidelines governing relationships and transactions among human beings and for laws to achieve harmony and stability they need to be applied in a fair manner. It is not enough to interpret the meanings and implications of laws but to also evaluate how the laws will affect the vulnerable groups. It is in this context that it becomes critical not simply to look at the legality of actions but the fairness of seemingly legal actions. Where legal

actions are manifestly unfair, such justice is not justice from a theological perspective for God demands "fair justice." This is particularly important in contemporary situations where laws are enacted in order to legitimize the actions and aspirations of those who are privileged to be the law-makers. Take for example, an employer goes for half a year without paying her/his employees their wages and in the process of scavenging for their families the employees steal some products from their workplace in order to feed their families. Legally, the employees will be arrested and punished for stealing even though such stealing has been necessitated by the failure of the employer. While justice would have been done in arresting these employees that justice will certainly be "unfair" because it advantages the employer. The employer is always in a win-win situation while the employee is in a lose-lose situation. Fair-justice will resist and reject such legal manipulations of justice.

Equality refers generally to the quality of being similar, being of the same quality or quantity and in legal but streetwise talk, it also refers to the ideal of being treated in similar ways using the same standard to judge or evaluate all. Coming from an African perspective, equality is a concept that was central, alongside justice, to the fight for liberation in many African countries. The colonial experience had clearly shown that human beings were not equal, they were different. Some (meaning white westerners) were superior than others (meaning black Africans). Laws were applied differently and opportunities (economic, political, religious and social) were availed in a way that favoured the white community against the black community. These inequalities were among the many reasons why some were horrified to the extent of going to war to fight to put such practices to an end. Once again, we are more exposed to statements such as "we are all equal before the law" even though this statement is far from the truth when it comes to the operations of law in most contemporary communities because there are some who use the law and those on whom laws are used. The equality that is advocated and meant in this

study is one that also borrows heavily from theological thinking. To elucidate on this equality one need only refer to Galatians 3:28; "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This basis for equality can then be further strengthened by invoking the concept of the "Image of God", which is inherent in all human beings according to Genesis 1:26-28. If all human beings possess the image of God; it, therefore, follows that whether one is leader of the community or the least in that community they are all equal and must therefore be treated with dignity and respect. To call for equality in this way is not to neglect the need for leaders, rather such equality is a pre-requisite to the establishment of a society that is stable and strong.

The terms that have been dealt with above, that is, justice, fairness and equality can all be fairly represented by the term Equity, which can refer to the quality of being fair and just thereby promoting equality among people. I am fully aware of the controversies that surround King David but in 2 Samuel 8:15, it is suggested that "David administered justice and equity to all his people" while Proverbs 1:3 extols Solomon "for gaining instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity." In these texts, it is clear that equity is closely connected to righteousness and justice. Equity is also used in this study to refer to the need for the equitable distribution of resources among members of the community, which allows such members to be in a position to fend for themselves without the need to depend on pity and handouts. These terms are also considered to be central in understanding the promises of democracy, which is the preferred political system in Zimbabwe currently. From this perspective, democracy is not essentially contradictory to the essence of Christian faith.

There are a set of terms that I am using in this study which are all derivates of the Bible. These terms are inspired by the realization that we are living in a community and world that is increasingly dependent on the Bible. In Zimbabwe, the Bible occupies both public and private spaces and the process of making the Bible a

feature of all these spheres is what I mean by biblification. Different spheres are shaped by explicit and also implicit biblical influences. Conversely, the attempt or process of removing the Bible and its explicit and implicit influences in the public sphere is represented by the term de-biblification. De-biblification is used to refer to the total eradication of the Bible from the public sphere while partial-de-biblification is used to refer to targeted removal of the Bible in some public spaces and events. Finally, this study also uses the phrase "critical biblification" of the public sphere, which is used to refer to the process where the Bible is acknowledged as a public resource which however must be engaged with critically in search of solutions to questions that challenge our society focusing on all areas of human life from politics to economics. Other terms that are not defined in this section will be defined as and when it becomes prudent.

Chapter 1

Understanding Canaan Sodindo Banana: the man and the ideals

> An oppressed people cannot move toward their own liberation without knowing who they are and who their oppressors are. Being able to name the enemy is the only way to gain power over oppression and injustice (Queen-Sutherland 2013:193).

Introduction

Ideas are generated by women or men! The idea to "re-write the Bible" was generated by Canaan Sodindo Banana. While the bulk of this study will focus on the idea, this chapter focuses on the person. Ideas, like texts, are contingent upon the context within which they are generated, or the context of the one generating such ideas. This chapter is a quick endorsement of the fact that no idea is context free! Ideas are not generated in a vacuum, hence understanding something about the generator of an idea is already a necessary step into understanding the idea itself. This chapter looks at Banana, the man, the politician, the ordained minister of religion and finally the university professor. In all these facets of Banana's life, there are elements that feed into his controversial call to re-write the Bible, which is the main focus of this work.

Canaan Sodindo Banana: The man

As this study focuses essentially on the call by Banana to "re-write the Bible", a call made in 1991, it is important to begin by outlining the man behind the call. Canaan S. Banana is a larger than life character, born on 5 March 1936 at Esiphezini, Essexvale Dis-

trict, now called Esigodini (Banana 1990:xii, Banana 1991(a):232, Chitando 2004:188). Clearly, the time of Banana's birth must of necessity shed some light on his experiences of life in then colonial Zimbabwe. It also means by the time nationalism gained momentum in the 1950s through the 1960s, Banana was a young man. Banana married Janet Mbuyazwe in 1961 and had four children. He was nurtured in an environment that juxtaposed the excesses of colonialism and the strength of indigenous resistance of the same. The colonial experience of Banana looms large in his works and his ideas.

Banana was born into a peasant family of practicing Christians. According to Chitando (2004:188) his parents "were struggling peasants, members of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. His father was a local lay preacher and also an African herbalist." This situation meant Banana had first-hand experience of what it means to lack or to be deprived, for that was the stock of peasants. Therefore, when he begins to interrogate biblical texts on "the abundance of life" promised by Jesus Christ, Banana was indeed responding to his own life, a life that was anything but abundant! Further, that his father was an African herbalist would have brought about other challenges to Banana's development. It is widely acknowledged that missionary Christianity characterized such a trade as evil. How then did Banana reconcile the "darkness" of African medicine with the fact that his own father was a practitioner of such "dark arts" and a lay preacher?

Banana attended school at Mzinyati Mission and Tegwani High School (Banana 1990:xii). Chitando (2004:188) elaborates on the early education of Banana by noting that he did standard 2 up to standard 4 at Mzinyati Mission, he then moved to Luveve High Primary School for standard 5 and 6. Eventually enrolling at Tegwani Teacher Training College from 1955 to 1957 after which he taught from 1958 until 1959. The schooling record suggests Banana was actually among the "few blacks who were well trained" (Chitando 2004) hence it is no surprise that he was promoted to work as "schools manager in the Wankie and Plumtree areas be-

tween 1963 and 1968." In between Banana's time working as a teacher and schools' manager, he attended "Epworth [United] Theological College from 1960 – 1962" (Banana 1991(a):232) where he trained to join ordained ministry in the Methodist Church, going a step further than his father who was a lay preacher. To round up his academic studies, Banana obtained a Master's Degree in Theological Studies at the Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC in 1975. During his time in Washington DC, he also served as Visiting Chaplain at the American University between 1973 and 1975. He then graduated with a Bachelor of Arts Honours in Theology from the University of South Africa in 1979" (Banana 1990: xii, Gunda 2012b:133). Finally, Banana "also earned his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1996 at the University of Zimbabwe" (Chitando 2004:190).

While Banana served as a teacher, schools' manager, Principal of Tegwani, Visiting Chaplain (American University 1973-75), Chairman of Bulawayo Council of Churches, member of the Advisory Committee of the World Council of Churches (Banana 1990, Chitando 2004, Gundani 2000), he was also actively involved in the political developments in Zimbabwe. According to Gundani (2000:178) Banana was instrumental in the creation of the Student Christian Movement, a not so politically docile movement. He was a founder member of the African National Council (ANC) in 1971, becoming the first Vice-President, with Bishop Abel Tendekai Muzorewa of the United Methodist as President (Banana 1990:xiii). With this public involvement in the politics of his day, it is not surprising that "in 1972 the Rhodesian Police impounded his passport and forbade him from entering police stations on the grounds that he might incite members of the Police Force" (Banana 1990:xiii). Even without his passport, Banana travelled to the United States and stayed there between 1973 and 1975, but on his return, he was arrested and released in 1976 but then restricted to his home area (Banana 1990:xiii). This man knew the vagaries of the politics of his day, not from the testimony of others, but from his experience. He was released from re-

striction in order for him to attend the Geneva Conference as Vice President of UANC led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa but being the enigma that he was, he took that opportunity to cross the floor to join Robert Mugabe's ZANU (Chitando 2004:190), a party he felt was much better placed to deliver true liberation to Zimbabweans since Muzorewa was involved in some secret talks with the Smith regime (Banana 1996:194).

While he had left the country as Vice President to Bishop Muzorewa, he returned "as the publicity secretary of the People's Movement, the internal wing of ZANU" after which "he was arrested in January 1977 and placed in solitary confinement ... only to be released in 1979 after the completion of the Lancaster House Conference" (Chitando 2004:190). The story of Banana in 1980 is the story of Zimbabwe because with the election of Robert Mugabe as Prime Minister, Banana became the "first President of Zimbabwe until his retirement in 1987" (Chitando 2004:190, Ellis and ter Haar 2004:102). Banana's retirement was in a way linked to the political developments of the time, especially "the signing of the Unity Accord on 22 December 1987 between ZANU and ZAPU led by Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo respectively" (Chitando 2004:191). Could it be that the new dispensation did not have room for Banana? The new dispensation saw Mugabe becoming (Executive) President with two Deputies, Simon Muzenda who was already Mugabe's deputy premier and Nkomo. It is in this context that Rupert Cornwell (2003) contends that "in 1987, Mugabe pushed through a revised constitution, turning Zimbabwe into the presidential republic it is today. Banana was forced to step down." Upon retirement from active politics, Banana served as "OAU Eminent Person for Liberia and Sierra Leone and UN Eminent Person on a Mission to South Africa" (Hallencreutz 1996:8). Besides these roles, he also traced his steps back to his other love, teaching and "became an Honorary Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe" (Chitando 2004:190); it is in this Department that Banana made the kind of impression that has necessitated this

work. Working in the University provided Banana room to continue with his political activism which saw him criticize the Mugabe regime (Chitando 2004:191) and there was even suspicion that he intended to challenge Mugabe in the 1996 Presidential election (Gunda 2010a:197).

This indeed is a story of a "great man" but the end of Banana was anything but that of a great man. As Chitando (2004:191) sums up the final years of Banana; his "life turned a full circle when he was convicted and jailed for a year for sodomy in 2000. His star had fallen from that of a respected statesman to that of a convicted criminal." Chitando rightly questions the snubbing of Banana by his political and religious friends, while noting the unwavering support he received from some of his academic friends and colleagues. Prof. Canaan Sodindo Banana died on 10 November 2003 and I dare say "the man died a very disappointed man" not only because of how his star had fallen but also because a closer reading of his works, both the Church and the State had terribly betrayed his ideals! "By the end of his life, Banana was deeply saddened by the disaster that Zimbabwe had become, but was powerless to change its fortunes" (Cornwell 12/11/2003). In short, Banana was a conglomeration of a religious minister, teacher, politician and family man.

Canaan Sodindo Banana: The Ideals

While Canaan Banana, the man went from peasantry to Head of State living the dream that never materializes for many peasants, the same man tumbled down from Head of State to a common criminal convict, all in one life; a life that reached its destination on 10 November 2003, when Banana passed on. This section intends to outline some of the ideals of the life of Banana. Life was one whole not to be compartmentalized; his ideals, therefore, cannot be understood as political, religious or economic. In taking this position, I am greatly indebted to the observation of Rieger

(2007:25-6) whose observations are descriptive of the worldview of Banana, when he writes;

> It is easily overlooked today that in none of these [ancient] manifestations of empire could the political, the economic, the cultural, and the religious be separated; separating the realms of politics, economics, culture, and religion is a modern idea, which would have been foreign to the inhabitants of the ancient world (Rieger 2007:25-6).

Banana's ideals were for an ideal life. By outlining these ideals, we are preparing a necessary background to engage with Banana's call to re-write the Bible, an engagement that will follow in the coming chapters. Critical to understanding the ideals of Banana is his belief in a God who is active in history, a God who should be manifest in human relations. This understanding of God is central if we are to appreciate the ideals that follow below.

African Culture/ Religion as the foundation for African Christianity

Banana never hid his displeasure at the manner in which western mediated Christianity had treated African culture, rubbishing it instead of integrating itself within the African worldview. He accused missionaries of failing to "understand, develop and baptize the positive elements of African culture" thereby creating "in the minds of some missionaries and their white parishioners a false sense of importance and created in African minds a sense of self-rejection" (Banana 1991(a):124). Having risen from a peasant to Head of State, Banana was aware of the impact this policy had on Africans, hence he could argue that "taken historically the ramifications of cultural bastardisation were earthshaking" (Banana 1996:49). The problem was not simply that African cultures were rejected, what made it worse was that they were replaced "with Western values and systems... creating an African with a sense of self-rejection and dejection and it created a white with a sense of conceit and self-superiority" (Banana 1991(b):4).

In Banana's works one can detect a line of argument that clearly asserts that this historical fact must be reversed if Christianity is to rediscover itself as authentically African among the Africans. To that extent Banana argues that "any attempt at a relevant theology in Zimbabwe has to recognize that African traditional religion plays a significant role in Africa" (Banana 1991(b):22). There can never be an authentic Christianity in Africa if Christianity fails to take seriously African culture and religion. This is a view that is shared by Crispin Mazobere (1991:171) when he argues that "the validity of Zimbabwean religion must be recognized." The need to integrate Christianity within the African worldview saw Banana attempt an enculturation of "Jesus as our Ancestor" (Banana 1991(b):64). At this stage, Banana appears to be much closer to African inculturation theologians, whose major focus is on the cultural identity of Africans as a relevant starting point for an authentic African Christianity (Gunda 2012b:135). To sum up Banana's idea of authentic Christianity in Africa, we need to go to his call to re-write the Bible; there Banana (1993:29) writes that "religiously speaking, there is no difference between Abraham and *Mbuya Nehanda*[3]." In short, African culture can be the bedrock upon which a sustainable and relevant Christianity can be grounded in Africa, implying that any Christianity that seeks to undermine and reject African culture and religion can never be relevant and sustainable in Africa. In that case, the Bible enjoys no privileged position; rather it is one among many sources for African Christianity and theology.

[3] Mbuya Nehanda was one of the prominent leaders of the First Chimurenga war, when indigenous Ndebeles and Shonas fought against the white settlers in present day Zimbabwe. She was eventually executed for leading the Shona rebellion and is believed to have prophesied that "her bones would resurrect to reclaim the land" a prophecy believed to have been fulfilled in the Second Chimurenga war, which resulted in independence in 1980. She is, metaphorically speaking, the mother of Zimbabwe.

African Experience as the basis for Theologizing

Having looked at African culture/religion above, this section looks at African experience; another area that is critical in understanding the works of Banana. This is a subject that brings to the fore the radical and revolutionary nature of Banana as he begins by asserting a point that most would agree with, that is, "theologizing is time and place specific, the church articulates its theological praxes from concrete contexts" (Banana 1991b:1). This is particularly important for Banana because it opens the way for his other views, such as when he argues that "our problems are entirely peculiar to our own situation and will be different today from those of tomorrow as they differ from those of the past" (Banana 1982:85). The uniqueness of "our problems" is understood as suggesting the peculiarity of "our experiences." This in turn implies that if any solution is to be found it would have to be sought from within these local experiences.

To illustrate his point, Banana takes aim at most doctrines and theologies developed outside Africa, based on the experience of others but not Africans, when he writes that such "creeds and doctrines are almost irrelevant and meaningless to our context, providing answers to questions which we have not asked, and asking awkward questions about problems of our day" (Banana 1991(b):42). In laying the foundation for the integration of local experiences in developing relevant theologies for Africa, Banana even challenges the primacy of the Bible when arguing "revelation is not confined to the Israelites alone... Relevant theology, thus, should not be divorced from the experiences of the people: past and present and their vision for their future" (Banana 1991b:40). This line of thinking is forcefully expressed in Banana's "The Case for a New Bible" (1993:18, 21) when Banana argues;

> The material contained in the Bible is but a small part of the whole gamut of God's revelation to humankind...The voices of the people of the 'third' world are voices of God's revelation, inspired by God's Spirit. Why are they not reflected in the Bible, directly testifying to God's presence in their lives, in their time?

These demanding questions and challenges from Banana can only be fully appreciated within the context of Banana's insistence on the primacy of a people's peculiar experience.

Having clearly destabilized the bases of established theologies and being fully aware of various criticisms that have been levelled against him by other scholars he acknowledges such criticism when writing, "my theology has been criticized as *unsystematic* but I make no apology. Why should there be systematic theology? Is there *systematic agony* or *systematic hunger*?" (Banana 1991b:xi). Indeed, Banana is an interesting scholar because he responds to western critics by resorting to his own experience, an experience of agony and hunger and asks a simple question, "if my agony and hunger are not systematic, why should I produce a systematic response to such unsystematic agony and hunger?" (Gunda 2012b:136). Having dealt with this criticism, Banana goes on to outline his point of departure for doing theology as his "experience as an activist in the liberation struggle. It is not an articulation of theology of abstract theories...My theology consists of a critical analysis of relationships" (Banana 1991b:x). Banana juxtaposes his theology and western theology and suggests that western theology is all about abstract theories while his is based on experience and, therefore, pragmatic. He goes further, "my theology is not manufactured from ivory tower or white elephant pinnacles of bourgeoisie individualistic mentality. My theology originates from the ghetto. It emanates from mundane situations of crises" (Banana 1991b: xi). Banana's theology is not a theology that comes from 'normal life'; the ghetto is street name for substandard suburbs created for Africans by the colonial system, characterized by overcrowding and general deprivation. He recognizes this is not a normal environment, but one of crisis. This experience is and should be central in developing a relevant theology in Africa. Experience is critical because God does not wait for those in the ghetto to go to the low density suburbs to speak with them, rather God speaks with people wherever they are, hence their experiences are central in their understanding of God.

The Politics or Theology of compromise as opposed to true liberation

As Banana does not really consider politics, religion or economy as separate and exclusive spheres of life, his ideal was to see true liberation which would apply across these spheres. Banana was unsympathetic to "compromise" in any of these spheres, which as we noted was his major reason for crossing from Muzorewa's side to join Mugabe's side in Geneva 1976. Banana would have agreed fully with the wording of Joerg Rieger (2007:90) when he writes; "the middle is not the most balanced place, as is commonly assumed, but the place most attuned with the status quo." Compromising was, therefore, supporting the oppressive structures. Compromise was anathema to Banana and he saw it as the major failing of Christianity as he argues that, "the average missionary sympathized and fraternized with his colonial compatriots and therefore could not vehemently condemn imperialist exploitation. And where he did cry out against it, the cry was not for its abolition but for its mitigation" (Banana 1991(a):129). While Banana acknowledges the existence of a few exceptions among missionaries, by and large, the majority were guilty of compromising Christianity to protect their kith and kin. To that he asserted;

> The church has a mission in society, the mission of renewal, reassurance and reaffirmation of basic human rights among the oppressed, the wretched and the marginalized. The church's primary concern therefore is service to humankind and to make an intensification of the preferential option for the poor and the marginalized (Banana 1991(b):2).

This mission cannot be compromised according to Banana and most missionaries were guilty of doing just that, including his own Church. On the Smith-Holmes Settlement Proposals (1969-1970), the Methodist Synod responded: 'The Synod of the Methodist Church is not willing to accept or reject the proposals, but we recommend each Methodist member to express judgment to the commission' (Banana 1996:159). In evaluating this response from the Methodist Synod he noted "one may be inclined to sub-

mit that the Methodist Church became a victim of the theology of convenience" (Banana 1996:160). The church was being weighed down by its desire to compromise between the African and White membership at the expense of the greater good.

In speaking against compromise Banana was theologically radical and revolutionary, declaring that:

> God wants to meet us in our strength and not in our weakness. Every time we assert our dignity, we express the sovereignty of God, and every time we become willing victims of injustice, we renounce God (Banana 1990:xiv).

Compromise was inimical to the nature of God and cannot produce true liberation. To avoid falling into the pit of compromise, Banana unites here experience and resolve when suggesting that "the material needs of the people in the ghetto must define our theology" (Banana 1991(b):10). If this was the foundational experience informing Christian response to colonialism then vague responses as noted above would not have been possible to issue. Such vague response was made possible because compromise had gotten the better of the Church. Banana (1982:50) expresses this when he writes "the liberation aspects of the gospel became obscured and in many circles the churches have been regarded as a cover-up for exploitation." Despite seemingly disputing the special position of the Bible, when highlighting the importance of local experience, when it comes to the desire to fight exploitation, Banana can still revert to the Bible as Scripture and therefore, regard it as normative.

In articulating his own uncompromising stance, Banana says of The Gospel According to the Ghetto (1990:xiv),

> [It] is an attempt to affirm the liberating hand of God through the willingness of the oppressed to revolt against those negative forces around and within themselves that keep them perpetual prisoners of circumstances. It affirms the need for the ghetto masses to become co-partners with God in His divine mission of moral, economic, political and social revolution.

This, according to Banana, is the mission to which Christians are called to partake and this mission should not be compromised. This he believed, notwithstanding the fact that the "negative forces" may change their manifestations by observing that "in Zimbabwe the people fought for fifteen years to destroy the lethal system of exploitation and we must be prepared to fight this system in the new forms that it is likely to take" (Banana 1982:33). From the works of Banana, one could argue that compromise is a fatal sin.

The Politics and Theology of Land as a threat to Africanness

One of the subjects that is dominant in Banana's works is land, particularly the land that makes up Zimbabwe. To understand the privileged position land enjoys in Banana's works, one must rewind a little bit to the colonization of Zimbabwe, a period when black Zimbabweans were forcibly dispossessed of their land when the British South Africa Company (BSAC) realized there was not as much gold as they had thought. Instead of returning to South Africa or Britain, the settlers decided to engage in farming. This change of aim saw blacks being indiscriminately dispossessed of their land. Banana rightly observes that "to tamper with an African's land is to tamper with the heart of his faith, his culture and his livelihood" (Banana 1991a:143). Land was everything for the Africans and losing it was losing everything because "there was an inextricable link between the African and his (sic) land" (Banana 1996:129). The life of black Zimbabweans without fertile land was no longer life and they were turned into aliens in their own land.

To illustrate the pain of losing the land and subsequently witnessing how both land and people were being exploited by the colonial regimes, Banana wrote a poem, "The Land so Dear to Us":

> Aliens plunder and squander thy riches;

> Shall we watch and see our very life blood bleed to death?
> O Land of our fathers, where are thy men of valour? ...
> Shall our sweat and tears continue to oil the wheels that grind us to death? ...
> The answer to this riddle lies in the blood of the martyrs of our Freedom,
> which is the SEED of human dignity and national prosperity
> (Banana 1990:5).

The pain of seeing the indigenous without land led Banana (1996:120) to argue that

> The question of land, such as that of racism can be tentatively said to be as old as human existence itself. This is more (sic) true for the Africans than any other ethnic group. Africans have for generations been totally dependent on the land for sustenance.

The suffering of the African masses in Zimbabwe could, therefore, be understood only from the background of the dispossessions they suffered at the hands of colonial regimes. Land was the link also between Africans and God hence Banana found it difficult to believe that anyone calling themselves Christian could support such dispossession of a people's God-given right. The failure by Christians and biblical scholars to make use of the Bible to speak against the massive land dispossessions demonstrated why the Bible and biblical studies were clearly implicated in empire, especially Western colonialism (Schüssler Fiorenza 2008:163).

> The support by some Church leaders of a qualified franchise along with the attendant Land Apportionment Act was a paradox of the greatest magnitude and in no way could it be reconciled successfully with the tenets of justice as expunged [articulated?] upon in the New Testament, where equality of humankind before God is stressed (Banana 1996:94).

Once again, Banana takes recourse to the Bible as Scripture and not simply as literature that can be done away with. Banana understood true liberation to the majority of Zimbabweans to be the "realization of universal adult suffrage, repossession of land and a

share in the material prosperity of the land of his (sic) heritage" (Banana 1996:87). People had to be given back their land without necessarily kicking out descendants of the white colonial masters since he counsels that "it would be wise for the people of Zimbabwe to accept that racial co-operation becomes paramount if the nation is to become a progressive one" (Banana 1996:76).

Socialism as essentially Christian, Christianity is Socialism

One of the most controversial aspects in Banana's works is scientific socialism as it was popularly presented during the war of liberation and after independence. While the freedom fighters called it that, the Smith regime called it communism, sending shivers down the spine of western mediated Christianity, which considered communism as a sworn enemy of God. Banana was a socialist and this is so apparent in all his works yet his Christian faith appears not to have suffered from that reality. How did this happen? Banana came up with a reconciliation of socialism and Christianity (Gunda 2012b:137-8). He contends that "Socialism, like Christianity, seeks to eradicate the inhuman and abhorrent class system which is a creation by the notorious capitalist system" (Banana 1991b:52). While western Christianity had tended to warm up towards capitalism, Banana poured scorn on that relationship by suggesting that capitalism stood for everything that Christians must oppose. In the words of Dzingai Mutumbuka, then Minister of Education when writing the "Introduction" to Banana's *The Theology of Promise* (1982);

> As a revolutionary, Christ pursued the cause for justice and equality to its final conclusion: God's justice and the equality of all men before God as their common father. In actual fact, the demands of socialism are frequently not as radical as those of Christianity.

Similarly, Robert Mugabe (1982), then Prime Minister and writing the "Foreword" to the same text argued, "Rev. Banana is issu-

ing an ideological and social challenge to the church to identify itself with the cause of social justice, equality and the development of the poor." The three are apparently in agreement that the quest for social justice could not be fully pursued outside of a socialist conviction.

Banana's desire was to see a prosperous Zimbabwe, offering opportunities to all, yet he was frustrated by the lack of means of establishing such a society. His hope was that "a growing political reality for the future will be a revolutionary nationalism and the development of socialism as tools for change and response to the problem of powerlessness" (Banana 1990:xv-xvi), especially because for all the talk about the exploits of the colonial economy there was not much in it for the indigenous people (Rieger 2007:1). As socialism was thought of as seeking the establishment of a classless society, Banana (making use of the Bible as Scripture) argued "the concept of a classless society is essentially theological... (Gal 3:27-9). Christianity aims to create the Kingdom of God whose society is devoid of the iniquitous class system. It is an inarguable fact that Socialism and Christianity have no fundamental differences" (Banana 1991b:53-4). It was, indeed, brave for Banana to proclaim the oneness of Christianity and socialism at a time when Church leaders were skeptical about the intentions of socialist leaders.

In rounding up his reconciliation of socialism and Christianity, he insists that "socialism is the legitimate child of Christianity" (Banana 1991b:14) and that one can "return to the Bible, mainly the New Testament, to prove that Christianity is nothing else but socialism and therefore Christianity can only be fully realized in socialism" (Banana 1982:117). As Adrian Hastings (1982:155) observes, Banana was convinced that "both Christianity and Socialism are focused on the need to change the world for the better," suggesting they were one and the same thing only that it was named differently. While choosing different wording, Hoppe (2004:155-56) argues that

> In Acts 4:34, Luke observes that the problem of destitution did not exist in the first Christian community of Jerusalem since the members of that community shared their food and possessions... In Acts, then, Luke does not focus on the destitute who needs charity, but he describes the actions of the first Christians that eliminated poverty from their community (2: 44-45; 4: 2, 34-35).

It would appear that Banana did not shed his socialist beliefs as his comrades did at the turn of the decade after independence. Banana was even convinced that "the Kingdom of God should be realized here and now, through socialist revolution or transformation" (Banana 1991b:106). In his most radical ideas on the relationship between socialism and Christianity, Banana takes flight to the Bible as Scripture to demonstrate, sometimes in very unconvincing ways, how Scripture testifies to socialism as godly. As his early quest was to convince Christians that socialism as practiced in Zimbabwe was religious, Banana (1996:44) observed that "the white populace could not have foreseen that the new majority led Government would accommodate religious pluralism and uphold faithfully the values of Christianity." In short, Banana argues that the values espoused in socialism are the highly regarded Christian values; hence the two were essentially one.

Justice, Equality and Fairness: The trilogy of revolutionary (true) Christianity

This section will consider the critical trilogy of justice, equality and fairness as the pillars of the only true (revolutionary) Christianity. I have deliberately put this trilogy at the end of my analysis of Banana's ideals, not because it's the least, but because it is the most dominant in his works and in tackling this, Banana uses the Bible unashamedly. Yet it is also the lack of this trilogy in Israel-Palestine that led him to call for the re-writing of the Bible. Further, the lack of this trilogy in Zimbabwe led to this project of re-writing the Bible. The demand for justice, equality and fairness in human relationships is premised as a Christian tenet which "dic-

tate[s] a just and equitable society" (Banana 1996:110), because "justice, equality, fairness are all elements that propagate love and peace among humankind" (Banana 1996:131). Again reverting to scripture, Banana argues that "the Old Testament prophets always denounced the inequitable distribution of goods and the inequality of the society of their times. A society risks its existence if it fails to observe justice for all (cf. Amos 2: 6-7, 3:9-10, 5:11, Isaiah 5:8, Micah 2: 1-2, Jer. 22:13)" (Banana 1991b:104-5). In essence, Banana appears to suggest that the solution to injustice, inequality and unfairness lies in appropriating the scriptural teachings and principles for contemporary societies.

In an attempt to elaborate on the quest for social justice, Banana can be controversial yet informative. He at once recognizes the Bible as scripture and also re-writes the Bible even before he called for the re-writing of the Bible (Gunda 2012b:139). As he re-wrote the Lord's Prayer, Banana writes: "Teach us to demand our share of gold; forgive us our docility as we demand our share of justice" (Banana 1990:1). He goes on to re-write the Apostolic Creed where he writes: "I believe in a colour blind God, maker of technicolour people who created the universe; and provided abundant resources for equitable distribution among all his people" (Banana 1990:2). In a re-writing of the popular Psalm 23 "The Lord is my Shepherd" Banana writes "Freedom and justice are my heart's desire. Help me, Oh God! To walk the valley of the pursuit of Manhood, and hasten the Day of the Haven of your Love, Power and Justice" (Banana 1990:9). In these excerpts from Banana's The Gospel According to the Ghetto, one realizes that the call to re-write came after he had already re-written parts of the Bible, reflecting his experience of deprivation instigated by the successive colonial regimes. Banana also

> takes the text of Luke 7:10-23 and adapts it to here and now in a way that is genuinely moving: 'Go back and tell your masters in Europe and the United States what you have seen and heard: land is given to peasants ... the sick are looked after and the ignorant are educated; co-operatives are formed ... the hungry are filled

> with good things and the rich sent away empty' (Hastings 1982:156, cf. Banana 1982:119).

Banana justified this by arguing that "for Christian theology to talk about hope without relating it to the struggle of the oppressed for freedom in history is for it to sanction the structures of oppression, which deprive the oppressed of their dignity" (Banana 1991b:105). In essence, a relevant Christian theology was one that began from the experience of deprivation and oppression that the majority of the people suffered and continue to suffer at the hands of the elites.

Banana's use of the Bible is informed by the belief that the Old Testament expects ancient Israel to shape its life according to the demands of justice and equity; while the New Testament looks for the triumph of justice in the world to come (Hoppe 2004:163). In search of elusive justice, equality and fairness, Banana proposed in his last major work, *Combat Theology* (1996:312), a theology which

> [E]nsures that the Cross of Christ is no longer to be used as a sharp edge to cut African feet to force them to fit the theological shoe meant for European and American feet. It is a theology that can never be neutral or fail to take sides on issues related to the plight of the oppressed.

This kind of combat theology for Banana would be the necessary ally to "the armed struggle [through which] we attained independence and started to move towards the promised land, a land where there would be equality and mutual understanding, cooperation, prosperity and a better life for all" (Banana 1982:138). Justice, equality and fairness would see Zimbabweans sharing in the prosperity of the land, hence he counseled Christians; "the Christian Faith motivates man (sic) to aspire for the fullness of life in the HERE and NOW" (Banana 1990:3), and to the majority who had been exploited without respite "thou shalt not live by the exploitation of others; but shall strive for the sharing of prosperity" (Banana 1990:7). There is no doubt that Banana understood the

implications of what he was saying, hence he elaborated on Combat theology by arguing that it "is in effect, a theology of actionable protest, whose fundamental credo is no retreat, no surrender" (Banana 1996:313).

In short, Banana sought to inspire Zimbabweans and the world in general to strive to create societies that are characterized by justice, equality and fairness. Banana would approve of the view that "in the global political system, blessed are those who institutionalize justice, promote social order, and defend the rights of the poor" (Hanson 2011:221). This society, according to him, would constitute essentially the realized eschatological kingdom of God. This is not a goal that we can easily argue against; in fact, it is this realization of what Banana really stood for that makes him such a towering figure in the history of Zimbabwe. As the battle to realize the society he wished to see continues, it is only proper to come back to Banana and from him scholars and activists from a wide range of backgrounds can develop a plan of action to execute their own contribution to this noble cause. Christianity cannot avoid playing its part in this quest; neither can biblical scholars nor theologians dodge their own obligations. Indeed, Banana agreed with Baruch Spinoza that

> True Christianity is equivalent to the universal moral characteristics of 'love, joy, peace, temperance and honest dealing with all men' as opposed to false Christianity of outward forms, credulity, prejudice, and the avarice of clerics (Baruch Spinoza cited in Harrisville and Sundberg 1995:40).

Signs of Frustration and Betrayal

Earlier on, I suggested that Banana died a frustrated man; this section seeks to elaborate more on this point. As I indicated also above, Banana was a socialist from the 1970s and on the basis of his writings, the last which I have being his 1996 publication; *Politics of Repression and Resistance: Face to Face with Combat Theology*, he appears not to have shifted away from his socialist ideol-

ogy. The single major shift observed in the works of Banana relates to the subject of a political system to be adopted by Zimbabweans. In his *The Theology of Promise* (1982:45), Banana declares:

> From past political experiences came the concept of multi-party politics, which is totally incompatible with the aspirations of people in the developing nations and is a contradiction in itself. If people should be united to defeat a common enemy that is united in its continued ploys of destroying the poor, how can the poor be so naïve as to play into the hands of the enemy by continuous quarrelling among themselves? The multi-party system has one obvious consequence: weakening the people and eventually to snatch from them their power.

In addressing the question of multi-party system, Banana invoked the biblical story of Solomon's judgment on the parentage of the son claimed by two women. He suggests that life is one and cannot be divided and in his argument, the son may have been metaphorically representing the United Kingdom and that Solomon's judgment was against dividing power. To show his commitment to a one-party system, Banana went on to suggest that "to keep the people united at all costs in the present historical moment of our country will show the divine wisdom for dispensing justice" (Banana 1982:46). Having played a significant role in the unification of ZANU PF and PF ZAPU, Banana defended the move by noting that "unity is a more (sic) nobler objective than discord" (Banana 1996:235). However, by 1996 circumstances had conspired to make him realize that "socialism and one party state are not mutually inclusive as some officials of the Government were wont to say" (Banana 1996:234). He appreciated then that a one-party system posed a dangerous "temptation to slide towards political intolerance of dissenting voices" (Banana 1996:235). In his later years Banana warmed up to the idea of multi-party democracy but without departing from his socialist ideology. While one can detect this slight shift in Banana, his frustrations came from his strong socialist principles.

The question of land remained a bitter pill for Banana, especially in the years after his tenure as Head of State. On the equitable distribution of wealth and resources, Banana (1991b:16) wrote, "Over the past ten years, there has been a discernible reduction of commitment to this goal both in action and in word." This lack of commitment was blamed on the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) by the government after 1990 (Banana 1996:246-52). For Banana the march towards true liberation had stagnated and by 1996, he noted "today the majority of Zimbabweans are still landless, the result of ninety years of dispossession by colonial masters" (Banana 1996:124), and he aptly captured the expectation of the majority when writing "the landless masses in Zimbabwe still wonder when they will be able to celebrate the day when they will have land to call their own" (Banana 1996:238). The failure by the Government to address the land imbalances in a decisive manner frustrated Banana seriously that he apparently felt pushed to criticize the Government, something that Banana had tried hard to avoid in most of his writings from the time he was Head of State and even after retiring in 1987. In his later years Banana may have started to appreciate that

> Poverty does not just happen; it occurs because people make it happen. While sometimes these decisions can be laid at the feet of the poor themselves, the predominant assertion made by the tradition [biblical] is that the avarice and greed of the wealthy lead them to unjustly deprive some people of their essential needs...[explaining why] The poor come to depend upon God because they cannot fend for themselves; often they are powerless to change their situation. They cannot depend upon the wealthy because it is the wealthy who create and maintain their poverty (Hoppe 2004:171).

In this context, after the adoption of ESAP and the detour by former socialists to capitalism, poverty was no longer to be blamed on the colonial regimes only, but also on the government by indigenous elites (Kaulemu 2012:ix).

The criticism directed towards the Government was influenced by the fact that while Government had acquired some farms for resettlement, the peasants, those who really needed the land to improve their lives were apparently not the top priority of the resettlement. In an interview in 1994, Banana attacked the manner the land redistribution was being handled when noting that;

> The procurement of land is meant for resettling the landless people who derive their livelihood from the land but have nowhere to plough. Leasing out farms acquired for resettlement can never be justified by anyone when the majority of the people have nowhere to plough…I don't want to be seen running battles with Mangwende and Kangai [both Cabinet ministers] but the thing is, people are hungry for land and their first priority as a Government is to provide it to them to survive. As soon as land is acquired, such people are the first that should be considered…Government officials need to improve their resettlement strategy (Banana 1996:245).

In response to this criticism, Minister Kangai responded thus;

> There is nothing sinister or peculiar about the lease and that many other state farms had been rented out to senior civil servants, Members of Parliament and other state officials. The leasing of property is in line with Government's new policy of tenant resettlement where commercial farming by indigenous farmers was being encouraged (Banana 1996:246).

While it is argued that the United States and the European Union maintain their lifestyles because of economic and political power over the poorer nations, the early handling of resettlement schemes in Zimbabwe also shows that the wealth of the newly created black elites was being sustained by entrenching poverty among the masses (Hoppe 2004:22, Rieger 2007:282). Indeed, in the past few years, especially during "the decade of crises" (Chitando 2013) in Zimbabwe, many people have moved away from blaming the foreign powers and have refused to buy into the sanctions mantra, instead blaming local elites for ruining the country (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:141). That instead of prioritizing the

poor, the government preferred the elites is illustrated and defended by Kumbirai Kangai leading Banana to write:

> I still maintain the view held by many Zimbabweans of all races, who feel that the land resettlement programme has been poorly managed. At present, the landless seem to be the least beneficiaries of the resettlement programme. We need to continue to focus on the landless as a priority sector. There is a very real need to avoid a situation where only a few elite reap the fruits of the grueling war of liberation. The issue of lack of resources should never be used as a scapegoat for our failures to take effective measures to ensure swift redistribution of land (Banana 1996:246).

I think it was because of these frustrations with the manner the Government was conducting its business that Banana moved away from his earlier forceful calls for Church to simply partner the State, to arguing that "the close co-operation between Church and state must be maintained only insofar as that Government does not misuse or abuse its power" (Banana 1996:289). By this time Banana had become fully aware that oppression had not ended with the defeat of colonial regimes because it was clear that "the viciousness of oppression has outlived these systems!" (Gunda 2009:86).

Concluding Observations

Two major issues of importance to this study arise from the works of Banana: that the Bible has a role to play in the quest for a just and democratic society and that the scholar of the Bible has a role to play in constructive engagement between readers and the Bible. First, I will focus on the role of the Bible in the quest for a just and democratic Zimbabwe. Clearly, Banana uses the Bible as scripture and in that regard he takes it to be normative, as when he cites Acts 2 to justify socialism as biblical. While he acknowledges the Bible as scripture, he nonetheless is aware of the challenges posed by the Bible when it is used by elites. Consequently, he criticizes the colonial era by noting that "Christianity, Com-

merce and Civilization ran alongside Biblical verses and epithets" (Banana 1996:101), suggesting that biblical verses were used to sustain the exploitative colonial systems. This is one of the critiques raised by Banana that this work will seek to pursue further.

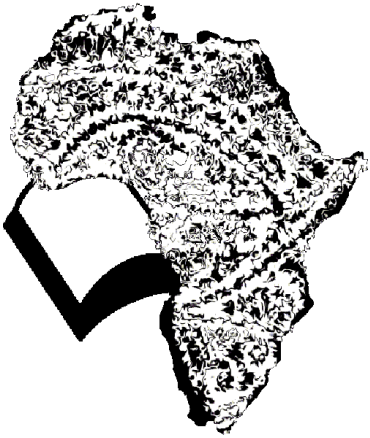
Second, I will focus on the role of the biblical scholar in realizing this quest. In challenging the Church in Zimbabwe, Banana makes some interesting observations such as when he writes "any progressive Church organization has to take due and active cognizance of the social, economic and political processes within its environment" (Banana 1996:269). That the Church must involve itself in so-called material questions in society is not only based on the existence of exploitation in our society, neither is this optional. Banana (1996:274) argues that

> [A]dmirable Church precedence is entrenched in the great tradition from the Old Testament Prophet Amos to Martin Luther King, fearless social commentators who discovered and developed an ethical criterion for creative action in the socio-economic and political sphere throughout the world.

In spite of the supposed weaknesses in Banana's interaction with the Bible, few can actually suggest this reference to Amos is misplaced. This work takes this reference to Amos as one of the openings and challenges that Banana has placed on the doorstep of the biblical scholar because there are resources to develop a responsive interaction between Christian communities and the Bible in the search for a society characterized by justice, equality and fairness.

Banana clearly appreciates that the Bible can be dangerous when used to legitimize and sustain oppressive, discriminatory and exploitative systems and that it can also be an instrument that can be used to establish the society that many wish and hope for. This double function of the Bible becomes a critical starting point for a biblical scholar in Africa, especially bearing in mind that "yesterday's liberators have themselves become purveyors of prejudice" (Kaulemu 2012:ix). Such scholar must willingly fight against the oppressive appropriations of the Bible, while helping in develop-

ing constructive appropriations of the Bible for the development of a sustainable, just, democratic and fair society. It is through this critical demand to be actively involved in the transformation of our society that Banana becomes an inspiration to this work. As Banana argues; "poverty and prosperity are not unrelated phenomena, because poverty is a consequence of prosperity" (Banana 1982:93). The clincher for me is when Banana challenges Christians in a very unorthodox way by suggesting that "God is not being insulted by the atheist who ignores him but respects life, but he is insulted by the believer who acknowledges him but is intent on destroying life" (Banana 1982:103). The fact that Christians are leaders in sustaining the unhealthy situation obtaining in Zimbabwe calls for a critical engagement with the Bible in search of solutions that the majority who are hoodwinked whenever the Bible is deployed can also buy into because their numbers could transform the situation. In the following chapter, the study examines Banana's call for the re-writing of the Bible.



CHAPTER 2

"REWRITING THE BIBLE" IN "THE CASE FOR A NEW BIBLE": ANALYSIS AND ISSUES

> Christian church history is a saga of exploitation in the name of Christ, from the subjugation of the European tribes, to the crusades to redeem the Holy Land from the infidel, to the subjugation and exploitation of native people in the 'new world,' to the colonization of Africa in the great mission thrusts of western civilization. This history is long, sordid and deeply sad: the result of the use of the Bible as a justification for exploitation; the self-serving adoption of one group as 'superior' to another (Banana 1993:21-2).

Introduction

Zimbabwe is largely a conservative society, both in terms of traditional religious manifestation and thought pattern as well as in the dominant Christian manifestation and thought pattern. Notwithstanding the competition between traditional religion and Christianity, the two dominant religious traditions tend to agree on conservative social values. These conservative values are reinforced by a constant invocation of culture and the Bible, as the two most important underpinnings for any supposedly 'Zimbabwean values and customs'. While there was a time when these two were mutually exclusive, now they are mutually inclusive, culture is reinforced by the Bible and the Bible is reinforced by culture. In a society that is so conservative, any proclamation that suggests a deliberate attempt to tamper with the source of legitimacy (culture or the Bible), itself seen as the Word of God, is highly frowned upon. In other words, to suggest that culture is probably faulty or that the Bible is mistaken is an unforgivable sin.

This Chapter deals with the suggestion by Banana that the Bible must be re-written. In the previous chapter, we highlighted the fact that Banana was driven by the desire to see a society that promoted justice, equality and fairness in its dealings with all of its citizens. Banana understood this desire to be essentially Christian; hence he appropriated the Bible, whenever necessary, and any other resources, to drive this connection forward. The call to re-write the Bible was and should always be understood within this context.

The Problem behind the Call to Rewrite the Bible

On 6 April 1991 Banana presented a paper in Hatfield, Harare on the role African theologians could play in resolving the Middle East problem (Banana 1993:17).[4] While one could highlight several problems across the Middle East region, especially in recent years, Banana's reference to the Middle East was simply a reference to Israel and Palestine. The call to re-write the Bible was made as a possible way of solving the problems between the Palestinians and the Israelis, whose conflict spawned over politics, economy, social relations but all underpinned by millennia old religious traditions. By focusing on Palestine-Israel, Banana (1993:28) was highlighting the dangers that are posed by religious intolerance, for in Jerusalem "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." These three related religious traditions fight because

[4] By the Middle East problem, Banana was referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which has been raging for decades now. While the need for a solution in that region remains the hope of all peace loving citizens of the world, this conflict does not play a critical role in my study. It is the conflict that has engulfed Zimbabwe for more than a decade now, but which can be traced back to the colonial era, which takes center stage in this study. This focus is only natural because I am Zimbabwean.

of several factors, one being the supposed association between monotheism, violence and exclusiveness (McConville 2006:12). This constant bloodshed among groups that are supposedly kith and kin is behind Banana's call to destabilize the source of such conflict.

While the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be traced back to Old Testament times, the current conflict according to Banana has its genesis in the post-World War II era, even if there are attempts to invoke ancient traditions to justify contemporary actions. For Banana (1993:28), "this is clearly seen in the establishment of a homeland for the Jews following World War II, which was carved out of someone else's territory. All acts such as these are justified by religious Holy Scriptures, including the Christian Bible, and are examples that haunt efforts to secure peace and equity in world problems." In other words, the creation of the state of Israel in Palestine in 1947 was largely based on the interpretation of the "Promised Land texts" of the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. The slogans behind this creation were; "Nations are the will of God. National borders are the will of God. National expansions and colonization are the will of God" (Schwartz 1997:11, cf 58-62). That interpretation disregarded the fact that there were people living in this territory at this particular time, who were negatively affected by the establishment of this new state. Further conflict arose between the Palestinians and the Israelis due to the various allegiances to God and religious traditions, such that

> The various allegiances of the warring parties to God often appear to be the main barrier to progress. This is nowhere clearer than in Israel-Palestine, with its long biblical resonances. Here the memory of Abraham, carefully tended to this day in his adoptive home at Hebron, might be a symbol of unity, as some have hoped. Yet on the contrary, the 'tombs of the patriarchs' grace one of the most conflicted sites in that embattled land, the very divisiveness of Abraham fossilized in a shrine to complexity and hostility. The reality of the land of Israel-Palestine is an arena of competing populations, each informed at some level by their own

> version of Abrahamic monotheism (McConville 2006:12, Kuschel 1995).

Due to the central role played by the Scriptures (both the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Bible) in justifying the displacement and replacement of Palestinians in the creation of the new state of Israel, Banana saw the scriptures as a critical problem within the crisis. Not only were Jews claiming ownership of the land in question, Christians were also actively supporting such claims due to the perceived intrinsic connection between the wellbeing of Christians and Israel. To that extent Banana (1993:17) observed that

> [P]art of the problem was religious fundamentalism expressing itself in such ideologies as Zionism. During this discussion, the concept of re-writing the Bible was mentioned as a possible alternative to the exploitative situation in the Middle East. I challenged Christian scholars to seriously consider re-writing the Bible so that God can be liberated from dogmas that make God the property of ethnic syndicates.

While many in Zimbabwe were quick to condemn Banana for suggesting the Bible could be re-written, few appreciated the reasons behind the call. Banana could not stand the continued shedding of blood in the seemingly unending Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While there were and continue to be political efforts to settle the disputes, Banana was right to accept the religious basis of the problem. While we may find various explanations for the strife between Palestinians and Israelis, Banana (1993:21) was critically right to argue that

> Included in the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, is a strand which establishes one people as a 'chosen' people. The sense of the early Israelites as God's chosen people became a justification for their conquering people in the land they viewed as the 'promised land' – promised to them by God as a reward for their faithfulness as a people of God and as compensation for their suffering in slavery.

Banana's call generated widespread debate (condemnation?) throughout Zimbabwe, which was aided by the fact that this call

was covered in national newspapers, *The Herald* and *The Sunday Mail*, in magazines like *Moto*, as well as on the *Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television and Radio*. On 14 June 1991, the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe organized a seminar at which they invited Banana, himself a member of the Department, to present his thesis to his academic colleagues (Mukonyora et al 1993:x). The title of Banana's thesis then was "The Case for a New Bible" (1991), the same article was to be published in a project by the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy titled "*Rewriting" the Bible: The Real Issues* (1993). Since Zimbabwe is predominantly Christian and conservative, the responses Banana received were predominantly condemnatory (Mukonyora et al:x) that when he was arrested, charged and convicted of sodomy years after making this call, a number of Christians took his downfall as God's punishment for having attempted to re-write the Word of God (Gunda 2010a:146).

At this early stage, no one could link the call to Zimbabwe because generally the living standards in Zimbabwe were relatively high, especially when compared to neighbouring communities. The effects of the decade of expanded social services championed by the government of Robert Mugabe meant at the time of the call, many were still in independence euphoria. The same, however, cannot be said of Banana, while his focus was the Middle East, he nonetheless was aware that the situation in Zimbabwe was deteriorating as highlighted in the previous chapter. Indeed, because of the bloodshed in the Middle East, Banana sought to contribute to the end of the hostilities there yet he was aware that such problems were not unique to that region. Many peoples of the universe had already faced the problems created by sacred texts that thrust special labels on some while alienating others. In this context, therefore, the call to re-write the Bible is proposed as a universal solution to the problems of domination and exploitation of one human being by another through a deployment of sacred texts to legitimize such sordid acts.

Banana's call was made also at a time when the evangelical-pentecostal and charismatic brand of African Christianity was beginning to expand rapidly across Africa. While the mainline churches were more adept at addressing social and political issues, this brand of Christianity emphasized that "the only way a 'true believer' could be involved in politics was to pray for the nation and for God to guide the rulers" (Imo 2008:45). In such an environment, Banana was overstepping by trying to find a solution to an earthly problem. This brand of Christianity is guilty of isolating Christianity from the principles that govern believers in the area of economics, politics and social life (Gifford 2002:59). This is also the brand of Christianity that was vociferous in its condemnation of Banana that Christians were discouraged from listening or better still, understanding what Banana was actually intending to achieve. Instead of encouraging engagement with Banana and his ideas, the trend in Zimbabwe was to regard in high esteem, prominent people who could cite from the Bible, a fashion introduced in Zambia by the rise of Fredrick Chiluba as a born-again President (Phiri 2008).

The call to re-write was bigger than the Middle East conflict that Banana used as the focal point. Once Banana had identified oppression as the central human problem, it became clear that "the rich use the poor for their own purposes and build their success on the backs of the poor" (Rieger 2007:282). This state of affairs is the single reason why equality, equity and fairness cannot be realized in human society. The oppressors "use their economic, social, political, and sometimes military power to maintain their position. Poverty and oppression, then, are human inventions (cf. Exo. 1, 8-21)" (Hoppe 2004:21). This is what Banana is trying to fight by re-writing the Bible. The paradox is that while the Bible is lethal, Banana realizes it is at the same time the antidote (Reed 1996:283); re-writing therefore is not simply the same as rejection. The call for Banana is universal because

> We have seen the results of the Bible being used to designate one people superior to another through the separation of racial groups

> within a country... The suffering imposed on the majority by the minority, the designation of less than full humanness, the justification of political and social and economic oppression and exploitation has its origins in the way the Bible has been used and in the material that rests within the Bible that allows such interpretations to be made. The Bible has been and continues to be used to relegate women to a second class status in society... Women often are not accepted in the Bible or they are regarded negatively... The Bible, moreover, frequently is quoted to keep major church bodies from ordaining women into professional ministry (Banana 1993:22-3).

The Nature of the Bible

In order to appreciate what Banana was trying to do, it is pertinent that I briefly highlight the key markers of the Bible. Banana did not call for the re-writing of some ordinary piece of literature; he called for the re-writing of a collection of writings that is considered normative by Christians and to a certain extent by Jews as well. Unlike secular pieces of literature that survive because some people find them funny, entertaining or simply pedagogic;

> The Bible has survived and enjoys the status it does because communities of faith considered the preservation of these writings valuable for the community. Because Jews, and then Christians were committed to remembering and preserving their story, the story was told and retold, written and rewritten, acted and reenacted. A story repeated in any medium becomes a tradition. A tradition develops, continues, and survives in practice because communities – not just individuals – consider it valuable for the present, not because it is an interesting museum piece (Bowley 1999:8).

As Bowley clearly articulates above, the Bible is not an ordinary writing or collection of writings, for it is considered not only to be the work of humans (literature) but also the work of God in that it is considered as the Word of God. As Young (1959:156) puts it, "when the Word of God was written it became Scripture and, in-

asmuch as it had been spoken by God, possessed absolute authority. Since it was the Word of God, it was canonical." This combination is critical in understanding the Bible; it is both human and divine. This combination creates an interesting paradox;

> One can describe the Bible as a collection of authoritative books or as an authoritative collection of books. The first means that the books had authority individually before they were collected, while the second formulation implies that the books got their authority by being collected at a given time (Metzger 1999:100).

Banana's call to re-write the Bible appreciates this duality in the nature of the Bible, which would explain why Banana does not join hands with those who would want to get rid of the Bible entirely. For Banana (1993:23-6), the Bible is human because from oral traditions of the ancient Israelites, men and women sat down and committed living traditions down to written form, to preserve and remember their past, their heroes and heroines and the activities of their God in their lives. They preserved these traditions because they were convinced that the future would learn so much from the past. One could even argue that there was an understanding that the past had seen everything that would come in the future hence by going back into the past, future generations would actually be forging ahead. This understanding persists among believers; solutions for today's and tomorrow's challenges are already in the Bible. Contemporary communities are inspired by the Bible not because of "what it meant, but by what it means and continues to mean for our community of faith" (Draper 2008:47).

Since the focus of this work is the Christian Bible, let me briefly outline the nature of this Bible. The Christian Bible is in two divisions, called "Testaments" which is another word for "Covenant." Christians, therefore, speak of an "Old Testament/Covenant" and a "New Testament/Covenant." These designations are supposed to be both chronological and qualitative. They are chronological because the old came first and the new came later. The new is younger than the old. The human aspect explains the historicity of

the literature, which "reflects the political trials and successes of the ancient people of Israel ... and the development of the church and its doctrines in a particular time out of particular concerns" (Banana 1993:24). They are qualitative because the new is not simply a continuation of the old; it is in Christian talk, a fulfilment of the old. However, it does not simply conform to the old; it sometimes radically re-defines, re-structures, repudiates or even re-writes the old. In western Christianity especially, the new is considered better than the old. This Christian understanding of the two covenants led to the development of Christo-centric hermeneutics to the study and interpretation of both covenants. According to McClanahan (1999:181), "the Bible is to be seen as 'Christocentric' because the whole story of the Bible, the words and acts of God, climax in the Christ-event." In essence, everything revolves around Christ, before and after he became flesh. Every text (or at least most) is read in relation to the Christ-event. This Christo-centrism is what separates Christianity from Judaism because

> Christian talk about God is Christian only if God is understood in relation to Jesus, and Jesus in relation to God. Christian talk about the world is Christian only if the world is understood in its relation to Jesus and to the God whose triune being Jesus discloses (Watson 2006:95).

Jesus is certainly not the only divine-man to have arisen in different societies and demanding to be followed. The world has seen many such individuals, but not all of them have been as successful as Jesus and not all of them have had as much literature written on their activities and lives as Jesus. The Christian Bible makes itself a book about Jesus and his Father and their dealings with their chosen people, first the Jews then the Christians. Since the Bible is seen as propagating the ideals of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, the Bible should therefore be understood as a manifesto of the divine. A manifesto outlines the promises to be fulfilled when given a chance! The Bible, therefore, can be seen as both divine and social in that it promises both

divine and social actions. Banana is keen on highlighting the social dimension of the Bible and the biblical God hence his emphasis on "justice, equality and equity in social and human relations throughout the world" (Gunda 2012a:23). The Bible as scripture has models for proper administration of society, whose interest is to establish fair distribution of resources. This is what Jesus Christ, the central hermeneutic to a Christian reading of the Bible, represented both in deed and word.

The Old Testament is divided into five sections: the Five Books of Moses (also called the Law or the Pentateuch): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These are generally believed to be written by Moses but such writing can only be understood symbolically and not literally since there are many evidences that they were not written by one person and certainly not written in the supposed time of Moses. The second section consists of the historical books: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. This section is a departure from the traditional Jewish arrangement of the canon. The third section consists of the Poetic and Wisdom writings; here we have Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. The fourth section consists of what we may call the Major Prophets and here are books such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel and Daniel. These are called Major Prophets only because each book was large enough to be contained on a scroll by itself, in this regard, major does not signify qualitative importance. Finally, there is the section of Minor Prophets, whose importance is not diminished by the use of the adjective minor. Minor in this case simply refers to the brevity of the texts. These prophets are Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

A fundamental difference between the Christian Old Testament from the Jewish Tanak[5] lies in the fact that the Jewish Tanak is relatively historical in its arrangement, books dealing with the history of the fathers, followed by the era of Israel in Palestine: the era of kings and prophets, finally closing the canon by texts that could be regarded as timeless but late in origin, the writings. The Christian Old Testament is highly ideological, it is Christo-centric, such that, it ends with the prophets predicting the coming of the messiah and then introducing the New Testament immediately afterwards showing how the prophets were pointing to the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. These observations about the canon feed into the human production of the Bible. It goes without saying that arrangement is not innocent; it is tendentious, compromised and dependent on the target of the one doing the arrangement. The Christian Old Testament is arranged differently from the Jewish Tanak because it was arranged to point towards the New Testament as a continuation and fulfilment of the Jewish Tanak.

By proposing re-writing and not rejection of the Bible, Banana is admitting that in many societies, the Bible has become an integral part of their livelihood that any attempts at rejecting the Bible can only lead to greater strife between believers and non-believers. That would then undermine the goal of Banana, which is to establish a society based on justice, equality and fairness. In the scheme of Banana's quest, re-writing is supposed to be a measure that eliminates the "non-believer" since he attempts to create a

5 *TaNaK* is an acronym for made from the names of the three sections of the Hebrew Bible namely Torah (Law/Instruction), marking the first five books supposedly written by Moses. This first section is similar in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament. The second section is called the Nebiim (Prophets) includes the former prophets contained in the Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings books as well as latter prophets which are divided into two classes, the major and minor prophets almost like in the Christian Old Testament but without Lamentations and Daniel. The third and last section of the Hebrew Bible is called the Ketubiim (Writings) which contains all the other writings not included in the first two sections.

supra-Bible for all in all places (Gunda 2012a:27). This in itself shows that the Bible is understood as important for the present societies even though it can be abused. It also shows that the Bible is only but a tiny fraction of the entire revelation of God to all human groups throughout the world. Even in the cultural dressing of the Middle East, there are elements that remain above cultural limitations and such elements can become the pivots of building a God-fearing, just and fair society. These elements are more important than whether such system is democratic, theocratic, socialist or communist; these systems can be used to achieve the set goals but frequently they are all abused to frustrate the said goals.

Embracing the Bible, Abandoning the Missionary

That the Bible was once associated with the oppressors did not result in the rejection of the Bible by the oppressed people. Gerald West (2008:101,108) is right that "since its arrival in Southern Africa, the Bible has been a site of struggle ... apartheid was built on the Bible, and so was the liberation struggle." In fact, the rise of African Initiated Churches (AICs) shows that most indigenous people faulted the interpreters and not the text (Sithole 1970:103). From another perspective, one could argue that once translated, the Bible encouraged indigenous readers to read it differently from the readings of western missionaries and colonial settlers. That is essentially part of the essence of the Bible; it encourages all to find themselves within itself. Indigenous people simply had to re-read the text from their own experiences, and this continued through the nationalist era and even to the present. The Bible was re-read and re-interpreted from the perspective of the reader. Banana raised objections on the re-interpretations of the text by noting (and rightly so) that the text was part of the problem, that instead of coming to us as a clean document, it came to us already clothed with culture and experiences that were not indigenous (Banana 1993:17-9). In order to counter the dominance of foreign or elite culture and experience, Banana proposed that the text

itself had to be re-written. This was his response to the human dimension of the Bible; re-writing only works for the text produced by men and women.

While the human text can be corrected or re-written, Banana also accepts that there is something in the Bible that is not made by human beings. Even then, he still accepts that in the Bible, the divine and the human are intrinsically connected, maybe even inseparable hence he argues "the material contained in the Bible is but a small part of the whole gamut of God's revelation to humankind" (Banana 1993:18). Banana is aware that because of the acceptance of the divine component of the Bible, the Bible becomes a tool for good and bad, but mostly bad hence it is invoked "to relegate women to a second class status in society and church" (Banana 1993:23), as well as the maltreatment of sexual minorities in Church and society (Gunda 2011) and many other evils that are committed ostensibly to honour biblical teachings. The major challenge therefore is to devise a way to separate the divine will from the human baggage that carries the will.

Defining re-writing as understood by Banana

The term re-writing is used widely in this study because it was this term that propelled Banana into annals of Christian condemnation for daring to put this term and the Bible in the same sentence. The Bible, largely understood as inspired, is in populist speak, the written word of God. Through the classic "plenary verbal theory of inspiration" or the "instrumental theory of inspiration" the understanding is that the Bible was written by God. It is suggested that God was responsible for the actual words that were written down (Decker 2006:30); meaning every single letter or punctuation mark in the Bible is where God wanted it to be. However, since all books claim to be authored by some men and women, it led others to argue that such individuals were used by God the same way men and women use instruments in doing their chores. The authors were not in control of their mental fac-

ulties, they did not even know what they were doing hence the work they produced belonged to the one who used them. In either of these ways of understanding inspiration, Christians thought they understood 1Timothy 3:16 correctly, that "all Scripture is God-breathed." In this context, how then can anyone suggest that human beings can "re-write what was written by God"? What did Banana mean by re-writing the Bible? Was Banana proposing something that had never been proposed before or something that had never been done before?

To understand what Banana meant by re-writing, one has to appreciate Banana's understanding of God's revelation. The Bible is understood as the carrier of God's special revelation as differentiated from general revelation that is accessible to all human beings through various sources. This leads to the privileged position of the Bible and sometimes to the downright rejection or undermining of revelations of other peoples. This is critical for Banana: the privileging of one revelation of God over other revelations of God is central to understanding the unending cycles of domination, oppression and exploitation throughout the world. Since the Bible is presented as a "closed Canon" Banana asks "has God's revelation finished?" (Banana 1993:26), thereby raising questions on the continued activity of God among the peoples of the universe after biblical times. While many thought Banana was alone, there were others before and during the same time like him, such as Kanzira (1991) who wrote; "If the Bible is to make sense, then it must be re-written."

To start with, from this early analysis, there is nothing that suggests Banana is using the term "re-writing" metaphorically or symbolically, it is apparent that he is using the term literally. This is clear where Banana (1993:17) argues that "some suggest that I mean re-interpretation" showing he disagrees with that interpretation of his call. The effect of re-interpretation is fundamentally different from re-writing because re-interpretation "or contemporary applications must be discerned from the once-given text. The practice of this is seen in the Bible itself, as the prophets make

contemporary applications of earlier given Torah" (McClanahan 1999:186). In short, re-interpretation leaves the text intact and unchanged.

This is different from what Banana understands to be the solution to the problems he confronted. While recognizing "liberating aspects in the Bible, Banana was concerned that the Bible still contains material which can be used to justify the oppression of other people" (Reed 1996:283) hence his "re-writing of the Bible would include revision and editing to what is already there, but would also involve adding that which is not included" (Banana 1993:30). The problematic texts or the texts that encourage oppression and exploitation would certainly be edited out of the text. This is not simply a re-interpretation; it is a re-making of the Bible. Banana (1993:21 cf. Bowley 1999:31) also argues on the inadequacy of re-interpretation when questioning why "the voices of the people of the 'third' world are not reflected in the Bible, directly testifying to God's presence in their lives, in their time?" His re-writing would exclude some texts that are already in the Bible and it would also include some testimonies that are not already in the Bible. To that extent Banana (1993:30) wrote

> There are others throughout the world whose voices and experiences need to be collected into a source that reflects the plurality of religious experiences and expressions... And the conclusions from this material and investigation can be used in re-writing the Bible, to add what is missing and to create a more universal Bible.

In this statement Banana makes clear that "his call for the 're-writing' 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 single universal collection of sacred writings for a universal religion" (Gunda 2012a:27-8). This is considered important and relevant because, "the biblical story concentrates mainly on God's dialogue with just one people, the people of Israel, and – through Christ – with the early church. It tells us little about the way in which other peoples, living in other cultures and epochs were challenged by

God and how they responded" (Weber 1985:ix). For Banana, this work will eliminate the theories of chosen-ness which are central to unraveling exploitative practices throughout the world, because such stories will show that God did not choose one people, he created all the peoples and loved them equally.

Re-writing is a step towards recognizing that "the material contained in the Bible is but a small part of the whole gamut of God's revelation to humankind" (Banana 1993:18) and it has the potential of undoing the limits imposed on God through a closed canon. Banana goes further to argue that

> The people in the Bible – both Old and New Testaments – are people whose lives and faith response to God provide lessons for those who come after. Each culture has its record of those people...It can be argued that Mbuya Nehanda and other traditional priests must be accorded an honoured place alongside leading religious leaders from other cultures such as Abraham of the Jewish tradition...religiously speaking, there is no difference between Abraham and Mbuya Nehanda (Banana 1993:29).

By this, I assume that Banana is indeed suggesting that if Abraham is biblical material, then Nehanda is biblical material too. Nehanda is to Zimbabwe (Shona? Korekore/ Zezuru?) what Abraham is to the Israelites. About the same time Banana was making his intial call, another scholar was raising similar issues in Uganda. Kanzira (1991) wrote in his article "Was Jesus Christ a failed Revolutionary?" "if the Bible is to make sense, then it must be re-written or infused with world history into which humanity will not be divided into chosen and foreign. Justification of evils like Zionism will have no place in it." On that, Banana (1993:26) agrees when he asks: "Is it not possible that there is more that needs to be added to (as well as subtracted from) the Bible as we know it today to make it relevant to our times and people?" This, indeed, sums up Banana's understanding of re-writing the Bible, that is, adding to and subtracting some things from the Bible. It is not apparent whether Banana was actually influenced by Kanzira or that he only saw Kanzira's work when he was now preparing

the 1993 paper. What is beyond doubt, however, is the fact that their understanding of what it meant to "re-write" the Bible was essentially and fundamentally similar.

The next question is: is there any precedence that would allow Banana to make such a radical call? Banana justifies his call by going back to the history of the making of the Bible itself. Since he accepts that the Bible did not fall from heaven, he rightly observes that, "the process (of producing the Bible from the masses of oral traditions) covered centuries, many editings and re-writings of the texts in order to fit new understandings of the past in relationship to the present" (Banana 1993:24). In short, re-writing has always been a part of the development of the text of the Bible and may have only ended in the post-Christian era, when the canons were closed. While writing was highly revolutionary in determining how people would remember their past (Fang 1997:xv), writing was never understood as rigid. Writing was similar to orality and both could be changed as circumstances demanded. Committing the word of God to writing was never understood early on as 'closing the word of God.' This is made so clear in the Dead Sea Scrolls because

> What is on prominent display in such parabiblical texts (Dead Sea scrolls), when viewed from the perspective of what we know as 'Bible', is a 'rewriting' of the Bible itself. This particular practice – interpreting the Bible by rewriting the Bible – is a very significant piece of cultural information that possesses far-reaching implications for tracing the authority of what we call 'Bible' in early Judaism (Reeves 1999:71).

The same observation can be applied on Christians. By developing a New Testament canon, the Christians were effectively refuting the Jewish idea that prophetic inspiration had ceased during the time of Ezra. Christians effectively were re-opening the canon and extending the era of inspiration by maintaining that in Jesus Christ, God's revelation reached a new peak. The Old Testament was regarded as the inspired Word of God given for guidance, it was only pointing towards what was to come. Jesus may have seen

the Law as a stage below the requirements of the kingdom of God (Banana 1993:26), thereby re-writing the Old Testament as subordinate to Jesus. Up until then, the re-writing of scripture was done openly and covertly, but it was done. Banana, therefore, thought he was actually calling for a return to the pristine age, when scripture could be re-written to deal with contemporaneous challenges. He realized that some of the challenges demanded more than re-interpretation or re-reading, he wanted to "rewrite those parts of Scripture that sound most dissonant to our culture" (Vanhoozer 2006:61), while replacing them with localized experiences.

To end this section, it must be reiterated that re-writing according to Banana was an actual alteration of the text of the Bible. These alterations were necessitated by the persistence of oppression, exploitation, injustice and inequality in the world. These problems were blamed on many things, but sacred texts were also to blame because they claimed for themselves a divine status which made them tools to justify such actions. The re-writing, according to Banana, was inspired by the realization that

> Many millions throughout the ages have venerated the name of Jesus but few have understood him and fewer still have tried to put into practice what he wanted to see done. His words have been twisted and turned to mean everything, anything and nothing. His name has been used and abused to justify crimes. Jesus cannot be fully identified with that great religious phenomenon of the Western world known as Christianity ... nor can historical Christianity claim him as its exclusive possession. Jesus belongs to all men (Nolan 1977:3).

The re-writing that Banana proposed would liberate Jesus from the abuses he has suffered through ages, by placing emphasis on Jesus' understanding of human relations. Banana's re-writing would make religion and scriptures "far more 'materialist' and this-worldly than has often seemed to be the case" (Hastings 1982:156). The re-written Bible would certainly be very different from the written word of God as we know it today. With such a

radical call, which Banana knew would be rejected off-hand by many, why did he think it was important? He could not have expended a lot of energy to think about re-writing if it was a useless proposition, could he?

The importance of re-writing the Bible

Now that, we know that by re-writing, Banana meant that the text of the Bible as we know it today had to be changed, cut and added to, why did Banana think this was a critical pre-requisite to the establishment of peace and justice? Critical to this, was the demand to include materials from all the peoples of the world, whose own stories of engagement with God had not been included in the story of the Israelites and early Christians which makes up the current Bible. This section seeks to analyse why Banana thought such an exercise was important. What would re-writing the Bible achieve for Banana? Was the re-written Bible the end or a means to an end? If re-writing was a means, what would be the end? That Banana allowed himself to be ridiculed may be a pointer towards how dear he thought this project was, especially when it is placed within the context of Banana's lifetime struggle for justice, equality and equity among all peoples in any given community. The re-writing project was firmly placed within this overall quest, a position that is acknowledged by Stephen Reed (1996:283) who observes:

> For him [Banana] a central problem in the world is oppression and the solution is liberation. Such language is pervasive in his article. He speaks of the need to liberate God from the captivity of culture, liberate the Bible, liberate Christ from the Bible, liberate Christianity and liberate people.

The re-writing proposal is, therefore, a liberation project according to Banana. Liberation would not only free those who are enslaved today, but it would also free up those who are enslaved to the enslavement of others, creating an environment that would lead all to belong together and be united. Proper liberation would

eliminate those things that divide human beings, hence the quest for a supra-Bible that would include everyone's story and experience because the privileging of one story and one experience had divided human beings between the chosen and the heathen. This, apparently, was the motivation behind the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation by its first born-again President, Fredrick Chiluba without regard to democratic principles he had initially promoted (Phiri 2008:99). What Chiluba tried was to foster to place himself in a group that saw itself as superior to all others who were not within that group to gain goodwill from the group of the chosen. However, that meant disenfranchising all those who did not share his supposed religious beliefs. It is not surprising that Banana (1993:29) declares;

> I think it is time to create a Bible that reflects the realities and possibilities of today's world ... a function of the Bible was to unite the Christians against those things which divided them. So, too, do we today need a unifying element that will help our world to set aside our differences and learn to live together.

Taken seriously, the aspirations of Banana throughout his works and also in his call to re-write the Bible, there is a deliberate preoccupation with changing the world for the better. This aspiration is framed as essentially Christian since, "for Banana the most basic Christian commitment is to justice, the revolutionary struggle for a better world, the building up of an equitable society" (Hastings 1982:155). The stories of heaven are indeed a part of the Christian worldview, yet it is the debilitating reality of oppression, exploitation and discrimination that made Christianity such a force in the world. It is a this-worldly Christianity that has successfully challenged exploitative and oppressive tendencies and practices in different parts of the world. "The ultimate context is the divine purpose that justice-righteousness should be realized in human society on earth" (McConville 2006:99) and this can be effectively done through human practice. Re-writing the Bible was understood as a way of emphasizing the "this-worldly dimension of the Bible," focusing on how God had affected, effected and

influenced the lives of different people in their different environments.

The second critical point is that Banana understood God and Jesus Christ as being larger than the Bible, even that the Bible "limits God and God's potential in the continuing creation of the world" (Banana 1993:18). Instead of painting a picture of a God who acted only in the limited life of Israel, Banana saw the re-writing project as a project of expanding the activities of God to the entire universe. To that extent Banana (1993:31) argues;

> A Bible liberated from its oppressive limitations, a Bible liberated to be the freeing word of God as that is experienced world-wide by peoples of many traditions and faiths, would, I believe, enable humanity to more adequately fulfill our responsibility as a people of God.

Being a people of God brings us back to the commitment to justice, equality and equity in different communities. All oppressive institutions would become enemies of the faith to be resisted since "Christ challenged the powerful and the oppressive," while frequently "the Church has become instead a part of a system of oppression and privilege," thereby making "Banana's theology a theology of revolution" (Hastings 1982:155).

Looked at from this perspective, the re-writing proposal was not only geared towards promoting the religious beliefs of all peoples, it was especially meant to curtail cases of abuse of power and authority under the guise of some special divine election. Such a proposal would make sense in environments where, according to Paul Gifford (2002:304), "dictators were defending their policies in the name of God, when those policies meant the death, starvation and misery of countless people," hence a re-writing project could "set out to discover what a truly saving Christianity might be." In Africa, the problem of dictatorships is being added onto the burden of colonization, neo-colonization, and economic plunder by multinational corporations, local elites and foreign governments. These challenges are central to the work of scholars on the continent. According to Gunda and Kügler (2012:8), "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." Unlike those who predicted the end of religion and its influence, Banana's call to re-write the Bible was couched in an understanding of the enduring relevance of religions and sacred texts, an understanding that in as much as they are part of the problem, they are equally part of the solution.

> 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 (Gunda and Kügler 2012:10).

Re-writing in this context was an alternative to rejecting the Bible, in fact, the "intention was never to reject the Bible, but to reconstitute it as a more inclusive, amenable and attractive text" (Sugirtharajah 2001:109). Re-writing was recognition of the fact that the Bible had been compromised in the theater of human oppression and exploitation while acknowledging that if it provided the way in, it may as well provide us with a way out.

Without downplaying the continued existence of race, gender, social, economic exploitations and oppressions that characterize the contemporary world, it is also true that due to greater mobility and inter-cultural networking, there are more communities living peacefully in spite of the cultural diversities of residents and members of such communities. These possibilities were clear to Banana, and even as he fought alongside many others to liberate Zimbabweans from the evil of colonization, Banana was never a proponent of "a pure Zimbabwean community." This understanding of citizenship by Banana is contradictory to the politicized citizenship of post-2000 Zimbabwe, a time when citizenship was largely determined by political affiliation, alleged or real (Jeater 2012:130). This was also a period when "citizens" were seen as those not taking an active role in shaping their destiny by collaborating with others to create conditions for human development

and sustainable development of their society (Tarusarira 2012:69). The problems experienced by Judith Garfield Todd (2012) as a Zimbabwean born white in the post-2000 era would have shocked Banana. Banana wanted to see all people co-existing, living in harmony and with respect. Re-writing a new and universal Bible was important because it would eliminate the differences and, therefore, the justifications for some of the discriminations some encounter in their societies. The new Bible envisaged by Banana would make all peoples of the universe the chosen people of God and, therefore, equal. Alternatively, the new Bible would redefine God as a God who does not bind God to any one people; hence no people would stand up as the chosen people of God. Either way we look at this new Bible that Banana envisaged, the goal was to level the divine claims, all are chosen or none are chosen! This would be revolutionary in an environment where everything seems to depend on the ideologies of chosenness. The call to re-write the Bible was important to Banana because he understood it, "as a way of finding long term solutions to the problems of political and economic domination which are sometimes packaged as divinely sanctioned ambitions" (Gunda 2012a:23). Not only are these problems limited to politics and economics, problems of domination and discrimination have always included gender relations, and of late sexual minorities have experienced the brunt of exploitation and rejection. Reading Banana from our context, it appears Banana would have unequivocally stood on the side of women and sexual minorities.

In short, Banana understood the re-writing project as of critical importance because it could be a solution to the problems created by the ideologies and theologies of chosenness. Entire communities had been and continue to be exploited, enslaved, oppressed, colonized and economically plundered by groups that justified such actions as divinely ordained by God who had chosen them ahead of their victims. This underpinning ideology of chosenness was being buttressed by a reading of the Bible, whose major fault according to Banana was to privilege the story and experience of

one people only. This gave the impression God was limited to that one people when in effect and fact, God had always acted in all communities. Re-writing the Bible would re-discover this universal God who was already known in other communities without the Bible. Finally, re-writing the Bible would also allow the Bible to place emphasis on the commitment to justice, equality and equity in the world, the commitment that Banana understood as Christian.

The Impossibility of Re-writing the Bible: A critique

While the call to re-write the Bible by Banana is informed by a noble cause, that is, the desire to see a vicious world tamed into a friendly world to all human beings; there were, are and will always be some misgivings about its practicability. The misgivings are not limited to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that Banana thought he was resolving, but they extend to contemporary situations in other areas, like Zimbabwe, that continue to grapple with the viciousness of individuals, groups of individuals, institutions and indeed states that are bent on maximizing their profits or, as is commonly suggested, "protecting their interests at any cost." Looming large on the list of weaknesses in the call to re-write the Bible is the apparent contradiction in the paradox that the Bible that is "essentially Jewish" can at the same time be re-written, while remaining with the name "Bible." While the name "Bible" is derived from a general Greek term meaning "books", it has over the years evolved to become associated specifically with a collection of books that are considered sacred by Jews and Christians, hence the notion of the Christian Bible and the Hebrew Bible. What Banana attempted was to cleanse the Bible from all vestiges of Jewish superiority, especially expressed in the divine chosenness of the Jewish people (Lehmann-Habeck 1993:37). It is impossible to talk of the "Muslim Bible" when referring to the Quran, hence the suggestion that Muslims and other believers from other faiths can willingly identify themselves with a text

called the Bible without feeling that they have been conquered is clearly unthinkable. While one could refer to the Quran as a re-written Bible, the politicization of the relations between the "Islamic world" and the "Christian world" means that talk of Quran being a re-written Bible can easily become inflammable. It can torch a serious backlash. Further, the call to re-write the Bible assumes that all religious traditions value or are dependent on "sacred texts," an assumption that fails to appreciate the existence of religious traditions that are based especially on ritual and orality, religions that are lived and whose ideas and teachings are re-enacted continuously, among them being African Traditional Religions.

The call to re-write the Bible is impracticable in the manner in which Banana envisaged such a re-writing. The Bible is a term used to refer to the Christian sacred texts and also to the Hebrew Scriptures. In Zimbabwe, the Bible is almost single handedly associated with Christianity. Re-writing the Bible, therefore, draws criticism from many Christians who find such a project as directed towards neutralizing the only path to salvation, which is Christian faith. Christian faith is then understood as expounded in the Bible as it is written; changing it is, therefore, not only unacceptable, it is actually blasphemous! Re-writing will also draw criticism from non-Christian believers, who associate the Bible with Christianity and Judaism, but more damning is the association of the Bible with imperialism. Even though Banana promises to include the stories of all other peoples in this supra-Bible, the fact that he calls the supra-text, a Bible means it is skewed towards Christianity and Judaism and thereby fuelling, instead of averting, imperialistic fears among the other religions. This is also apparent in Banana's insistence that Christ will remain the focal point of the supra-Bible. Re-writing fails especially because it fails to pay particular attention to the centrality of the "doctrines of chosenness" across the world religions.

The complications arising out of the chosen name of the re-written text are a manifestation of the "ideology of chosenness"

(Banana 1993:21-3), which continues to influence and instigate bouts of intolerance in various communities across the world today. All or most religious groups claim some special standing before the ultimate Supreme Being. This special standing is dependent on the group establishing its claim to being specially chosen to be the vehicle or mediating instrument between the Supreme Being and all other peoples. From this background, it is clearly impossible to realize the "supra-Bible that Banana advocates since all major religious traditions including the three Abrahamic faiths will likely undermine any such project" (Gunda 2012a:27-8). Without the claim to chosenness, these religious groups would cease to be relevant. Unless one group claims to be in possession of the "truth" and in control of the "true path" to salvation, religion will become irrelevant. It is the ideology of chosenness that keeps religious traditions alive in different societies and it is unthinkable that religious groups would give away their existence by submitting to a generalized religion where everybody is chosen or conversely where nobody is chosen!

There is no doubting the need for tolerance and acceptance of difference in order for peace to reign throughout the universe. This desire is central to Banana's call to re-write the Bible, which would reflect "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" (Banana 1993:29). Critiquing the call to re-write should not be mistaken for a rejection of the desire to achieve peace and justice. This critique rather questions whether re-writing is a viable path towards achieving the peace and justice so desired. Banana's call is premised on an optimistic assessment of the world we live in. Banana assumes that the world will wake up to see the beauty of peace and justice and thereby willingly doing away with selfish interests, thereby participating in the re-writing project fairly and justly. I do not share Banana's optimism about the world we live in; neither do I share the vision of a world that is not inherently controlled by selfish interests (Gunda 2012a:27). Any attempt at achieving

peace and justice must, therefore, acknowledge the reality of the selfish interests and must attempt to find remedies to counter the excesses of such selfish interests. Re-writing cannot succeed because it is dependent on goodwill and honesty, traits that are hard to get in many communities and among different groups within the same community. Banana's call is self-defeating, in that however we re-write the Bible, the interpreters or preachers of that re-written text will most likely continue to manipulate the re-written 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.

A closer analysis of Banana's arguments and treatment of the Bible shows that Banana is his own worst enemy. The call to re-write the Bible is informed by the assumption that it is such an important text that is determinative in contemporary situations in the world. Seen this way, while it is part of the problem, it is also part of the solution, hence the desire to re-write it and purge it of the problematic areas while retaining and strengthening the positive elements. Indeed, there is some validity in this observation, yet Banana's views regarding the Bible are inconsistent and sometimes even contradictory (Gundani 1992:41) that the significance of this observation is watered down. In one instance Banana takes the Bible as scripture hence normative and indispensable for Christians and in other instances he rejects any claims to special or privileged position for the Bible when he argues that it is one among many sources of God's revelation (Gunda 2012b:143). If, as Banana suggests, the Bible is one among many, is there any need to re-write it? For whose benefit will it be to re-write a text that is already "private"? If the Bible is scripture hence normative for those who consider it as such; who will be responsible for the re-writing of the norms? Will the believers join in the project or mobilize against the project? This is worsened by the fact that the Bible as it stands claims its authority from the idea that it is the revealed Word of God and therefore not man-made, the same claim is apparent in the Book of Mormon, Quran and other sa-

cred texts. Their authority comes from being something other than human-made, the call to re-write the Bible is in a way a suggestion towards the creation of a human-made text, along the lines of a constitution, such texts cannot claim divine authority only that which is given to them by mere mortals. This observation means, Banana's re-written Bible will not have the same authority as the current Bible because in the eyes of believers, it is not inspired.

The initial response to Banana in Zimbabwe can easily be generalized to apply in many other communities: the believers ganged up against the project before they had even listened to the noble desires behind the call. Re-writing the Bible can never succeed for as long as religions remain competitors. Further, a re-written Bible without followers will not be a useful instrument for the purposes for which Banana intended it. That realization, however, must not deter us from pursuing the desire for justice, equality and equity; other ways must be sought.

Concluding observations

A critical analysis of Banana's call to re-write the Bible shows that while it was a novel call, at least in Zimbabwe, it was nonetheless one that had been around for a long time before it was dusted by Banana in 1991. The history of the Bible, especially until the early years of Christianity, has been a history of writing and re-writing of the text and its ideas. This history is responsible for the layers of materials that can be mined in the biblical text as we have it. Some of the differences in texts are a result of these processes of writing and re-writing that the texts were subjected to over centuries. Calling for a new Bible, therefore, was not in itself something that was un-heard of to those who have followed the history of the Bible and the Church. Banana's call to re-write the Bible was a response to the realization that the Bible as a sacred text, with a significant following, was being abused and manipulated by the powerful to entrench their hold on power. This was the

case in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in which Banana sympathized with the Palestinians; the Israelis were accused of invoking ancient biblical traditions to justify their callousness in their "colonizing modern Palestine." The same fears were applicable to Zimbabwe during the colonial era and even in the post-colonial era. Indeed, "this call may be at home in Africa, because all the reasons that led Banana into making this call can be found in Africa" (Gunda 2012a:23). The call to re-write the Bible and especially its implications are, therefore, an appropriate starting point in considering the role and function of the Bible in contemporary Zimbabwe and other states in similar contexts.

Banana was clear that re-writing the Bible was not an end but a means to an end. This has greater significance for considering the implications of the call because even though Banana suggested re-writing as a meaningful path towards the end, he nonetheless knew the way was not the most important. From the works of Banana, it is apparent that the end is the realization of a society that is built on the principles of justice, equality and equity. The pain of apartheid and segregation of the colonial regimes were so bitter that the only desirable society was one that would guarantee the freedom and equality of all human beings. The powerful syndicates that control societies are all guilty of equating their happiness and comfort with that of everyone else, including those that they ruthlessly crush into poverty. Indeed, poverty is the by-product of the creation of wealth by these ethnic, social, economic and political syndicates. These syndicates use all sorts of sources and resources to guard their comforts, such resources naturally range from faith to force, religion and sacred texts are used alongside guns and bombs to secure their comforts. A closer reading of Banana's works shows that these syndicates can be fought and resisted by deploying the same resources, hence he was a strong supporter of "armed revolution for independence in Zimbabwe" while at the same time calling for a "re-writing of the Bible," thereby making use of the resources that have been used against

the oppressed and exploited masses. In short, re-writing the Bible is a path towards a just and fair society, as understood by Banana.

Finally, compromise was considered an unforgivable sin by Banana, hence the extremes in his arguments. Justice, equality and equity as the end to be sought and defended by Christians were non-negotiables, as I indicated in chapter one. Everything had to be done to achieve the target or to secure the target, even if it meant re-writing the Bible or taking up arms of war to fight. Banana did not believe that in a society characterized by oppression, exploitation and domination of many by the powerful there could be any neutrality. The fence in such environments "is ultimately determined by the powers that be, hence it is not the most balanced place, as is commonly assumed, but the place most attuned with the status quo" (Rieger 2007:90). In other words, by insisting on being neutral in such environments, the masses become co-conspirators with their oppressors. Re-writing was a bold step taken to avoid the ambiguity of "sitting on the fence" because the fence belonged to the oppressors. Does that mean Banana was right that the Bible must be re-written? If it cannot be re-written, how can the Bible be appropriated in the quest to achieve justice, equality and equity? In the following chapter, I will interrogate the way of Europe, which is the removal of the Bible from the public sphere, which I call in this study, de-biblification.

CHAPTER 3

IS DE-BIBLIFICATION A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO "RE-WRITING" THE BIBLE?

> Christian leaders have retreated into the private spiritual sphere of the church and, despite some pious statements here and there, are leaving the politicians to get on with the show. Church leaders appear at public functions to bless and to pray at the bidding of the politicians, thereby legitimating processes over which they have rarely had any influence (Draper 2008:42).

Introduction

The public court of justice in Zimbabwe was overwhelming in its pronouncement of a clear judgment against Banana. Banana was guilty of blasphemy for suggesting that he and other like-minded individuals could "add or subtract from the Word of God against what the Word of God itself says" (cf. Deut.12:32 and 2 Tim.3:16). It is possible that had this call been publicized in Israel, it could have been met with the same fate: it could be ignored to death or the author could be socially ostracized, if not killed literally. The response to the call was not surprising since believers tend to react in such ways when they perceive someone to be attempting to undermine their faith. In defense of one's faith, reason may not necessarily be a virtue; it is belief that governs in the realm of faith. Zimbabwe is predominantly Christian and conservative, hence the call to re-write the Bible was interpreted by most Christians as an attack on Christianity; the call was seen as offensive. This chapter, however, seeks to interrogate this subject further, through the question: can what Banana intended be achieved through the de-biblification of the public sphere?

Can "the way of Europe, a way created over centuries, which seeks to eradicate the direct or sometimes even perceived use of reli-

gion or sacred texts in the public sphere" (Gunda 2012a:22) be successfully implemented in Zimbabwe or Africa in general? While Europe sought to do away with religion and sacred texts in the public sphere, the same system will be difficult if not entirely impossible to adopt and implement in Zimbabwe because religion and sacred texts are the veins through which life is transmitted and preserved in Zimbabwean communities. The weaknesses inherent in this "way of Europe" lead me to propose a partial censorship of sacred texts or religion in the public sphere, what I call in this study, a partial de-biblification of the public sphere.

This chapter will therefore begin by engaging with the concept of the public sphere, what do we mean by public sphere? What belongs to this sphere and what does not belong to this sphere? It is important to carry out a delimitation exercise by which we can define and justify the use of the phrase "public sphere" in this study. Further, an attempt will be made to demonstrate that the use of the Bible in this public sphere has been largely in the form of a masking tape, which is used to cover up some defects and therefore to prevent onlookers from seeing the real thing. The chapter will also investigate the validity of the "way of Europe" in addressing the concerns that led Banana to call for the re-writing of the Bible. Finally, this chapter will critique the "way of Europe" and instead propose "a partial de-biblification" of the public sphere.

The Public Sphere: definition and delimitation

Since the planting of Christianity in Zimbabwe during the final decades of the nineteenth century, Christianity and the Bible as Christian scripture have been part and parcel of the public discourses. The presence of religion in the public sphere, however, was not unique to Christianity in the colonial era. Rather, in the pre-colonial era there were no rigid demarcations between private and public spheres, sacred and profane things. This duality is foreign to the traditional worldview among indigenous Zimba-

bwean groups. The setting up of the modern nation-state has however brought about the notion of both private and public spheres hence the need to define and delimit these two spheres. The notion of the public sphere is largely credited to the work of Jürgen Habermas (1989:27), who contends that

> The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate over the general rules governing relations.

This statement is a development within the context of Europe where the "bourgeois" could be rendered in modern parlance "middle class." In this context, the public sphere was a sphere where middle class citizens could suggest ways in which they could be governed. It was "a social space – distinct from the state, the economy, and the family – in which individuals could engage each other as private citizens deliberating about the common good. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this new social structure was its status as a space of reason-giving, a realm in which reasons were forwarded and debated, accepted or rejected" (Mendieta & VanAntwerpen 2011:2-3). Unlike the state-controlled public sphere, the bourgeois public sphere allowed all to express their ideas, debate them and allow the group to accept or reject them.

This coming together of private people to voice their opinions on how they were governed was seen as reasserting the tradition "of ancient Germanic law, through the categories of 'gemeinlich' and 'sunderlich,' 'common' and 'particular,'" which "corresponded somewhat to the classical 'publicus' and 'privatus'" (Habermas 1989:6). From these observations, it is assumed that prior to the rise of the "civil public/society"; matters that affect the entire community were dealt with by the rulers and governors while the ordinary people had a duty to abide by the dictates of the rulers. This explains why Habermas argues that the civil public wrestled the public sphere from the authorities. In other words, the bourgeois public sphere developed:

> As a sphere between civil society and the state, in which critical public discussion of matters of general interest was institutionally guaranteed, the liberal public sphere took shape in the specific historical circumstances of a developing market economy... [it] gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people (McCarthy 1989:xi).

The coming together of the ordinary people in the formation of the bourgeois public sphere was necessitated by the realization that the general public is affected by the regulations, proclamations, commissions and omissions of state actors. The "public sphere of the civil society" provided a platform on which private citizens could come together to discuss their common challenges and to offer a common opinion on the state of affairs, even challenging the state and proposing ways in which they should be governed. It became "a forum in which the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion" (Habermas 1989:25-6). No longer would the ordinary people consider it their duty to obey authorities; rather, authorities had a duty to listen to the public, which could, after discussions, proffer a representative opinion. It is not surprising, therefore, that "forces endeavoring to influence the decisions of state authority appealed to the critical public in order to legitimate demands before this new forum" (Habermas 1989:57). This state of affairs remains essentially operational in Zimbabwe through the so-called non-governmental organizations and other civil society groupings, which base their legitimacy on public opinion regarding specific issues that interest them.

While the concept of the public sphere as articulated by Habermas is specific to the European context, clearly there is a lot that we can derive from it for the purposes of an analysis that is specifically Zimbabwean and generally African. Of especial importance is the observation by Habermas (1989:1-2) that "events and occa-

sions [are] 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs – as when we speak of public places or public houses... 'Public buildings' simply house state institutions and as such are 'public.' The state is the 'public authority.' It owes this attribute to its task of promoting the public or common welfare of its rightful members." Of critical importance to note is the difference that exists between private individuals who come together to make a public and the servants of the state who were öffentliche Personen, public persons (public servants); they were incumbent in some official position, their official business was "public" (öffentliches Amt) (Habermas 1989:11). In this study and in agreement with the overall argument of Habermas, the public sphere is conceived of in terms of place and event. First, by public sphere, therefore, I mean places that are of necessity to all citizens and residents of a particular country. Second, I also mean events that are of necessity and of significance to all citizens and residents of a given country (Gunda 2012a:32). In other words, the concept of the public sphere can be extended "to encompass vital public institutions like the judiciary, media, agencies of law enforcement, financial institutions, even health and education systems" (Gifford 2009:1).

The public sphere in terms of places is informed by the fact that there are places where all citizens expect to be served, especially through the government or other service providers. In these places, service is for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic identity, gender, political affiliation, and education and/or religious confession if they have one or even if they are agnostic or atheistic. 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 (Only those institutions that offer service on faith basis can remain private spheres), sporting facilities, public transport etc, constitute public places. 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 translate to private sphere because some private properties actually form part of the public sphere. Privately owned public spheres would include such institutions as schools, hospitals, financial institutions, which may be owned by an individual but serving all citizens and residents. The faith, political affiliation or ethnic identity of the owner cannot, therefore, be imposed on clients (Gunda 2012a:33). In this work, therefore, reference to public places is with the highlighted places in mind.

Besides public places, the public sphere can be conceived of also in terms of events that are open to all citizens. The assumption is that "there are events that bring together people of the same country as part of a shared history and identity. Such events are considered significant for and by all citizens" (Gunda 2012a:34). In the context of the public events which would constitute the public sphere, I am thinking here of events such as Independence Day, and National Heroes' Day commemorations. These are events on the calendar that call upon all Zimbabweans to reflect on their collective identity as Zimbabweans or workers irrespective of their ethnic, political, religious, social or economic identity and status. I am aware that frequently in Zimbabwe; these events have been politicized and have largely made use of one religious tradition against many others present in Zimbabwe. In spite of this observation, I maintain that ideally these public events need not be discriminatory as they are meant to be events that bring Zimbabweans together as a single community. They are supposed to be above the differences that separate Zimbabweans into different ethnicities, faiths or social, economic and political classes and parties. As is the case with some private properties that become public spheres, there are also events that may appear to be private yet which should be categorized as public events. In this context, I have previously argued that

> 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 pronouncements are necessarily of interest to all citizens hence they should be considered as falling under the public sphere (Gunda 2012a:32-3).

These two categories of the public sphere will, therefore, be implied whenever the concept of the public sphere is used in this study. However, before we conclude this section, it is pertinent to address directly the question of Christianity or religion within this understanding of the public sphere.

We noted above that the notion of a bourgeois public sphere developed in Europe when ordinary citizens came together to assert their right to have a say in the affairs of their communities. Religion in general and Christianity in particular had enjoyed centuries of being part of the ruling authorities across Europe, it was part of the public authority that came under scrutiny upon the rise of public consciousness. As Habermas (1989:11) rightly observed "the status of the Church started changing as a result of the Reformation; the anchoring in divine authority that it represented – that is, religion – became a private matter. The so-called freedom of religion historically secured the first sphere of private autonomy," meaning that individuals were free to hold religious opinions without the threat of being discriminated by the ruling authorities. The freedom of religion is explained succinctly in the context of martyrdom in ways that are instructive for this study in that

> If martyrdom is death for the sake of one's religious faith, the only way to solve the problem of martyrdom was to ensure that no religion had the political power required to persecute another. All churches would need to be removed from political power. The modern liberal state, with its separation of church and state and toleration of all faiths, arose as a peacemaking mechanism to end the 'Wars of Religion' and thereby close the book on martyrs, at least for Europe (Cavanaugh 2011:125-6).

Whereas, rulers had initially asserted their right to rule as divinely ordained, once the bourgeois public sphere had come into existence, the legitimate rulers were those whose reign was accepted by the highly opinionated public.

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" (Gunda 2012a:32). This is in line with the understanding that

> the distinctive feature of the modern public sphere is that individuals are to appear as equals, formally not hindered by an attachment to particular interests or identities, with only the power of rational arguments acknowledged. Following this line of thought, there is no space for religiously grounded positions in the modern public sphere (Meyer and Moors 2006:11).

With this realization, I should hasten to suggest that "it is in these circumstances also that the call for de-biblification can become important. There is no attempt to undermine the role of Christianity or the Bible in the private lives of Christians" (Gunda 2012a:34). In essence, the critical questions that are assumed by the move towards asserting reason as the sole basis upon which public opinion could be based are "why do we believe what we believe? What are the sources of our opinions and attitudes?" (Fang 1997:xx). This emphasis on reason is also understandable within the historical context in which the public sphere arose, that is, a Europe that believed reason was all humanity needed to explain everything in the universe and that religion and reason were mutually exclusive hence Habermas (2006:9) argues:

> The liberal state must not transform the requisite institutional separation of religion and politics into an undue mental and psychological burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith. It must of course expect of them that they recognize the principle that political authority is exercised with neutrality towards competing world views. Every citizen must know and accept that only

> secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations.

The European experience raises some interesting points for our analysis; first, the use of religion as a legitimating force for rulers can easily engender intolerance, especially where there are competing religious traditions and beliefs. Further, where divine authority is claimed by authorities, accountability becomes labored. The opinion of mere mortals, that is, ordinary citizens, cannot be considered when it is deemed to be in opposition with divine plans and mandate hence good governance, the pursuit of justice, equality and equity can easily be defeated by flight into the realm of the divine where ordinary citizens are not afforded the opportunity to engage with the divine. As I proceed, the next section focuses on the effect or role of the Bible or religion in general in the public sphere.

The Bible in the Public Sphere: A Masking Tape?

As observed above, religion in general has been part and parcel of the public sphere for a very long time, in pre-colonial Zimbabwe it was possibly not even possible to distinguish between religious and non-religious things, everything affected everything else. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, it has become possible to investigate the function of religion, in general, in the public sphere. This is necessitated by the realization that among the reasons for the separation of church and state in Europe was the observation that religion could be used by the ruling authorities to suppress, oppress or exploit ordinary citizens. The desire for ruling elites is to gain total control of their subjects, and they use a raft of instruments to achieve that aim including security forces (military, police, secret services etc), laws, goods and capital as well as information (propaganda). On top of these and many other instruments, I agree with Gifford (2002:276) that, "an even more potent means of control is religion. If an idea or situation can be presented as divine

law or the will of God resistance can be reduced to a minimum." Similarly, Gerald West (2012:86) observes that

> among the items of power the missionaries brought with them was the Bible. From the way missionaries, and others, used the Bible while they were among African communities, it was apparent to anyone who was watching, and local Africans were rigorously attentive to any and every missionary activity, that the Bible had significant power.

This realization is critical in my assertion that more often than not, when public officials resort to using religion or the Bible in particular, the function of the Bible can be understood as that of a "masking tape." It is used to cover up something!

Is it not surprising that some of the vilest regimes in Africa have been filled to capacity with self-confessing Christians? Liberia has suffered many coup-de-tats and "at the time of the 1980 coup: [William] Tolbert, the President of the country, was also Chairman of the Baptist Convention; [Bennie] Warner, his Vice-President, was the presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church; and Reginald Townsend, the National Chairman of the (True Whig Party) TWP, was the moderator of the Presbyterian Church" (Gifford 2002:58). Being led by these Christians did not stop others from being totally disillusioned as to plan and topple this regime. This public posturing by public officials parading their faith has to be treated with suspicion otherwise it becomes difficult to reconcile a loving God with a cabal of murderous and ruthless elites claiming to be representatives of that God. This is not limited to Africa, one of the most feared American regimes was that of George W. Bush and his Deputy, Vice President Dick Cheney, who "in a 2003 Christmas card to his supporters quoted Benjamin Franklin: 'And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it possible that an empire can rise without His aid?" (Rieger 2007:41). This is a quotation that sought to place America as a divinely ordained empire, raised by God and thereby rationalizing what they were doing as being a divine mission. To that extent, it is right to argue that

> A God who rapes and maims is not a God to hold onto. While we fight against naming the devil, we must fight against naming God, too. A man who shot and killed an unarmed teen was asked if he regretted having a gun that night. His response, 'No sir, it was all part of God's plan,' places human action in God's lap. It is like saying that the defilement of a woman (Lam 1:9) when an enemy spreads his hands over her inward parts (Lam 1:10) was her plan. Explanations that blame Daughter Zion, blame a satan, or name God as the abuser, let human beings off the hook... The power of oppression comes from unchecked dishonesty. False blame – attributed to the victim, to someone else, or to God – allows the oppressor to triumph (Queen-Sutherland 2013:192).

Other scholars,, especially Paul Gifford, but also Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, have done studies across Africa, which clearly attest to the abuse of religion and sacred texts for the benefit of the ruling elites. This usage of the Bible or Christianity in general is equally evident in Zimbabwe, as seen in the manner in which government officials and political leaders take turns to show how much they know biblical injunctions and yet their lives appear to have nothing to do with Christian or biblical injunctions. On a trip to Ghana, I saw a billboard with the President John Dramani Mahama's portrait with the message "fulfilling God's Promise." Ellis and ter Haar (2004:91) observe that "when J.J. Rawlings took power (1979, Ghana) with a promise to clean the country of corruption, he soon became known as 'Junior Jesus'... Later, sometime after his second coup in 1981, the JJ prefix was changed in popular speech into 'Junior Judas' because of Rawlings' failure to deliver on his promises." Ruling elites promise to be champions of the people's cause but once entrusted with public office, frequently, public office becomes a platform for unbridled pursuit of private interests.

Many African leaders, including Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe, have had stories told about how they were specially set aside or chosen to be the leaders of their people. Such stories do not pay heed to the manner such leaders came into office. Mugabe, for example, was elected in 1980 to be the first Prime Minister

of independent Zimbabwe, yet he is still seen as having been chosen by God. The act of electing him is, therefore, seen as rubberstamping God's choice that also has been taken to mean such leaders cannot be accountable to ordinary people who voted them since their mandate is divinely ordained. This is, well articulated in the case of William Richard Tolbert Jr, former President of Liberia. According to Gifford (2002:59):

> Christianity's function of legitimating political power is evident in the official biography of Tolbert, written not long before he died in the 1980 coup. Biblical imagery is used to depict Tolbert as someone called to his position by God. As a youth Tolbert heard a 'voice calling to him one morning while he was still in bed. He went to his mother's room, knocked at the door and asked, 'mama, did you call me?' 'Nobody called you, my dear,' she replied, 'Go back to bed.' After the incident was repeated twice, Mrs Tolbert... 'Since you have come again and said that you heard a voice, we have to pray about it.' No one in Liberia's biblical culture could fail to see that this is an extended reworking of the call of Samuel (1 Sam 3).

With such reworking of biblical imagery, questioning the leadership of Tolbert could be seen as questioning God who called him to lead. Despicable acts of injustice, which entrench inequality in society, are, therefore, committed by leaders who refuse to be accountable to the people by posturing as divinely commissioned and, therefore, answerable to divine authority. "Kenya's state-controlled media portrayed Moi as a God-fearing leader who is guided by Christian principles" (Karanja 2008:84) at a time when corruption was wreaking havoc and the elites were essentially untouchables clearly existing above the laws that governed Kenya under Moi.

The developments in Europe and the experiences in Zimbabwe show that there is greater usage of religion and sacred texts, especially, during periods when there are more cases of injustice, oppression and unfair distribution of resources in societies. To that extent Kalilombe (2006:442), is right to argue that "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 stirrings of revolt against oppressive or discriminatory practices, and to promote attitudes of resignation and compliance in the face of exploitative manipulations of power-holders." It is this observation that leads me to argue that frequently when public officials resort to using religion and sacred texts, such resources are only being used to cover the actual injustices that are being perpetrated against the ordinary people. Resorting to religion and sacred texts is a ploy to avoid accountability by removing the people's authority and responsibility to oversee how they are governed and depositing such authority in the divine, which essentially means the ruling elites become accountable only to themselves. With so much talk on bad governance across Africa, it is not surprising that most Presidents on the continent have legends created around their personalities and sometimes rumors are spread to the effect that "the head of State is the repository of great mystical power that originates from elsewhere" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:105). In effect such rumors have the effect of telling voters that the President is President not because they voted him/her into office but because he was divinely chosen to be the President. The election is only an exercise in rubber-stamping the divine choice, after hotly contested elections in Ghana, the President directly or indirectly commissioned billboards with his picture with the message;

Fulfilling God's Will
Working for a Better Ghana
H.E. John Dramani Mahama,
President, Republic of Ghana

In Zimbabwe, the use of Christianity and the Bible to mask injustices and oppression can be traced back to the colonial period, where white domination was seen as being part and parcel of the burden of the white man to civilize and Christianize the African. Ian Smith explained and articulated his Unilateral Declaration of Independence UDI in Christian terms, as a move to protect Chris-

tianity when it was clear to many that it was a move to protect the privileged position of the few whites in Zimbabwe while sustaining the oppression and exploitation of the majority black Zimbabweans. In his words, Ian Smith (11/11/1965) declared; "We have struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilization, and Christianity; and in the spirit of this belief we have this day assumed our sovereign independence. God bless you all." Religion, Christianity in particular, was simply being used as a masking tape. After independence in 1980, the new government tried to incorporate Christianity into its programmes by appointing Rev. Canaan S. Banana as the first President of Zimbabwe. These developments confirm that indeed "the history of empire reveals that empires have often been justified and supported by theological means" (Rieger 2007:5). The appointment of Banana to be President was possibly designed to bring the church to the side of the newly instituted government, which was "socialist" and therefore not trusted by the church. The war had been prosecuted with the help of traditional religious mediums as well as Christian ministers and believers. President Banana was supposed to be an assurance to the church that these socialists were "good" and were ready to work with the church for the development of Zimbabwe.

In the early years when Mugabe's reign was popularly acknowledged, Mugabe's legitimacy was almost always based on the elections yet when the economy started failing at an alarming rate, and it became clear that Mugabe could and/or would lose a free and fair election, stories about Mugabe being a divine gift arose. Indeed, there is truth in Mukonyora's (2008:131) observation that "as corruption continued to take its toll and the government faced ongoing criticisms from the Zimbabwean people for failing to relieve poverty, President Mugabe finally decided that forcible takeover of white-owned farms should proceed in order to enhance his dwindling legitimacy" (Mukonyora 2008:131). This move coincided also with greater choruses of supposed religious leaders who spoke glowingly of Mugabe's divine credentials. Whereas, legitimacy in 1980 was specifically associated with the

1980 general elections, in the decade of crises, legitimacy was now being sought in other spheres. Elections were becoming increasingly contested and the era of "landslide" victories had passed hence the need for other legitimizing resources.

For most people, the crises years in Zimbabwe commenced with the rejection of the draft constitution in a referendum in 2000, which was then followed by the re-taking of farmland from mainly white farmers in activities that were coordinated by war veterans with the approval of Mugabe and his government. These so-called "farm invasions" were followed by a violence-marred parliamentary election in June 2000 which for the first time since independence saw ZANU PF losing its two-thirds majority in Parliament to the newly formed Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai. However, I aver here that the crises years should rightly be seen to have been triggered by the infamous "black Friday" of 1997. According to Patrick Bond (1999) in one day (November 14, 1997, known as Black Friday), the Zimbabwe dollar fell by 75 percent over a few hours. While the black Friday is rightly a culmination of decades of skewed economic, political and social policies, it was triggered by two immediate factors. First, the unbudgeted $50,000 gratuities and $2,000 monthly pension paid out to 50 000 liberation war Veterans. Second, the proclamation that the 1993 Land Designation Act would be immediately implemented, with 1 500 farms already identified for redistribution, sent shockwaves in the commercial farming sector and other related industries. Clearly, from this period, things went from bad to worse and every past year seemed better than the following year until 2009. The economy went on a downward spiral that culminated in inflation reaching over trillion percent by 2008, unemployment figures exploded as industries collapsed throughout Zimbabwe. Zimbabweans were turned into economic and political refugees throughout the world.

While everything seemed to be going from bad to worse, religion was taking a different trajectory for during these crises years,

Christianity in particular; religion in general seemed to thrive. I, therefore, concur with the observation by Machingura (2012:256) that

> Even though the nation was crises-ridden, religion particularly Christianity continued to thrive well. It was not surprising when Christian leaders like No[l]bert Kunonga (former Anglican Bishop), Madzibaba Nzira (the late leader of the biggest AIC-Johane Masowe WeChishanu) and Obadiah Musindo (leader of the Destiny of Africa [Network]) were co-opted into the propaganda machinery that messianised Mugabe.

The relationship of Mugabe's political groupings with religion make for interesting study because even though the nationalists were avowed Marxist-socialists, the prosecution of the war made it imperative that they also be religious hence before independence one could characterize the nationalist movements as religious-marxist-socialist movements. After independence, the deployment of Banana as State President appeared to signal the prospect of fruitful partnership between the government and the Church, even though the government expected such partnership to be one in which the government decided on what to do, with the Church supporting whatever policy the government came up with. The crises years made it imperative that all necessary resources had to be used to retain power and legitimacy hence the blatant co-option of religious leaders in the pro-government propaganda machinery post-black Friday. It is in that context that the former Anglican Bishop Nolbert Kunonga proclaimed:

> As the church we see President Mugabe with different eyes. To us he is a prophet of God like Moses, who was sent to deliver the people of Zimbabwe from bondage of hunger. God raised him to acquire our land and distribute it to Zimbabweans. We call it democracy of the stomach (Machingura 2012:26).

In a similar vein Obadiah Musindo and Madzibaba Nzira are known for regarding Mugabe as 'having been sent by God or the Moses of Africa'. On one occasion Obadiah Musindo declared: 'Our God is not in America! Our God is in Heaven! Despite the

effort by the independent media to demonise you, Your Excellence, You were appointed by God' (Machingura 2012:276). It is not immediately clear why some religious leaders end up being propagandists for political leaders, but one suspicion is that "the government possessed information about some [church] leaders which could cause considerable embarrassment were it to become public; thus some were thought to be intimidated into silence" (Gifford 2002:67-8). This could be sustained in Zimbabwe following the humiliation suffered by Pius Ncube, former Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo whose sex videos were broadcast by the state-controlled Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Chinaka 17/07/2007). It is possible, therefore, that some religious leaders may have co-operated with the political leaders for fear of being exposed and thereby losing their standing in front of the multitude who hold them as paragons of morality and honesty.

While religious leaders such Kunonga, Msindo and Nzira became the religious faces responsible for rationalizing the divine election of Mugabe and his government, they were not the pioneers in "messianizing" Mugabe. These public proclamations associating Mugabe with divine election had ostensibly been launched by none other than ZANU PF former Mayor of Harare and MP, Tony Gara who declared in 1991 that Zimbabwe and "its people should thank the almighty for giving us his only other son by the name of R Mugabe. This son of God has and is still serving the people remarkably well" (Machingura 2012:25 my emphasis). This divinization of Mugabe came at a time when the labour movement was challenging the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) resulting in companies streamlining their operations and in the process retrenching many workers. Indeed, the beginnings of the economic problems caused by the adoption of ESAP coincided with the public manifestation of attempts at giving Mugabe a divine mandate to rule Zimbabwe.

While these public proclamations by religious leaders and ZANU PF officials suggests that Mugabe's divinization only began a dec-

ade after independence, a discourse arose suggesting Mugabe was divinely chosen from a very early age. In one of the interviews done by Heidi Holland (2008:6) the brother of Mugabe, Donato, was quoted saying:

> Our mother (Bona) explained to us that Father O'Hea (a Catholic priest) had told her that Robert was going to be an important somebody, a leader of Zimbabwe. Our mother believed Father O'Hea had brought this message from God. She took it very seriously. She believed Robert Mugabe was a holy child from God.

In the interesting book, *Dinner with Mugabe*, Holland narrates the several stories told to her by Donato which show that Bona indeed believed that Mugabe was a holy child and that Mugabe himself was very devout. This line of argument is also picked by Mugabe's deputy, Joice Mujuru who dissuaded Mugabe's challengers as follows:

> Speaking at the official opening of an Apostolic Faith Church building here yesterday, Mujuru said leaders are anointed by God, making them irreplaceable. "People are wasting their time by opposing President Mugabe. It was prophesied way back in 1934, when he was only 10 years old, that he was going to lead this country. How can a normal person challenge such a leader?" she queried. "There is nothing wrong in people having ambitions and discussing political issues with their wives. They should not, however, tamper with the presidency; it is sacrosanct. These positions come from God, they do not just come!" (*African Spotlight* 12/01/2013).

Taking Mujuru's logic further, if it is impossible to challenge a leader like Mugabe who was "divinely chosen" when he was only 10, can such a leader be asked to account for his commissions and omissions? To whom are such divinely chosen leaders accountable? My argument here is that this line of argumentation makes the electorate powerless since the rulers have a mandate not from the governed but from above. "Divinely chosen" leaders are, therefore, a danger to the wellbeing of contemporary democratic and pluralistic societies.

Prominent individuals within ZANU PF have fallen over each other to assert the divine mandate of Mugabe, especially after the formation of the Movement of Democratic Change in 1999. Oppah Muchinguri, the leader of ZANU PF's Women's League declared that "President Robert Mugabe is our god given leader. Mugabe is our gift from God. We don't have any problem with him. If anyone tries to remove President Robert Mugabe from power, we will march in the streets and we are prepared to remove our clothes in support of him" (Machingura 2012:24). No one puts it better than Muchinguri: Zimbabweans have no right to remove Mugabe from office because his mandate comes not from them but from God. From Matabeleland region where Mugabe's popularity is at rock-bottom because of the Gukurahundi massacres, Killian Sibanda (ZANU PF Provincial Chairman for Bulawayo) went overboard in eulogizing Mugabe:

> President Mugabe is like Jesus. Why I say that, it is because Jesus was sent by God to come and deliver us from our sins, similarly our President was sent by God to come and save the people of Zimbabwe from all the challenges we face today. So as from today know that our president Robert Mugabe is just like Jesus (Muvundusi *Dailynews* 18/02/2013).

Even Mugabe's erstwhile political foe, Morgan Tsvangirai has been roped in by the State newspapers which suggested that he had also declared that "President Mugabe is chosen by God, he is God-given and all leaders are chosen by God, so it is important for all Zimbabweans to pray for their leaders" (VOA News 13/02/2012). Tsvangirai later rejected this interpretation of what he said, yet he did not shy away from proclaiming himself as "divinely-chosen." He is quoted as saying "I am blessed to be chosen among the multitude to lead the country. I was chosen by God because it is said in the Bible leaders are chosen by God" (Radio-Vop/Zimdiaspora 11/02/2012). The divinization of leaders in Zimbabwe is, therefore, not limited to Mugabe alone but is spreading also to Tsvangirai and other leaders.

The search for a society that respects the multitude of its citizens is, therefore, put under the microscope when leaders decide their mandate is not from the governed but from above. Such shifting of mandate necessarily entails a shifting of accountability as well: such leaders can never be accountable to the citizens, they essentially are accountable to themselves, and they become gods unto themselves. Even more worrying in the case of Zimbabwe is the manner in which newly trained police men and women are asked to perceive Mugabe. Can a compromised police force, which believes it is there to serve the ruler and not the citizens, be trusted to assist the citizens express themselves if such expression is to show displeasure at the activities of the ruler? At a pass-out parade in 2012, police recruits were asked to swear their allegiance to Robert Mugabe:

> Police graduates in Harare yesterday threw out of the window their professional motto "For the People, For the Country, For the Law", declaring allegiance to President Robert Mugabe whom they described, in rehearsed worship recitations, as "the only God-chosen leader of Zimbabwe". They promised Mugabe that they would effectively deal with people that attempted to disturb the constitutional referendum and the subsequent elections. "You are our God-chosen leader and we hereby stand by you and remind the EU (European Union) and its allies that they can rule the rest of the world but not Zimbabwe anymore. Long live Gushungo," the recruits chanted in unison (*Zimeye.org* 15/06/2012).

In short, such declarations give the impression that Mugabe owns the police force, possibly also the national army, air force and prison service. It is already common knowledge that the secret service has always been loyal to the President, with such apparatus at his disposal, what can make Mugabe feel accountable to ordinary people? He is indeed made to feel divine, not only divinely-chosen, but he is the divinity itself!

Some people actively dissuade their followers from making divine insinuations concerning their person, but Mugabe has somehow actively fuelled the divine insinuations. Once, he dismissed per-

sistent rumours that he is dying of cancer by comparing himself to Jesus Christ during an interview on state radio. Scoffing at suggestions he was suffering from ill health, he joked: "I have died many times - that's where I have beaten Christ. Christ died once and resurrected once" (The Huffington Post 21/02/2012). While this was said sarcastically, it cannot be disputed that Mugabe would have given his followers room to perceive their leader differently. He, however, explicitly acknowledges his divine mandate on his 89th birthday, Mugabe said God had charged him to serve Zimbabwe and pledged to carry on the "divine task" without backtracking. "In my small way, this is the task the Lord might have wanted me to fulfill among my people and as I carry the burden of fulfilling it, it being a divine task, I read it as a bidding of God. A commandment that this is how you serve your nation," President Mugabe said (Maodza, *The Herald* 21/02/2013). Mugabe's wife also chips in with information that is supposed to convince Zimbabweans that the President was and remains highly devout and spiritual, showing that he indeed is divine. According to Grace Mugabe;

> He [Mugabe] has the ability to remain calm even when everything appears to be going wrong. I believe that calmness is divine because my husband is very religious. He prays the Catholic way and always moves with his rosary in his pocket ... Even when he changes clothes he makes sure that rosary is in his pocket. The first lady added: It is something he was taught by his mother and he still practices it up to this day. His mother taught him that protection comes from God and that is the reason why he always takes principled and God-fearing positions even when everyone is on the other side (*Mail & Guardian* 11/12/2012).

Clearly, the discourse on Mugabe's divine status is structured in such a way that his mandate as ruler of Zimbabweans is taken away from being merely a constitutional mandate to being a divine mandate. Indeed, Habermas is right that, "law and the monarch's judicial power owe their sacred aura to mythical narratives that connected ruling dynasties with the divine" (Habermas 2011:18). This structure dispossesses ordinary Zimbabweans of

the power that was established through the establishment of the bourgeois public sphere, the power to decide how and by whom they should be governed. According to Machingura (2012:27-8);

> after the historic March 2008 parliamentary and presidential elections; instead of accepting defeat as expected by people, Mugabe argued that: The MDC will never be allowed to rule this country-never, ever. Only God can remove me-not the MDC, not the British. We will never allow an event like an election to reverse our independence just through the strike of a pen on the ballot paper for that matter, our sovereignty, our sweat and all that we fought for and all that our comrades died fighting for. It is God who put me in this position not the British. So it is only God who can oust me.

While I am convinced that these divine myths created around leaders are nothing more than "masking tape", many unsuspecting citizens are hoodwinked into believing that masking tape is indeed the real thing. Such unsuspecting citizens end up offering "their fervent prayers and praise for dictators they deem 'godly' – a designation dictators usually earn by their adoption of biblical rhetoric and sponsorship of religious functions, particularly the ubiquitous evangelistic crusade" (Shah 2008:xiii). In fact, this strategic deployment of religions and sacred texts for political gain is a strong way of dividing ordinary citizens as was the case in Zambia during the presidency of Fredrick Chiluba, who declared Zambia a Christian nation. According to Isabel Apawo Phiri (2008:103-4);

> Some Christians thought that Zambia being democratic, the declaration of it as a Christian nation should have gone through democratic processes while supporters of the declaration saw those opposed to it as enemies of God's government. For them, the manner or process whereby the declaration was made is irrelevant. What matters is putting God above everything.

A Christian Charismatic leader, Nevers Mumba, is fingered out for helping "make it fashionable for political party leaders to declare themselves to be Christians in order to seek the votes of the

Christian community" (Phiri 2008:111), even if such importance of the Christian would easily be negated under the guise of a greater power. In articulating the Zambian declaration, Phiri rightly observes how the voting public ceased to be critical as Chiluba positioned himself as under the guidance and commission of God. She contends that

> Chiluba believes that King Josiah's mission to the nation of Israel is mirrored in him as president of Zambia. That is why he made the declaration while standing between two pillars at the State House. The declaration was not made to people; it was made to God. It was in a form of a prayer. He was basically saying that 'I believe God, and I believe what God has told me to do, and my government will follow. Where we fail, the standard that will judge us is not our manifesto, it is not how well we perform human rights as such, it is on how well we follow the principles as laid down in the Scriptures.' That is the declaration (Phiri 2008:104).

While ordinary citizens may indeed believe that they are putting God above everything, the leaders apparently know no other God other than themselves! In summing up this use of religion and sacred texts in the public sphere, I will cite here Baruch Spinoza (1670:60) who rightly observes that:

> The mass of people seem to have no interest in living by the teachings of Scripture; we see everyone peddling his own inventions as the word of God, concerned only to compel others to think as he does, under the pretext of religion. We see that the theologians have mainly wanted to extract their own inventions and beliefs from the Bible so as to prop them up with divine authority. They aren't in the least hesitant about interpreting Scripture; they read the mind of the Holy Spirit with great confidence and recklessness. They aren't afraid of fictitiously ascribing some error to the Holy Spirit and straying from the path to salvation; if they fear anything, it is being convicted of error by others, which would extinguish their authority and expose them to scorn.

It is their quest to gain and maintain power that they deploy religion and sacred texts, it is not for the strengthening of their faith. Sacred texts such as the Bible are used by rulers mainly to mask their unjust activities and interests. In such contexts, sacred texts can rightly be seen as militating against the empowerment of the ordinary people. 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 (Bernholz 1997:289).

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. Frederick Douglass observed that "the more religious the slave owners, the more cruel they were, and vice versa" (Davis 2005:11). In short, even though our leaders, both political, social, economic and even religious all profess a strong dependence on their faith in God, in Jesus Christ or any other religious faith, their faith and their actions are a cause for great fear because, according to Imo (2008:51);

> The hands of our leaders are blood stained, blood thirsty, and have intentionally brutalized fellow Nigerians in a bid to keep political power... oppression of the poor, perversion of justice, ostentatious lifestyle, desecration of the sanctity of life, religious bigotry and fanaticism and the hypocrisy of both the church (which is divided and commercialized) and the mosque (which

> has become the rallying point for fanaticism, and in many cases [a]... hide out armory for religious fanatics and fundamentalists.

The public posturing of our leaders cannot be trusted because frequently such public posturing is not related to the actual activities sanctioned by such leaders.

De-biblification of the public sphere: An antidote to the Masking Tape?

The fact that the Bible has been used, maybe even abused, by public officials in ways that seem to suggest such uses are driven by selfish interests and not as a manual for faith and conduct means we must seriously question all uses of the Bible in the public sphere. In this regard, one way of guarding against the abuses and excesses of Bible use, by public officials and generally in the public sphere, is to follow the "way of Europe". The "way of Europe" essentially means proscribing religion and sacred texts out of the public sphere! This is what I mean by de-biblification of the public sphere. The need behind this move in Europe was the yearning 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" (Kaulemu 2006). 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.

The theoretical proposition of de-biblification of the public sphere is that it can go a long way in minimizing the negative effects religion in general and sacred texts, such as the Bible in particular, have in the governance of society. The contemporary nation-state in Africa is largely formed from the ashes and ruins of European imperialism making them not totally averse to the principle of the separation of church (religion) and state. As Ellis and ter Haar (2004:4-5) rightly observe, "in the European tradition that has been exported all over the world in the last couple of centu-

ries, a solution has been proposed to the recurring problem of the rival claims to power of religion and politics by formally separating the institutional powers of church and state." The understanding and motivation of this separation was that the governed have to decide how they should be governed. It was further assumed, rightly so, that the rulers can only derive their mandate from the governed and nowhere else. The mandate to rule, therefore, became constitutional and not divine. Since Europe had experienced the vagaries of religiously sanctioned wars, it was assumed that by defusing religious conflict, political conflict would also be defused. This would be accomplished by separating politics from theology, or rather, Christianity (religion in general) had to be excluded from the conduct of politics (Long and Holdsclaw 2011:172-3, Gelot 2009:8).

While Kings in Europe had for long enjoyed some degree of divine status, after the reformation era, "nation after nation saw the Divine Right of Kings fall before a public crying for reform and a voice in their governance, and willing to go to the barricades to achieve them" (Fang 1997:32). This development saw religion being reduced to the level of private matter, with no direct influence on the public affairs of a society. This was especially pronounced as the doctrine of the separation of powers, resulting in the "separation of church and state and toleration of all faiths... as a peacemaking mechanism to end the 'Wars of Religion'" (Cavanaugh 2011:125-26, cf. Long and Holdsclaw 2011:172-73). The way of Europe is an attempt at "separating politics from theology, or rather, cordoning off questions of theological and moral truth to a private domain and recasting politics as a matter of public survival" (Long and Holdsclaw 2011:172-3).

This is understandable in a context where religion had ceased to be simply Roman Catholicism; at that time there was now religious diversity in Europe. The diversities meant religion could and had become a dangerous element in the public sphere, it had already instigated the century of religious wars across Europe. According to Habermas (2006:2); "There is statistical evidence of a

wave of secularization in almost all European countries since the end of World War II—going hand in hand with social modernization." The contention is that after World War II, religion was rapidly moved out of the public sphere into the realm of the private sphere. Religious ideas and beliefs became a matter of private opinion not to be used in the determination of public matters. The separation of church and state, that is, de-religionizing/de-biblification of the public sphere in Europe was, according to Harrisville and Sundberg (1995:35);

> [G]rounded in the simple but revolutionary notion that earthly existence is its own end. The legitimacy of a political regime is not to be determined – as it was since the time of Constantine (288?-337) – by the propagation of true faith, but by the protection of property and by the provision for encouraging opportunity. A successful regime must be responsible to the world that is, not the world to come... Religious obligations imposed upon the citizenry by law were judged to be an illegitimate means of oppressive authorities to control the freedom of thought.

By de-biblifying the public sphere and thereby maintaining "the secularity of the state" (Imo 2008:59), some of the problems associated with religious pluralism could be ameliorated. The reckless manner in which religion and sacred texts have been allowed to infest the public sphere has the effect of secularizing religion and sacred texts such as the Bible. Secularization in Africa "is not that Africans are noticeably becoming secularized, but much mainline Christianity effectively is" seeing as it focuses more and more on administering aid from secular institutions (Gifford 2009:50). De-biblification contends that "religious passions must be defanged by removing them from the political sphere" (Cavanaugh 2011:126), which should be governed in accordance with the constitution, with the mandate of public officials being drawn from the citizenry. A de-biblified public sphere in Zimbabwe would therefore invalidate the divine mandate that has been fostered on Mugabe and that is also being fostered on Tsvangirai and other public figures. The dangers of such divine myths surrounding public officials raise critical questions regarding their relationship

with the citizens. Some such questions are raised by Machingura (2012:28) when he writes:

> So the attribution of Mugabe with religious symbolism has resulted in debates on the implications of such attributes in relation to the role of the constitution and the power of the people. If Mugabe is regarded as messiah like Jesus, the obvious implication is that his mandate as president is only from God and nobody else. Is it then possible for one who is regarded as a representative of God to remain constitutionally faithful to the freedoms of citizens in choosing leaders? Is the use of religion justifiable to authenticate the power and popularity of a president who has lost it constitutionally?"

Unless citizens begin to critique the public posturing adopted by political leaders, citizens can be cajoled into docility. While addressing the Zimbabwe International Business Conference in Bulawayo 24 April 2013, Morgan Tsvangirai referred his audience to Matthew 18 Verse 3 in the Bible, "Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven." Interestingly, he does not elaborate on the relevance of this particular text in the content of his speech, suggesting it may not be useful or that it is being used to cajole people into infantile non-questioning attitude, an infantile trusting attitude, which makes children trust even the most venomous of snakes! The "way of Europe" would legislate against the explicit or implicit use of religion and sacred texts in the public sphere. De-biblification, the European way is almost similar to secularization, characterized by an almost hatred of religion and sacred texts. In this context, citizens may be permitted to sue public officials, public places and events for using religion and sacred texts, which they consider "offensive to their anti-religious sentiments."

Critique of total De-biblification of the Public Sphere

While many would point to the supposed success of the principle of separation of church and state in Europe (did it really succeed?)

it does not necessarily follow that what succeeded in Europe will succeed universally. There could be some truth that scientific developments in Europe may have led to the erosion of the influence of religion in the public as well as private sphere; the opposite appears to be true in Zimbabwe and other African nation-states. The more science attempts to assert its dominance over life, the more Zimbabweans turn to religion and sacred texts as a shield against the excesses of science and in general human pride. To suggest that a country that is predominantly Christian should actually legislate against the use of Christian scriptures in the public sphere by public officials will easily be understood within the framework of human freewill gone wrong.

> Talking of de-biblification of the public sphere draws the objection of limiting Christianity or in some cases the accusation of trying to declare Christianity illegal or bluntly, a declaration of war on Christianity. Further, there are some who object to de-biblification 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 (Gunda 2012a:30-1).

Clearly, therefore, any proposal that has the potential of antagonizing Christians in Zimbabwe can easily be defeated because of the existence of strong and conservative vocal Christian group. In the context of Zimbabwe, therefore, the options of re-writing the Bible or totally de-biblifying the public sphere can only spell doom for whoever makes the call. Re-writing, as already seen in the case of Banana brought him too many enemies than friends (Mukonyora 1993:x). The same fate awaits the call to de-biblify 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 (Gunda 2010a). The Bible's availability on the public sphere is seen as the working of God and it is this belief that has allowed some to manipulate the Bible.

The second challenge that is posed by the call to de-biblify the public sphere is the mistaken assumption that in Europe the sep-

aration of church and state was instrumental in eliminating the scourge of violence thereby bringing about justice, peace, equality and fairness in society. There are those who believe that "violence can be tamed by privatizing religion" (Cavanaugh 2011:149). This however is not the reality, the reality in Europe is that the state took the holy away from the church and gave new reasons for people to kill and die for. The violence that characterized the wars of religion may not have ended because the state had become secular, the violence did not actually end. What may have ended was violence that was religiously justified because the secular state replaced God with the flag, identity, race and national interests. A whole new set of reasons to die for and therefore to kill for were developed to replace religious motives. The First World War and the Second World War are all manifestations of the continued existence of violence even though it may no longer have been explicitly religiously sanctioned violence. In this context, debiblification on its own does not lead society into justice, peace, equality, fairness and equity, it may only mean that people will develop new justifications to continue to deal unjustly, unfairly and to entrench greater inequalities. While sounding noble, debiblification is not the proverbial silver bullet to the problems that we face as a society.

The third challenge that militates against the success of debiblification regards the nature and notion of the public sphere. The proposal to de-biblify the public sphere fails to acknowledge that the public sphere itself is a rather confusing notion, is it homogenous? Is it unified such that it only acknowledges the entire population as one group thereby making irrelevant sub-groups within the nation-state? This assumption is highly flawed because the public sphere is best imagined "as a proliferation of publics, as a contested terrain that ought to be thought of in terms of its multiplicity or diversity," a sphere where "particular groups succeed in presenting their specific interests as universal, as entailing the common good" (Meyer and Moors 2006:12). Total debiblification fails in that it seeks to alienate one set of interests

while allowing other sets of interests from sub-groups within the nation-state to remain in the public sphere. It is impossible to extinguish the interests of groups within a given society, whether such groups are social, political, economic or religious. This step is further informed by the realization that, "it is difficult [if not impossible] to locate the institutional and symbolic boundaries demarcating not only the private and the public but also the secular and the sacred dimensions of communities and nation-states" (Stolow 2006:73). This is particularly true in most African nation-states, whose traditional foundations knew no such demarcations.

The multiplicity of political actors, economic actors and social actors suggests the multiplicity of interests, some of them diametrically opposed to each other much in the same way that religious motives are diverse. In short, de-biblification assumes, wrongly in my mind, that the public sphere is and should be inherently secular, a perspective that "is intrinsic to a modernist attitude toward society" (Meyer and Moors 2006:4-5). This modernist perspective assumes that the decline of religion or even its disappearance in the public sphere is essentially a mark of modernity in any given society. While it may sound as if Europe succeeded in removing religion and sacred texts from the public sphere, recent developments in France, the Netherlands, Great Britain (on the relations between the state and Muslims) show that whatever success de-biblification may have enjoyed, it was only temporary because religion and sacred texts are back in the public domain. In short, the way of Europe has only been met with partial success.

The fourth challenge has to do with the African context in general and Zimbabwean in particular. The distinction of things religious, social, economic or political is not indigenous among Zimbabweans as well as many other African communities. These demarcations are artificial because the traditional worldview and understanding is of single whole life, whose sub-divisions are intrinsically connected that one cannot be understood outside of its relationship with the others. The assumption that the public sphere is or should be secular is essentially problematic in Zimbabwe and

Africa in general because "religion and politics are inseparable in Africa" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:27). To call for the de-biblification of the public sphere therefore is to call for the fundamental alteration of the understanding of the connections between and among the different facets of human life in a community. There is a strong belief that those who intend to influence society must not only seek the support of fellow citizens but they must also seek the approval or sometimes even the manipulation of the spirit world.

Even though de-biblification as suggested in this study could go a long way in engendering a sense of accountability of public officials to ordinary citizens, there is no doubt that the demographic context of Zimbabwe will seriously challenge the viability of this option. With Zimbabwe being more than 75 percent Christian, and the majority of the Christians being "evangelical", "conservative" or "silent," any moves that are seen as undermining the sacrality of the Bible will largely be resisted. De-biblification antagonizes most Christians thereby defeating one of the cardinal needs in any quest for justice, fairness, equality and equity, that is, numbers! If the lofty ideals of Banana are to be realized, a way has to be found which will mobilize the numbers of Christians and this is where both re-writing and de-biblification come short.

Proposing a Partial De-Biblification of the Public Sphere in Zimbabwe

Early on in this chapter, I argued that Banana's proposal to re-write the Bible cannot be achieved without inviting the wrath of believers from different religious traditions, especially because of the claims to exclusive paths to salvation by all religious traditions. Even though Banana's call was a response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I argued that the call was essentially a response to injustice, inequality and the unfair distribution of resources. This general thrust of the call made it a necessary starting point for this study. Therefore, 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. In the previous section, I have demonstrated also why and how the total de-biblification of the public sphere will face the same fate as re-writing the Bible. The exclusive claims of Judaism, Christianity and Islam are so fundamental to their existence that it is close to impossible to "re-write" a universally valid Bible or to proscribe all sacred texts from the public sphere, not only because of clear cultural differences but also because each religious tradition has a set of non-negotiables (Gunda 2012a:28). It is in this context that I propose a partial de-biblification of the public sphere not only to rid the public sphere of unnecessary religious burden but to protect the sacrality of the Bible itself. The use of the Bible in non-Christian spheres has the same effect of secularizing Christianity and the Bible and not of Christianizing public spaces, especially where such usage in public spaces is only meant to cover up the injustices being perpetrated by public officials through commission and omission.

The partial de-biblification of the public sphere recognizes the exclusivity claims of religions, and does not seek to create a supra-religion for all, as Banana's re-writing attempted to do. Instead, partial de-biblification seeks to remove religion or religious elements from some parts of the public sphere, which is already constitutionally legitimately secular. In order to remove some confusion regarding the meaning of secular, I agree with the definition suggested by Prozesky (2009:242);

> 'Secular' means independent of religious control of any kind; it means fairness and neutrality of stance towards them, but the neutrality is an enabling or facilitative neutrality because it provides freedom of belief and operation for all. By contrast, 'secularism' is a philosophy or ideology which opposes religion, deeming it to be a bad thing, at best confused and at worst deeply damaging to humanity.

From this definition, therefore, my call to de-biblify is not an extension of secularism because I am not opposed to religion or faith. 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 instrument 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 (Gunda 2010b). 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 partially de-biblifying 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 (Gunda 2012a:29). The constitution of Zimbabwe, with its "acceptance of legitimate moral and value diversity, is essentially, secular" (Norman 2002:xiii) hence better served by a policy of partial de-biblification.

The importance of partial de-biblification is especially important when implemented in "those places where service is offered to all, without the faith requirement, a policy of partial de-biblification would appear much more reasonable and indeed foster the idea of tolerance in a pluralistic society like ours" (Gunda 2012a:33). Public officials and those seeking public office must derive their mandate from the citizens through the constitution of the land and no claim to divine mandate should be asserted by public officials, whether elected or appointed. That way religion is partially seen "as privatized, meaning religious convictions should be treated as opinions alongside many other opinions in the public sphere" (Meyer and Moors 2006:4). Clearly, unless checked, religious beliefs have the potential to lead to or instigate greater incidences of intolerance, while encouraging a sense of impunity as leaders hide behind their divine mandate to avoid questions of accountability. In this context, it will become unacceptable for a public official to display biblical quotations in a public office, in

places where they are visible to people who come to be served in the same office. The same would be necessary regarding public events, where sacred texts and religious ideas could be proscribed. Will it be impossible to celebrate Independence day without resorting to the Bible and Christianity? If the war that led to the independence was assisted by ancestral spirits and spirit mediums, why should Christianity and the Bible have a privileged place in the celebrations and not traditional religion? Partial de-biblification, will therefore, identify spaces and events where religion and sacred texts will be proscribed while allowing religious ideas and opinions to be debated in the pool of ideas and suggestions within the public sphere. As noted above, the input of religious groups and individuals can no longer be seen as "gospel truth" rather, "religious convictions should be treated as opinions alongside many other opinions in the public sphere" (Meyer and Moors 2006:4-5).

My proposal in response to the challenges posed by the divinization of public officials is to suggest a partial de-biblification of the public sphere that it should become unacceptable to all citizens for public officials to claim to have divine mandate since public officials can only be legitimate if they are accepted by the citizens. De-biblification preserves the Bible as scriptures for the believers unlike re-writing, which seeks to create a totally new collection of writings or total de-biblification, which seems to essentially declare war on sacred texts.

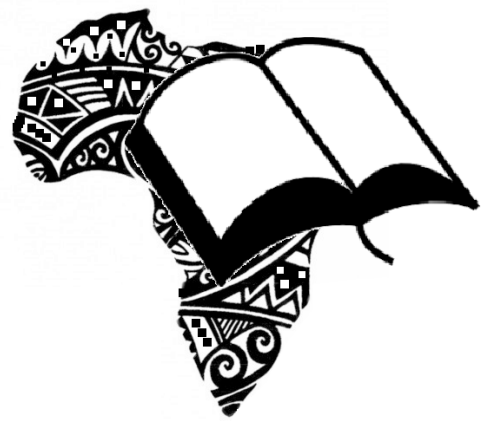
Concluding Observations

To conclude this chapter, it is important to reiterate that the public sphere in Zimbabwe is infested with religion and sacred texts, especially Christianity, the Bible and traditional religion. By public sphere, we are referring to places and events that are of necessity to all citizens, irrespective of their faith, political affiliation, social or economic status. Government buildings and departments, hospitals, schools and events such as independence com-

memorations are all littered with religious innuendo. Public officials in Zimbabwe, especially the President and by implication public officials, who represent him in their various offices, have portrayed their mandate as both popular and divine. Popular because they claim they win elections and divine because when electoral results are not exactly what they want, they claim they were chosen by God hence the voices of the people do not really matter. This usage (or is it abuse?) of religion and sacred texts is what I have referred to by the metaphor of "masking tape," an instrument used to cover up some defects! Religion and sacred texts are used to cover up the lack of legitimacy and accountability by many leaders in Africa.

Finally, I have argued that totally de-biblifying the public sphere will likely face the same fate as the call to re-write the Bible, rejection and demonization by the believers. With many Zimbabwean Christians being largely conservative and evangelical in the manner in which they view the Bible, de-biblification will not be entirely acceptable because it clearly has the potential to antagonize the Christian believers who are likely going to interpret such calls as an attack on their faith and God. It was observed that even in Europe, where total secularization was adopted, it has not been smooth sailing. I, therefore, proposed a partial de-biblification of the public sphere, which respects the multiplicity of religious traditions in Zimbabwe and the exclusivity claims that are associated with the various religious traditions by allowing each group to retain their unadulterated identity and belief systems. Further, partial de-biblification will allow citizens to challenge and take their leaders to task without fearing the accusation of challenging God or the divine, a situation which obtains in contexts where the leaders are portrayed as representatives of the divine. Even though there is this danger, a partial de-biblification as suggested in this chapter is a necessary step towards not only salvaging the power of the people but equally the essence of religion if it ceases to be only a means to political ends. What is abundantly clear in this chapter is that "the power of scripture can be wielded only by a

few to dominate the many, or it can be seen as energizing everyone, as enriching, creative possibility for community and justice" (Schüssler Fiorenza 2008:165). In this regard, the following chapter focuses on a critical biblification of the public sphere. This chapter proposes a socially engaged Christian community, which responds to abuses of the Bible and proposes alternative uses of the Bible in the search of the common good.



CHAPTER 4

IS A "CRITICAL BIBLIFICATION" OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE A VIABLE OPTION?

> A collection of texts that begins with the creation of the cosmos and ends with its renewal in the form of a city can hardly be said to focus on the private, rather than public, sphere' – and the more so, we might add, when between its covers we encounter a God who calls on humanity to steward and tend the earth, liberates oppressed slaves, institutes measures aimed at promoting economic and social justice, raises up prophets to 'speak truth to power' and announces and inaugurates a 'kingdom' in which the powerful and mighty are made low and the poor and humble raised up (Bradstock 2011:4).

Introduction

That the Bible is already firmly entrenched in the public sphere in Zimbabwe cannot be disputed, in fact, as Gerald West (2008:113) declares, the issue is not whether "the Bible is in the public realm," rather the focus should be on "how it is used and for what purposes"? This observation on its own, therefore, challenges both the call to re-write the Bible as well as the call to de-biblify the public sphere. Re-writing would have been easier were the Bible a private document in the hands of a few select individuals. It ceases to be easy where the Bible is a public document in the hands of many. While de-biblification has challenges of its own, it does well to acknowledge that the Bible is already part of the public sphere. However, to suggest that the Bible can be part of the problems our society faces will quickly and easily antagonize

those who believe that the Bible is sacred scripture.[6] Suggesting, therefore, that our society can become more tolerant if we remove religion and sacred texts from the realm of the public sphere, is essentially, picking a fight with those who think sacred texts have the mandate to direct the entire society, especially, where such sacred texts, as the Bible, is seen by its believers as being universally valid (Gunda 2011:102). The major undoing of the two positions, therefore, is their potential to antagonize the believers!

It is apparent that the believers aspire and hope for a society that is characterized by justice, fairness, equality and equity, the society that Banana sought to achieve through the re-writing of the Bible and the same society that Europe tried to achieve through the separation of church and state, another manifestation of debiblification. While Europe may have relatively succeeded in pushing religion into the background, the same cannot be said of Zimbabwe and Africa in general. We have already observed that instead of Christianity (religion in general) waning with the end of colonialism in Africa as was predicted by some in the 1960s and 1970s, the opposite has actually happened; religion in Africa has grown exponentially since then. The distribution of the Bible in the continent has been growing dramatically in the last few decades, "The Gideons International distributed 186 million Bibles in sub-Saharan Africa from 1908" (The Gideons International 2012), averaging 1,8 million Bibles every year. The "United Bible Societies distributed more than 6 million Bibles in Africa in 2011 alone" (UBS COMMS 06/08/2012). These are only two of the largest distributors of the Bible in Africa but there are many others, showing that the Bible is the single most distributed text on the African continent, south of the Sahara. This presence of the

6 By believers, I am referring to ordinary Christians, those who are part of the suffering majority, whose faith is manipulated by selfish elites who are aware that they can convince them to remain docile if they can package themselves as fellow believers. These ordinary Christians must be distinguished from the elites who mostly manipulate sacred texts to entrench and sustain their own interests.

Bible means that care and caution must be exercised when searching for solutions to the challenges our society faces. This presence of the Bible suggests that there is need for a solution that seriously considers the Bible as an indispensable part of the public sphere.

The believers in Zimbabwe and across Africa are not prepared to sacrifice the Word of God in order to achieve justice, equality and equity. In order to appreciate this line of thought, "it is helpful to think of pre-colonial African societies as having been ruled by justice rather than by law. Justice is a moral concept; law has become a bureaucratic one" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:146). Once justice is understood in moral terms, it becomes clear why most Zimbabwean Christians will not understand why the Bible has to be sacrificed in search of justice, justice which is a central tenet of God as expounded in the Bible. Alternatively, there is belief that these goals can be achieved sustainably when approached through the Word of God. Religion and sacred texts are seen as indispensable to the quest for justice, fairness, equality and equity because these attributes are associated with the essence of God. In that case, "the Bible can in fact be used to reconfigure social relations by re-engaging with its texts, since these are already so influential in Zimbabwean society" (Gunda 2011:102). Re-writing and de-biblification are, therefore, weakened because these two propositions are largely seen as provocative and antagonistic by believers in the Zimbabwean context and possibly in many other contexts across the African continent. Instead of antagonizing the believers, a solution must be sought which harnesses and motivates the believers to transformative action, which has the potential to entrench justice, fairness and equality in society (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:3). Due to these observations, this chapter will propose a critical biblification of the public sphere as an alternative to re-writing the Bible and de-biblifying the public sphere while being complementary to the partial de-biblification of the public sphere as proposed in the previous chapter.

"Critical biblification": Rationale and Definition

That the public sphere in Zimbabwe is already biblified cannot be questioned; since the colonial era Christianity has been the dominant religion in the public sphere. Other religious traditions have maintained their presence in Zimbabwe but have never enjoyed public dominance to the level enjoyed by Christianity. African Traditional Religions in Zimbabwe may to a certain extent rival Christianity but it has never enjoyed public dominance, in fact, it has sometimes been the dominant secret religion for many, where under the cover of darkness, people have sought the comforting promises of ritual over against the written Word (Mwandayi 2011). In this context, therefore, by critical biblification I 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. Though many associate religion and sacred texts with complicity with the powers that be in the exploitation and oppression of poor people, it is also a truism that "some of the strongest critiques of empires throughout history have come from theological developments" (Rieger 2007:6). Such developments have largely sprouted from the critical engagement of sacred texts and theological themes, something that a critical biblification of the public sphere makes a top priority. In this context, one can think of the role of the Bible and theology in developing a critique of colonialism, slavery, apartheid and the inequalities between men and women. Lately, there have been developments towards the development of a theology of equality across the entire spectrum of the human sexuality continuum.

Critical biblification of the public sphere confirms a fundamental truth about the religious, social, economic and political demography of Zimbabwe. Christians, who are the major users of the Bible in Zimbabwe, are part of the publics in Zimbabwe. A critical biblification, therefore, succeeds in demonstrating that not only are Christians "to be seen as being *in* the public but rather *as* the

public" (Meyer and Moors 2006:12). I am not suggesting that Christians are the only public in Zimbabwe; they are one of the publics in Zimbabwe. Since the public sphere is understood as an indefinitely open space in which all reasons could be expressed and heard (Mendieta & VanAntwerpen 2011:3), it applies also that bases from which such reasons are drawn would become resources to be considered. That being the case, the Bible, as a resource for Christians can, therefore, be used much in the same way that other resources both secular and sacred can be used in search of justice, equality and fairness. By advocating for a critical biblification of the public sphere I am acknowledging that the Bible is already in the public sphere and that it is already influential. With this realization, I am arguing for the re-directing of the influence towards the set goals of justice, equality, fairness and equity.

Critical biblification is a necessary development, especially since through an uncritical use of the Bible in the public sphere; blatant abuses can be detected in various situations in Africa. President Chiluba professed to be a born-again Christian, and even declared Zambia a Christian nation believing and propagating the idea that a nation whose leader fears God prospers economically. This, however, did not stop his government from corrupt practices such that he faced various probes from his successor (Phiri 2008:107). From Liberia, Charles Taylor declared; "I am an African leader, and I can do as I wish" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:141). These words were uttered by a man who presented himself as god-fearing, a lay Baptist preacher but who was seen by others as a murderer and cannibal even as he quoted scripture to his supporters (Elbagir and Wilkinson CNN 30/05/2012). In one famous exchange with former BBC Focus on Africa editor Robin White, White suggested that some people thought him little better than a murderer. Taylor bellowed with a flourish to the effect that 'Jesus Christ was accused of being a murderer in his time' (BBC News Africa 30/05/2012). There is no mistaking the implications, that Taylor compared himself to Christ. These abuses of religion and sacred

texts demand that religious people and scholars take action to fight against them. In my thinking, re-writing the Bible or de-biblifying the public sphere will be detrimental to the common good especially because those who abuse religion and sacred texts would sponsor the condemnation of these two alternatives, presenting themselves as "defenders of the faith." A critical biblification, which would leave religion and sacred texts within the public realm while taking an active role in challenging apparent abuses of the same, would be a positive development in religious communities.

The thinking behind critical biblification is that the ideals of justice, equality and fairness, which were so central to Banana and which are central to many Zimbabweans today, are essentially Christian concepts as well. There are many instances in the Bible where injustice, inequality and unfairness appear to be tolerated, such as in the narrow understanding of the "election of Israel." There, however, is widespread agreement among scholars that justice, fairness and equality are concepts that drive the divine-human and human-human interactions in the Bible. There is agreement that cases of injustice, inequality and unfair dealings are actually misnomers (cf. Ex. 23:2-6, Deut. 16:20). In the light of these observations, it should be possible to contend that "texts and lessons from the Bible can therefore be used in our community to affect the present" (Gunda 2013:18). This way, through a critical biblification of the public sphere, it is possible to;

> Use the reality of the text in understanding God's involvement in the reality of our lives. This does not at all absolve the text of the potential to be manipulated. Rather, with the text, we can learn both the authentic theology relevant to all peoples at all times as opposed to co-opted theologies, which are mostly the dominant theologies (Gunda 2006:20).

Such dominant theologies are mostly born out of a selfish manipulation of the divine for private and narrow interests.

The Goals of a "Critical biblification" of the Public Sphere

In this section I intend to address two concerns: First, what do we seek to achieve through the critical biblification of the Zimbabwean public sphere? Second, how do we achieve the critical biblification of the public sphere? In short, what are the goals of a critical biblification of the public sphere and how is it done? There are several goals that can be achieved through a critical biblification of the public sphere among them:

1. To assert the position that religious groups are part of the publics in any given society that allows for freedom of religion. It is only logical that if citizens are allowed to freely exercise their right to be religious, then the presence of religion and sacred texts in the public sphere is a natural consequence of that freedom. There is no reason why Christians or any other religious grouping should be penalized for suggesting possible solutions to issues affecting their community. To do this, is not against the tenets of democracy, where it is the aspired for political system because "democracy has opened up a space where ideas are expressed and power is fought for" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:111). I find it contradictory that a people that demand democracy must also demand the ostracization of religion and sacred texts from a sphere where believers and followers of the same are allowed to participate. This is particularly alien in Africa where religion is known to permeate all spheres of life.
2. To deliberately conscientize Christians, especially the multitude of ordinary believers, on the dangers of "abused religion and sacred texts" to the welfare of society at large. A critical biblification of the public sphere must thrive, without antagonizing the faith of believers, to expose cases of abuse-driven uses of religion and sacred texts. A critical biblification is defined in this study as the deliberate deployment of the Bible as a resource to aid in establishing public opinion on matters of governance and conduct of public officials. In the previous chapter, I tried to show that the freedom of expression that is

provided for through democratic systems "is open to exploitation by incumbent presidents, political heavyweights and assorted entrepreneurs interested less in the objective recording of events than in using the press for purposes of party propaganda, libel and blackmail" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:111). It should become pertinent for scholars and Christians to analyse why politicians have all of a sudden become paragons of ecumenism, attending worship services for all the different denominations and even adorning the various uniforms (Bishau 2013). Are these actions driven by faith or by political gamesmanship? Is religion and sacred texts being used to edify faith or to pacify faith? In short, are sacred texts and religion being used or abused?

3. According to Ellis and ter Haar (2004:108), "Churches in Africa have been criticized by Western academics for their failure to speak out against corruption and injustice and for their willingness even to make common cause with disreputable regimes." Even though there is some validity in this statement, I must hasten to highlight that there are also Christian leaders that have been victims of the high handedness of political elites across Africa. Archbishop Pius Ncube was "martyred" for speaking out against Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe. Through a critical biblification, Christians and scholars should thrive to advocate for accountability and justice, not because they are what Western academics want but because accountability and justice are central to the Christian faith and good for the community in which they live. "The Kairos Document of South Africa hastened the end of apartheid by inspiring a new generation of conscientized and radicalized Christians to participate alongside secular liberation movements in the struggle to remove apartheid" (Draper 2008:39-40). It is critical to demonstrate to ordinary Christians that speaking against corruption, which essentially is fuelled by the exploitation of the poor, is indeed preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is particularly important because "our

society, both colonial and post-colonial, is caught up within an environment in which we know 'about the expulsion of small landholders from their traditional means of livelihood, dishonest business practices, venal priests and prophets, and a (royal) regime that connives in the oppression of the poor" (Gottwald, 1985:375, Gunda 2006:21-2). It is, therefore, the goal of critical biblification to fight against these religiously sanctioned malpractices by showing that the deployment of religion and sacred texts by some of the perpetrators is merely in the form of masking tape.

4. Through a critical biblification of the public sphere, it is possible for socially engaged scholars and Christians not only to critique incumbent authority, but to propose alternative ways in which society can be governed in the interests of all citizens, irrespective of whether they are Christians or not. Religion is stronger when it defends those that are outside of its sphere because it is then that it begins to be attractive (Matt. 5:43-47). Critical biblification must, therefore, involve the production of literature that is accessible to ordinary readers and believers. Such literature can address religious issues as they affect everyday life of the people. This is particularly critical because "literature that may appear at first sight to be entirely religious in nature may be usefully read as a critique of power, and of its uses and abuses in politics and society" (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:111). Briefly, a critical biblification of the public sphere must conscientize Christians and believers of the abuses of their faith by the powers that be; and it must even go on to name the evils that afflict society.

According to Gunda (2006:31);

> A prophetic church must also name the evils and perpetrators of all injustices, whenever such injustices occur. Unfortunately, the Church has not been able to do this not simply because the perpetrators of evil are dangerous, but because Church leaders and Christians in general fear the real possibility of losing favour with those in power, or being called hypocrites who benefit from

> the system they claim to fight. These fears have seen the manipulation of compliant masses by populist demagoguery based on a skewed and uncritical re-telling of the Biblical story without the attendant critical analysis of the text. This is critical because, "though his [Christ] enemies seemed to understand the radical implications of his teaching, Christians did not." A prophetic church in Zimbabwe must return to the text of the Bible and look for the profound and far reaching teachings contained therein, which have clearly been watered down in the Christian story. Without interpretive prophecy, the Church risks continuing the trend of limiting God and Jesus to an instrument of the powers that be.

The limitation of God and Christ in our age has manifested itself in the manner in which men's prejudices against women have been packaged as God's prejudice against women. This has even seen the Church calling for the equal treatment of men and women in society in general, while the Church itself has continued to treat men and women as unequal on issues such as ordination and headship of the family unit. The rabid opposition to the recognition of the full humanity of sexual minorities, such as gays and lesbians is another clear example of human prejudice being lifted to the pedestal of divine prejudice. In both cases of women and sexual minorities, difference is treated as a manifestation of deviance! No text can articulate the need to name and shame evil than the book of Esther. A critical analysis of the scroll of Esther shows that

> Power comes with naming the enemy at the right time in the right place. Facing Jewish annihilation, Esther points the finger of truth at Haman, the originator of the plot to destroy the Jews (Esth 7:3-6). There is no mention of God in Esther, yet the Jew Mordecai can coax Queen Esther into action and good triumphs over evil (Queen-Sutherland 2013:192-93).

That good eventually triumphs over evil is already attested to in the history of Zimbabwe, with the colonial regime falling to the will power of the oppressed peasants. That, however, can only happen when the oppressed are "able to name the enemy [since it]

is the only way to gain power over oppression and injustice" (Queen-Sutherland 2013:193). This is an area where the Churches and Zimbabwean Christians have largely been found wanting such that at some point "the cartoonist of the *Daily News* juxtaposed people being violently abused by the 'party thugs' [ZANU PF members] in one corner with three clergymen saying, 'Hear no evil, See no evil, Speak no evil'" (Mukonyora 2008:141). The document "*The Zimbabwe We Want*" is one document that clearly shows that generalities are of limited value in an environment of multi-party politics. It is not surprising that the authors of the document had to seek "the blessing of the President [Robert Mugabe] who eventually launched it" (Manyonganise 2013:147) The politicians may be sitting in the congregation and even go on to praise the Bishops, but without any tangible changes on the ground. General exhortations to avoid corruption and promote justice have come to be seen as rather hollow, almost as evasions. Names are not mentioned, specifics are avoided (Gifford 2009:61) and evil persists.

In short, the proposal to advocate a critical engagement of the Bible and religion in general within the public sphere is driven by the same desires that inspired Banana, that is, the desire to see justice, equality, equity and fairness as the pillars of governance in society. Critical biblification acknowledges that sacred texts and religion can be manipulated to sustain narrow and private interests that stand in opposition to the common good and wider interests of the community as a whole. Since sacred texts and religion, like law, military power and many other instruments of power, can be equally manipulated, it is important that proactive and reactive groupings of citizens across the various sectors be instituted to critically advocate and fight against such abuses by constantly evaluating the uses and abuses and even proffering alternatives. Indeed, this way, it will be possible to appreciate that "to make democracy 'run,' the people have not to obey but to participate" (Ranger 2008:19).

On Christians and Bible scholars: Building New Bridges

Having looked at the goals of critical biblification, this section focuses on the aspect of application. How can the relationship between believers and scholars be mended in order to make the goals achievable without antagonizing the believers or the scholars alike? How is it possible to reclaim religion and sacred texts from the abuses they have endured from authorities bent on hoodwinking the masses by portraying a religious face in public, while fuelling and entrenching injustice, inequality and unfairness against the vulnerable citizens? The success of this proposal depends so much on the construction of new bridges and among various players in society but for this study, especially between Christians and Bible scholars. There is no doubt in my thinking that Christians and Bible scholars need each other if Christianity, Christians, the Bible and Bible scholars are going to make a positive transformative contribution to the quest for justice, equality, equity and fairness in Zimbabwe. Through this collaboration, a critical public theology could be developed. "A measure of the value of public theology might well be the extent to which its voice challenges and unsettles entrenched structures that make injustice systemic and thereby endemic" (Bradstock 2011:10).

There are points that draw Christians and Bible scholars together, most important of them all being the desire and need to transform the world for the better. While the entirety of Christian belief certainly extends beyond the pages of the Bible, there is little doubt, especially with reference to Christianity in Africa, that the Bible remains the single most important resource for Christian belief and practice. There is a sense in which the narrow and rigid interests that characterize the obtaining suspicious relationship between scholars and ordinary Christians are essentially a failure to appreciate that the two warring factions actually need each other. The Kairos Document of 1985 in South Africa "posed a direct challenge to biblical interpretation, with its blunt denial that there are *neutral zones* where biblical research and teaching can be done without regard for their social consequences" (Draper 2008:40).

When these two groups join forces and rally behind a critical biblification of the public sphere, it may become possible that "rather than providing a set of proof texts for doctrine, we should study, interpret, and engage Scripture to deepen and enrich the agreements between Scripture and our doctrine, faith and practice" (Fowl 2006:50). The coming together of ordinary Christians and trained Bible scholars is primarily important because it deepens the self-understanding of both Christians and scholars. Deeper understanding of the self will naturally transform into practice, for it is almost impossible to put into practice something that one does not understand. This may become critical in engaging with the public uses and abuses of faith and sacred texts.

The centuries of historical-critical study of the Bible have shown that indeed the text of the Bible has problems of integrity, pertaining to the manner in which it was brought into being. There are genuine concerns about the potential, which has been exploited in the past, of the Bible to inspire intolerance and instigate violence, injustice and outright oppression of some groups by others. These realities notwithstanding, it is apparent that the greatest problem that has faced the biblical text, all the violence done in the name of biblical injunctions and so on, has been orchestrated by human beings, especially those who have been among the privileged classes of their communities. The problems in the text of the Bible are by far insignificant when compared to the problems emanating from the abuse of the Bible by the privileged few against the masses. It is this real threat to justice that should unite ordinary Christians and scholars in a critically biblified public sphere. This coming together can become the bedrock upon which the freedom in service to God could be achieved by collaborating to defeat the all-encompassing enslaving, 'chaotic' human power (McConville 2006:171), which operates through unjust and corrupt regimes throughout Africa and the world. Contrary to the self-righteousness that is publicly displayed by the contemporary elites, there is little to distinguish them from the ancient Roman elites and their priestly collaborators who both

> saw in Jesus someone who could ignite the anger of the Jewish peasants into open revolution. Apparently the bulk of those who resonated with Jesus' message were those Jews who were being taxed into poverty. The priests identified Jesus as a threat to their temple-based economy (Hoppe 2004:13).

The comfort of the elites of this day emanates from the confidence of knowing that without a critical public to expose their abuses of religion and sacred texts, they can hide their injustices behind a façade of religiosity.

It has already been observed by other scholars, especially Paul Gifford in his studies in Liberia, Ghana, and Kenya that religion and sacred texts are systematically manipulated to keep reigning regimes in power. One would have thought that with the levels of corruption and underhand dealings by senior public officials, such malpractices would be central in deciding who should govern in the different communities across the continent, yet it appears the most corrupt regimes survive for long periods of time. There are many reasons and factors for this state of affairs, including the deployment of security forces to quell any suspected cases of dissent, the use of food in securing loyalty and/or punishing disloyalty by withholding food assistance in times of droughts as well as rewarding loyalty through senior public appointments (Machingura 2012). However, as Gifford rightly observes, religion is one such instrument that has kept some regimes comfortable in their positions even as the plight of the people has continued to worsen. According to Gifford (2002:117,124):

> Where poverty and sickness are attributed to evil spirits, there is of course no need to find economic or political causes for them, and the remedy becomes prayer, not social analysis or political activity... In this form of Christianity, the Christian has no obligation to the world (the nation, or society generally) except to bring more people out of it and into the church – effectively, to turn more people away from a concern with deteriorating social conditions.

This unwitting support to oppressive regimes is one of the many results of an uncritical presence of the Bible in the public sphere. Whether deliberate or not, some sermons and theologies are bound to drive attention away from the actual social causes of the plight of many ordinary citizens. A critical biblification of the public sphere demands that Christians and scholars unite to work with bodies such as "the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission ... in championing the causes of democracy, justice, peace and economic prosperity" (Mukonyora 2008:132).

While democracy may not be the only functional political system, in fact all political systems are hugely dependent on the human beings who operationalize them; it is the system that most Zimbabweans seem to prefer currently. Therefore, the fight for democracy, justice and peace must take various forms such as "public advocacy, lobbying, protesting, and other forms of political action" (Hoppe 2004:173). Such actions are, however, dependent on how Christians understand their faith and its relationship to the social conditions they find themselves in. For those whose faith is only geared towards heaven, contemporary challenges will be dismissed as merely obstacles to be ignored and in such a scenario the perpetrators of injustice and oppression will receive a blank cheque. An emphasis on a benevolent God can also undermine the quest for social and economic justice, as well as religious and political tolerance. According to Rieger (2007:292); "under the conditions of a postcolonial empire a benevolent God can easily be appropriated by the empire builders, especially if that God coddles the perpetrators of injustice." The central issue here is that unless we come together to study and understand our faith in the context of our daily living, some unscrupulous elites will manipulate that faith into some distraction to the quest for a better society that genuinely promotes the interests and rights of its citizens and those within its territory. In this fight, a critical faith community made up of ordinary Christians and socially engaged scholars will be driven by the realization that, "Christ restores justice; and what Christians need to imitate is not Christ's

death but his resolve to speak truth and justice – knowing that this might have consequences" (Rieger 2007:145). The challenge of imitating Christ pushed Archbishop Francis of the Catholic Church in Liberia to proclaim: "It is not too late to arrest this ugly trend of corruption in our country. We are proud to call ourselves Christians, but can we honestly do so if corrupt practices are the normal things in our lives?" (Gifford 2002:73). In short, can we be Christians if we do not speak truth to corrupt and corrupting power?

The need for this collaboration between socially engaged scholars and ordinary Christians is precipitated by the realization that from its early years, Christianity has largely put in limitations on what can be done with the sacred text. Our context appears to be infested with personalities that have no ethical limitations to what they do with the text of the Bible, such that these interpreters end up being in control of the Bible to their own private advantage under the guise of interpretive freedom (Vanhoozer 2006:53). This breed of interpreters is found among scholars of the Bible, Christians and other social, political and economic elites. Those, whose spheres of authority are on paper outside the religious realm, use such influence to assert themselves on unsuspecting religious communities. This is easy in the Zimbabwean and African context because, as Ellis and ter Haar (2004:99) observes,

> Various forms of power are connected to some degree in most societies. Even where state and church are formally separated, and where government is divided into legislative, executive and judicial branches, and where there is a high degree of respect for legal convention, powers may overlap.

The lack of rigid compartmentalization of life in Africa is responsible for the abuses and manipulations of religions and sacred texts in other spheres such as politics and economics. Once one assumes authority in one sphere, they largely are assumed to have authority in all spheres! The collaboration between trained readers of the Bible or the socially engaged Bible scholars and the ordi-

nary readers of the Bible (West 2003:x, 32) is critical in as much as it helps to bring to the fore the

> interaction between reader(s) and their context and the text and its context, so that the witness of the latter to the struggles and explorations of the past can be in a creative dialectic with the attempts at appropriate patterns of Christian response in the contemporary world (Rowland 1995:431).

No longer must scholars think their role is to teach Christians what the intended meaning of particular biblical texts were, rather, socially engaged biblical scholars must be prepared to "speak with, read with and listen with ordinary Christians as opposed to them speaking to, reading for and listening to ordinary Christians" (West 2003:32). Only this way can a trusting community of scholars and Christians be built and only such a community can make a critical biblification a transformative reality.

To sum up this section, my contention is that biblical scholars and ordinary Christians have an opportunity to form a grouping that could become one of the many publics in Zimbabwe, with an opportunity to make positive contributions in the governance of the nation-state. There are various ways in which groups can assert their right to be recognized as a public, but of critical importance is the observation that

> A politics of difference is central to the development of such new publics. Particular identities and interests are at play in the contestations between various groups in their attempts to take up a position as the public. This may take the form of highlighting *their particular identities and interests in posing as a counterpublic,* a sub-public, or an alternative public while *at other moments and under different circumstances they may downplay such specificities,* normalize their particular positions, and work to appear as the public in arguing for the common good (Meyer and Moors 2006:12 italicized phrases my emphasis).

The public that is envisaged in the collaboration between trained readers and ordinary readers of the Bible is one that is based on an identification of the fundamentals of Bible based faith, which

constitutes the identities and interests of that group. Justice, equality and fairness are such fundamentals based as they are in the divinity and ministry of Jesus Christ as noted above. Once these fundamentals are clarified, it becomes easier to generalize them for the common good such that this group does not demand the conversion of non-members for the realization of the common good. The interests of such a group are essentially common to all citizens, even if the group arrives at that identity and interest by professing their faith in Christ. A critical biblification of the public sphere is dependent, therefore, on a productive and trusting collaboration between socially engaged scholars and ordinary Christians, without which the biblification of the public sphere may remain at the mercy of the controlling elites.

Concluding Remarks

Having argued in earlier chapters on the impossibility of re-writing the Bible and the partial possibility of de-biblifying the public sphere, I have used this chapter to develop the rationale and basis of retaining the Bible in the public sphere. There is no argument against the observation that the Bible is possibly the most authoritative collection of writings in Zimbabwe. There are more Zimbabweans who would cite the Bible as the limiting force to what they can do than those who would cite the constitution or the Penal Code. More Zimbabweans understand their behaviour to be essentially religiously defined than legally defined; behaviour is based on the fear of offending God. With the Bible being so powerfully and highly regarded by many Zimbabweans, any attempt that is perceived as being detrimental to this lofty position of the Bible is likely to be met with resistance and rejection. That, in my thinking, is the downfall of re-writing as suggested by Banana. It sought to change the Bible from what is highly known and believed to something that is unknown and, therefore, not to be believed. Even though de-biblification would leave the Bible as the known collection that it is, to suggest that the Bible is part of

the problem is problematic for believers. Such a suggestion is, therefore, also going to be met with resistance. This chapter, therefore, sought to propose an alternative that could tap into the critical consciousness of scholars and the pragmatism of ordinary readers who read to survive. In interrogating the Bible for such resources for the public sphere, the collaboration between trained biblical scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible is seen as a perfect platform that allows for the critical mind of the scholars, the practical eye of the ordinary readers and their numbers to merge. This collaboration will form a critical public that will proactively propose ways of good governance as well as reactively challenge the abuses of this critical resource in sustaining bad governance. The goal of critical biblification is to make Christians and the Bible an important part of the public sphere, not some dormant resource to be abused and manipulated by the elites to hoodwink the generality of believers. To achieve this, I have argued on the need to establish a trusting and respectful community of socially engaged scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible.

Chapter 5

General Conclusions

> Why is the church always talking about Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,
> but not about the things that Jesus cared about? (Rieger 2007:ix).

Introduction

Even when Banana was calling for the re-writing of the Bible, suggesting that the Bible as it is now was open to manipulation by unscrupulous elites; he nonetheless never questioned the continued relevance of the Bible. Indeed, it is the apparent rejection coupled by a strong affinity to the Bible that became one of the major weaknesses of his project, as Gundani (1992:43) rightly observed, the project was made up of contradictory ideas. However, the observations militating against the practicability of the project did not and do not dismiss the validity and relevance of the foundational idea and desire behind the proposal to re-write the Bible. Banana sought the establishment of a justice, equality and equity driven society, a society that would protect all its citizens, a society that would uphold fairness as a virtue in human relationships and transactions.

It was from this observation of the continued relevance of Banana's central desire that I proposed the de-biblification of the public sphere. This proposal came about from the realization that one of the reasons why Banana thought the Bible should be re-written was that it was being manipulated to rationalize the injustices, inequalities and inequities characterizing the world in his eyes, especially in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The same observations would have been apparent during the long struggle for independence in Zimbabwe, a time that saw Banana spend time in prison, under house arrest or being confined to his rural district. By de-biblification, I argued that this was the way

that was adopted by Europe at a time when Europe sought to rid itself of religiously motivated wars. It was a deliberate policy of separating religion from state, making religion a private matter while state became public.

In the case of Zimbabwe, I argued that the Bible or sacred texts and religion in general could be partially excluded from the public sphere to avoid them being used especially by public officials bent on hoodwinking the public and thereby avoiding questions of accountability. By public sphere, I identified places such as government buildings and other buildings that are used to serve all citizens. I also identified events such as Independence Day commemoration, national heroes' day commemorations and other such national events that are open to all citizens. This proposal can indeed go some way in limiting the opportunities for public officials to avoid their constitutional mandates by seeking to hide behind some divine mandate, yet it cannot completely be the solution to achieving the just society that respects equality, equity and fairness as advocated by Banana.

These shortcomings led me to propose the critical biblification of the public sphere, which calls for the establishment of a movement of scholars and ordinary readers of the Bible, whose interest lies in protecting the integrity of the Bible and the Christian faith. Such a grouping could assert its right as one of the many publics who seek to influence public policy and the common good in Zimbabwe. Such a grouping would take seriously to studying the Bible, bringing together the findings of scientific study as well as the pragmatic driven appropriations of the Bible by ordinary Christians in order to challenge abuses of the Bible in the public domain as well as suggesting ways in which the common good could be achieved. Such a grouping would consider naming the evils of this world that not only affect the contemporary lives of all citizens but also the practice of the faith of their religious convictions.

The Bible as a continuing, relevant Influence

One of the major findings of this study is that the Bible continues to be a relevant document that can have a positive influence in the quest for a democratic and just society that has equality, equity and fairness as central virtues. This section seeks to highlight why and how the Bible remains a critical resource, when it has also been soiled by centuries of exploitation, injustice and unfairness. This continuing relevance of the Bible suggests that Christians in general are and must remain part of the publics in Zimbabwe, meaning that Christian ideas and resources will remain part and parcel of the resources circulating in the public sphere. While the Bible can have a life of its own outside Christianity as a text that touches on various subjects of interests to human beings in different contexts, its existence in Zimbabwe is intrinsically connected to Christianity. Therefore, for as long as Christianity remains a significant part of the Zimbabwean landscape, the Bible will enjoy the same status as well, either because of the influence of its texts or simply by association to Christianity. This is not surprising because more than seventy-five percent of the Zimbabwean population profess to be Christian, spread across the various denominations and strands of Christianity (ZDHS 2012). While there are some Christian groups that do not use the Bible such as the Johane Masowe weChishanu, relying instead on the direct revelations through the chief prophets (Engelke 2004:76-91, 2007:3, Bishau 2010:27) the majority of Christian denominations still hold on to the Bible as the foundational and normative text for the faith and conduct of their members. From this study, I agree fully with Jeremy Punt (1998:268) when he writes;

> The experience of the continuing value of the Bible - and the continuity in the use of these texts - is one of the enduring elements which arguably constitutes the continuity found within Christianity through the course of many centuries.

Even though humanism was confident maybe even over-confident on the capabilities of men and women as autonomous moral agents without need or resort to transcendent authority (Norman

2002:1), the history of mankind from ancient times to the present clearly disputes this optimistic over-confidence. What appears to be apparent is that given an opportunity and the necessary authority, human beings will try to exterminate fellow human beings or to enslave them for their own benefit. As Rusikira (2010, 2011)[7] the "village preacher" correctly observes, this world is full of people who would rather make another human being a delicious meal for a lion while pretending to be assisting the victim. Alternatively, he identifies how the poverty and wealth of this world is intertwined; one being the result of the other and that frequently individuals water their "good life" with the tears of other human beings. The fear of what human beings are capable of without restrainers is part of the reason why sacred texts and religions remain critical in the ordering of societies throughout the world. In Zimbabwe, the Bible remains relevant and valid because most Zimbabweans consider it as such hence try to derive life principles from it.

Speaking directly to the situation in Zimbabwe, I must contend that too many people are relying on the Bible to dismiss its relevance in the public sphere. Zimbabwean churches, like their

[7] I have paraphrased the Shona sermons of Pastor Rusikira of the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe. Here I reproduce his words in Shona: "Mupasi rino nhamo yeumwe inogara murugare rweumwe; rugare rweumwe runoriritirwa nenhamo yeumwe. Asi iwe mwanangu, usadiridza dzinde rerugare rwako nemisodzi yevamwe" (In this world, the poverty of one is in the wealth of another, the wealth of another is sustained by the poverty of the other. However, you, my son, you must not sustain your good life by the tears of the others (2010)). In the 2011 sermon, Rusikira says; "Uriko anochema, anzi bvambu neshumba kamwe, uyo omhanya neguchu remunyu kundonyunyurudza paronda nyoro kuti shumba izipirwe. Poyodzungudzira musoro nekunakirwa osekera mudundu, poobvunza kuti madarirei oti kusatenda huroyi taiti kurapa ronda" (Someone is crying, after being attacked once by a lion, another has rushed to sprinkle salt on the fresh wound for the lion to enjoy the meal, when the lion responds as expected, they silently enjoy the spectacle and when the victim asks why they have done so and they respond by suggesting that the salt was meant to cure the wound therefore the victim is being ungrateful (2011)).

South African counterparts, “have the allegiance of at least 75% of the population” (Prozesky 2009:238). It is not only that too many people follow the teachings of the Bible to some degree, most of them do so with the hope that they and others can become better people who can resist the temptation of exploiting others. They are people with good intentions who believe that the overarching teachings of the Bible proclaim justice, equality, fairness and honesty. Those using the Bible are one of the many publics that make up the public sphere hence it is against the democratic tenets to deny them the right to use resources that are natural to them and their decision making processes.

While the abuse of the Bible in the history of humankind, but more specifically in Africa, is well-known and well documented, over the past century the Bible has been accepted by the 'masses' and it has played a positive role in the lives of many African people hence mitigating against the renouncement of the Bible (Punt 1998:273). In fact, it is this realization that all three suggestions re-writing the Bible, de-biblifying the public sphere and the critical biblification of the Bible appear to agree on. By seeking to re-write the Bible, Banana was indirectly acknowledging that the Bible continued to be a relevant text, even if it may not be perfect for the task at hand. The re-writing was an attempt at perfecting the Bible so that it continues with its influence, but only its positive influence because the re-writing would eliminate loopholes that have seen the Bible being manipulated by elites to rationalize and justify injustice, inequality, inequity and unfairness in society. While de-biblification would have retained the influence of the Bible in the private lives of citizens, a critical biblification of the public sphere calls for the recognition of the Bible as one of many resources available to society. However, regarding the critical biblification, I must reiterate that “a special responsibility rests on those who occupy positions of influence and power in politics, education, law and, perhaps most of all, in religion” (Prozesky 2009:238) in protecting the rights of all citizens, especially those who do not share their ideologies or beliefs.

While Europe may have succeeded somewhat in classifying religion under private matters and thereby making sacred texts such as the Bible mere literature in public and only scripture in private, the same ignores another reality of texts such as the Bible. There are themes in the Bible that are clearly meant for the individual in his/her contemplations with their God, but there exist as well themes that are clearly public in nature. Clearly one could point to baptism and the Eucharist, or the Passover feast from the Old Testament as constituting private elements but when one reads the prophecies of Amos, Isaiah 1-5, or the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-12, Luke 6:20-26), it is clear that in these texts are embedded themes that are of significance to the public and not simply the private. Over the years, through eyes clouded by modern categories, we have tended to look at the Bible as a religious and faith text and have forgotten that in ancient Israel, there was no distinction between faith and public affairs, all things were interrelated. Revelation and reason were intrinsically connected that the distinction itself is unheard of in the Hebrew Bible. The Bible continues to be a relevant resource for the public sphere because, according to Bradstock, it has a public dimension. I will quote extensively here from Bradstock (2011:4-5);

> But it is to emphasise that there is also – perhaps as the other side of the same coin – an inherently 'public' dimension to the biblical narrative, to remind us that, as Richard Bauckham has put it, 'the notion that biblical Christianity has nothing to do with politics is little more than a modern Western Christian aberration.' The Resurrection of Jesus, with its profound challenge to concretize the radical message of the kingdom with its themes of peace, justice and inclusion, on the basis that sin and death have been defeated, is but one example of a biblical motif prone to interpretation in highly privatized terms. I am reminded of a favourite saying of the US activist and writer Jim Wallis: 'faith is always personal but never private'.

Clearly, when faith and texts such as the Bible are deployed and moderated by a selection of hermeneutical principles driven by the principles of justice, equality, equity and fairness, they stand a

better chance of transforming societies into some inclusive communities. Inclusive and accepting communities stand a better chance of becoming democratic.

The second factor to the continued relevance of the Bible, especially in Zimbabwe, lies in the fact that there are elements in the Bible that resonate with the daily lives of the people who read the Bible today. Lamentations articulates the voice of the victim; victims are what many in the south identify with. "Victims must be heard. All who struggle with oppression want to know that someone hears their cries" (Queen-Sutherland 2013:191). Some have even realized that contrary to the gospel that preaches the holiness of poverty; "they have realized that the Bible regards poverty as a scandalous condition incompatible with the kingdom of God" (Gifford 2002:298). In the eyes of many, the struggles of the people are still aptly captured in the pages of the Bible that Makoni (2008:3) had to argue that

> For Christians in the South, the Bible describes currently pressing issues such as hunger, poverty, exile, diseases and wars. The resemblances may appear superficial but the accumulated weight adds greatly to the credibility of the Biblical message. Immediate and material answers are provided to adversity as are ways to cope in the hostile environment. Hope for prosperity is held out. Thus issues that make the Bible a somewhat distant historical record for Christians in the North keep it a living text in the South.

This juxtaposition of Christians in the North and those in the South is critical in the shaping of relations between the north and the south. The south is more biblical while the north has moved away from the Bible. Instead of being dismissive of the attachment people in the South have to the Bible, it is important to unpack why this attachment is present for people who experienced the Bible as an instrument of oppression. Further, it can be argued that even though the specific contexts from which the Bible narratives emerged bear little or no resemblance to situations we encounter today, the essential nature of the world, and humanity,

has not changed. The thinking that the nature of humanity has not changed has meant that people read the Bible with their own questions in mind and still find the "right" answers to those questions. There are elements within the Bible that are seen as addressing contemporary concerns and answering contemporary questions.

The history of the Bible in Zimbabwe and in many other areas is a history which saw the Bible supplanting many indigenous resources for the imparting of morality in society. Traditionally, among the Shona of Zimbabwe, ngano (folktales) were one such resource for moral teachings. Even though the stories had characters such as talking rabbits, baboons, donkeys, tortoises and many other wild animals, the moral lessons were always the dominant focus. It was never about the animals, it was about us and what we ought to do in order to be respected in society. These folktales are no longer a part of the living resources, now they are found in books and children question if it is true that animals could talk. The children are not aware that the folktales were not about the animals! The disappearance of these folktales from the public domain as living resources is directly linked to urbanization, high levels of mobility among the working groups meaning children tend to grow among strangers than relatives under the care of maids and not grandparents who were especially responsible for telling the folktales. However, another factor that led to the disappearance of folktales was the rise of Christianity as the dominant religion and way of life and its accompanying resource, the Bible. The Bible had stories whose characters were Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Lot, Isaiah, Deborah, David, Jezebel, Mary, Elizabeth, Jesus, Mary-Magdalene, Peter, and Paul. Its stories were easily believable than traditional folk stories, it was easy for children to aspire to be like Abraham than to be like a rabbit! The Bible was presented as the perfect vessel for moral lessons. Because of this, Religious and Moral Education in Zimbabwean schools focus more on Bible stories than on the traditional folk stories. That means the Bible has remained relevant because it

has supplanted traditional resources to claim their role and position for itself.

Besides having risen to become the major resource for moral teachings, it has become indeed a manual for the faith of the majority of Zimbabweans. The story that the Bible relates has been believed by most Zimbabweans with its hope engendering attributes, it was resourceful during the prosecution of the war of liberation during which time some freedom fighters walked around with Bibles in their pockets, giving them the sense of being divinely protected. People believe the broad narrative which says this world was brought into being by God. That the same God who created the world also rescued some slaves from Egyptian bondage and gave them a land to call their own. The massacres involved in the taking over of the land are not part of the grand narrative! The grand narrative raises into the fore, David and Solomon as God-fearing leaders who successfully led the establishment of God's kingdom on earth before the division of the kingdom. The story is then accomplished with the coming of God on earth in the person of Jesus. Jesus cared about the poor and victims, this way they have used the Bible as their resource book (Gifford 2002:298). More than simply being a manual for moral lessons, the Bible continues to be living because it is the foundational document to the faith and conduct of many Zimbabweans. It is because of this that whenever a question arises, most Christians in sub-Saharan Africa will ask: "Is it in the Bible?"

The third factor that I will highlight on the continued relevance of the Bible in Zimbabwe and many other countries focuses on one of the key issues in this study, that is, justice. According to Norman Gottwald (2008:87), "the highest priority of a nation or state should be its domestic integrity in pursuing justice for all its people and fairness in relating to other nations. Self-preservation will be best served by adhering to just norms of behavior." While the Bible has been fingered as one resource for those who have trampled the rights of many and who have perfected the art of injustice, it goes without saying that for some, the Bible has inspired

and sustained justice movements across the world. I, therefore, contend that the relevance of the Bible is also dependent on the unbroken chain of the quest for justice, liberation and fairness from the period of the making of the Bible through the centuries of interpretations. Throughout those centuries, many have lost their lives as they stood up for what is just and fair. However, when we start talking of martyrdom, we sometimes lose sight of what is really important and that is expertly articulated by Hanson (2011:224) when he observes that "the crucial point is the willingness to risk death" because "martyrdom is always contingent on the authorities. Whether or not the authorities will kill them for this [seeking justice] is largely out of their hands" (Fowl 2011:44). The search for justice and the existence of biblical narratives, especially, the prophets of justice and the ministry of Jesus give readers of the Bible enough ammunition to challenge injustice in the world. The prophet Amos oozes with a socio-theological critique that is as effective today as it was in ancient societies (Gunda 2010). In the history of Zimbabwe, the deployment of the Bible as a resource during the war of liberation was an endorsement of its qualities as an instrument of justice. In the post-colonial state, part of the challenge seen across Africa has been the reluctance to continue in the chain of seeking justice as a fundamental part of the Christian faith. Indeed Budde (2011:153) is right that

> For too long Christians have sought to deflect charges of treason, bending over backward to prove their loyalty and reliability to rulers of all kinds. Instead, I think the integrity of the church and its faithfulness to the gospel are better served by resituating 'treason' as an irremovable possibility of a robust ecclesiology that 'seeks first the kingdom of God'.

Even though the Bible was manipulated by many elites over the millennia and centuries; even in those times there was always an undercurrent focusing on liberation, equality and fairness in society. The challenge for critical Christians is to encourage the upright member of the community to endeavor to aid the needy and righting the wrongs of our societies. Upright behavior certainly

cannot make the poor poorer or the weak weaker (Biddle 2011:126). The formation of a conscious group of Christians who prioritize justice over their own comfort can rekindle the old tradition that sees Christianity as a justice-righteousness movement. In societies, like ours, where the Bible is already an established resource it is important that it be retained and not restrained. "In seeking to affirm that Scripture can make a positive contribution to contemporary debates, it may be important to prioritize the 'spirit' of the biblical text over the 'letter', in the sense in which St Paul writes of the latter 'killing' but the former 'giving life' (2 Cor. 3:6)" (Bradstock 2011:11). Indeed, the abuses of the Bible have largely depended on a literal reading of some text which is then proclaimed as the divine basis for the justification of injustice; the spirit however is clear in putting injustice on the opposite side of the divine. Many in Zimbabwe believe that the Bible has a role to play in our search for justice; among them was also Canaan Banana.

Since the Bible in Zimbabwe is predominantly a Christian text, it is also important to emphasize the centrality of justice, freedom, independence, fairness and equality that are the cornerstones of the ministry of Jesus. It goes without saying that "the way of Jesus requires the unseating of those modes of behavior, ways of life, desires, and thoughts that are conditioned on scales of self-preservation, self-protection, and security for one's life" (Budde 2011:166). Focusing on this and rightly giving this a determinative influence in deciding the development of "socially sensitive biblical studies in Zimbabwe" is actually a necessary step, which acknowledges the continued relevance of the Bible in Zimbabwe. Whereas Christians and biblical scholars try to understand martyrdom and faith as related, I agree with Budde (2011:166) that "the virtues necessary to be a martyr are no different from the virtues necessary to be a faithful Christian." This is critical because being a faithful Christian entails being transformative to the world and society one lives in. This challenges the systems and structures that are put in place to preserve the few elites

against the well-being of the majority. In all such cases and learning from Jesus, Christians must always be on the side of the oppressed and exploited. By consistently being on the look-out for justice, equality, equity and fairness, Christians and biblical scholars, "provide the church and the world with a dangerous hope in that it is a hope that both invites and threatens the church into a life of vigil, a life of social struggle, and a new and resurrected community" (Katongole 2011:191). Social struggle is the central invitation to sharing in the life and ministry of Jesus! At no point should opportunity be allowed to pass without sharing with others the intrinsic connection between our faith in Jesus Christ and our obligation to social action! There can be no Christian faith without social action!

Finally, in Zimbabwe, the Bible remains relevant in academic circles because of the persistence of religious and moral education in primary schools, Bible Knowledge in secondary schools as well as Divinity in Advanced Level classes (Marashe, Ndamba and Chireshe 2009). While there is an attempt to pay heed to religious pluralism in Zimbabwe, the Bible still dominates in these studies as articulated by Godfrey Museka (2012:55) when he writes;

> The teaching and learning of Religious Education in Zimbabwe, particularly in Secondary Schools, has largely remained Eurocentric and Christ-centric irrespective of numerous researches pointing to the need for the curriculum to embrace the religio-cultural diversity of the inhabitants.

These studies from their inception were meant to transform individuals and subsequently society at large, while the focus may have been in making individuals docile in the face of oppression, suppression and exploitation under colonial regimes, the teaching of these courses can be developed to make individuals more sensitive to oppression by following the liberation thread we highlighted above. In fact while some today continue to highlight the negative associations, it is a fact that the Bible was among the resources that galvanized the people of Zimbabwe to stand up and fight for liberation. In fact the liberation war clearly demonstrated

that the establishment of justice, equality, equity and "democratic practice require cooperation with people who do not share one's religious beliefs" (Karanja 2008:88). The search for justice and equity in Zimbabwe brought about the collaboration between traditionalists, Christians and atheists because all groups had set their sights on the over-arching goals of justice, equality, equity and fairness which cut across belief systems. It has therefore become critical that biblical studies take seriously the impact of the Bible in the history of Zimbabwe and sub-Saharan Africa generally by moving away from the simplistic narrative of all things are bad if they were associated with white people and colonial regimes. The history of the impact of the Bible in our society is like the history of the text of the Bible itself, it has its ups and downs, but unless we acknowledge the ups and downs, we cannot have a proper perspective based only on ups or downs!

From the beginning this project has been focused on the establishment of a sustainable political, economic and social system in Zimbabwe, a system that can guarantee justice, equality, equity and fairness to all Zimbabweans and those who live within and outside of Zimbabwe. I argued earlier in this work that political systems on their own cannot guarantee these aspirations because all political systems are only as good as the human beings who operationalize them. There are many countries that call themselves democratic today but which do not guarantee these virtues to their citizens. The idea that Zimbabwe must be democratic is, therefore, not in itself an endorsement of democracy as the perfect political system. I only specify it because it is what Zimbabweans highlight as their political system of choice. In fact, not only ordinary Zimbabweans but the key political parties in Zimbabwe all claim to be pursuing a democratic political system. Biblical scholars must, therefore, channel their work towards this community aspiration by contributing to the national discussions on the subject, not only as a way of endorsing but critiquing the system and abuses that come under the guise of being democratic. This is particularly important because

> the successful establishment of democracy in Africa involves more than the overthrow of dictatorship and more than the introduction of multiparty electoral systems. Above all, it means the achievement of participation in voting, in discussion, in self-assertion and self-help, in the establishment of a democratic culture both within church and state (Ranger 2008:6).

Frequently, Christians across Africa tend to disengage with politics because politics is this-worldly while Christians (especially evangelical and charismatic Christians) are heaven-bound, yet it is vital that such people engage socially in search of equity, justice, and prosperity for themselves and others, if Zimbabwe is ever going to succeed in its quest for democracy (Mukonyora 2008:149). Earlier in this section I highlighted that Christian faith entails social action and disengagement from politics is essentially renouncing of social action which may mean a disregard to the social action-filled ministry of Jesus and prophets of justice. The need for social action by believers has also been necessitated through the rise in religiously motivated violence; violence which involves the loss of many lives of innocent men, women, those in between (since human sexuality is a continuum with heterosexuality and homosexuality being the extreme poles, there are others who are found in between these poles, some who are neither men nor women, male nor female) and children (Englund 2011:1, Madawi and Shterin 2009). Such violence has largely been justified by the invocation of sacred texts, such as the Bible. This upsurge in religiously-motivated violence suggests that sacred texts and religions must remain subjects of in-depth studies in order to understand what is happening and most importantly in order to develop systems of tolerance and acceptance that can stem this tide from developing into a vicious cycle of religiously motivated attack and retaliatory violence. For the cited reasons and many others not cited here, the Bible remains a relevant collection of writings in Zimbabwe as in many other societies that have Christians among their publics. That being the case, it can, therefore, be argued that the Bible remains an influence in such communities as a resource that informs the faith and conduct of some

members of the community. In the following section, I will focus on the nature of a "biblical studies" that can become an important part of the movement towards the establishment of justice, equality, equity and fairness in society.

Scope for Biblical Studies

Since 1997, when I was first exposed to academic biblical studies, I have grown to understand the complexity of the field and the challenges that come with studying such an ancient collection of writings. Critical in biblical studies in Zimbabwe has been the duality of eisegesis and exegesis (Bishau 2010:78, 2013); a duality I now seriously think is shallow and unhelpful to a socially engaged biblical scholarship that is relevant to contemporary communities (Kugel 2007). Eisegesis was defined as the art of reading meaning into the text while exegesis was defined as the science of reading meaning out of the text. This is particularly true in areas dominated by the historical critical approaches to the Bible, such as in Zimbabwe, where according to Klint (2000:87) "exegetes have traditionally been preoccupied with questions about how the Bible came to be. Or even more typically with the intended meaning (by God or the author) of its different texts." This duality was and continues to be abused by scholars who associate the former with believers while the latter is seen as of a higher quality and, therefore, the preserve of scholars. This is a duality born out of the binary of objectivity and subjectivity; scholars were presented as individuals driven by objectivity while believers were understood as driven by subjectivity. Since scholars were supposed to extract meaning out of the text, a meaning that was intended by the author and directed to the author's audience, it meant that it was impossible for academic biblical studies to consider question of relevance and appropriation of the Bible for contemporary usage.

The study of the Bible was geared towards asserting that the writings of the Bible are ancient and not contemporary. The question

of appropriation for contemporary usage was portrayed as theological and therefore subjective. One of the biblical scholars in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe who responded to Banana's call for a new Bible responded thus; "Historical criticism is introduced as the indispensable modern method of biblical study. The method must be applied because the Bible itself is a piece of literature from the historical past" (Lehmann-Habeck 1993:57 my emphasis). This is the attitude that makes scholars and Christians mutually suspicious of each other. Indeed, "these methods, developed in the West, have today been well established and recognized as veritable scientific tools of modern biblical research" (Ukpong 2006:49), yet they have also failed to reconcile themselves and their practitioners with believers and ordinary readers of the Bible. In contexts such as Zimbabwe where religion and sacred texts remain alive and influential, blindly pursuing such methods can only lead to scholars remaining aloof and disinterested where they are supposed to be "the light and salt" of the community.

While most Zimbabwean biblical scholars and students have focused on the historical approaches to the Bible, this has not been the only approach to the Bible in the African context. Especially important have been African theologians, whose engagement with the Bible has been informed by the need to answer African questions, resulting in the various strands of African theologies such as, Inculturation theology, Liberation theology, and Black theology in South Africa, leading Justin Ukpong (2006:49-50) to proclaim;

> In spite of this, however, biblical scholars in Africa have been able to develop a parallel method of their own. The particular characteristic of this method is the concern to create an encounter between the biblical text and the African context. This involves a variety of ways that link the biblical text to the African context such that the main focus of interpretation is on the communities that receive the text rather than on those that produced it or on the text itself, as is the case with Western methods.

The realization that the western methods on their own were not answering the questions arising out of African contexts pushed biblical scholars, especially, theologians, to search for ways of addressing this shortcoming. However, I must quickly highlight that some of the suggestions from African theologians-cum-biblical scholars moved from the extreme of western methods to the other extreme where the Bible was simply acknowledged as the Word of God (Mbiti 1986, Mugambi 1995). There was no attempt to articulate in what ways the Bible was the Word of God (Maluleke 1996:11). This section seeks to outline ways in which biblical studies in Zimbabwe can be transformed in such a way as "to bring the Bible to bear on public issues in a dialogical rather than dogmatic spirit" (Bradstock 2011:12). When this happens, the fear of non-believers and minorities is taken care of by avoiding the dangers of imposition that are associated with dogmatism. This dialogical deployment of the Bible acknowledges the complexity of the biblical sources themselves and the fact that by using the Bible we are not simply fetching for answers to all our problems but rather that we can together develop answers to our problems as partners of the creator God (Bradstock 2011:12). This section argues that unless the trained readers begin to make themselves relevant to the larger community, then their endeavours in the academies are limited because all endeavours must be geared to make the community a better place for all community members.

The first characteristic of the envisaged biblical studies in Zimbabwe, which could transform biblical studies into a profitable endeavour for society at large, has to do with the relationship between biblical studies and the context in which it is practiced. I aver here for a socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies. Socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies will seek to understand the Bible as it influences and is influenced by the lives of the people who are using the Bible. In agreement with Jonathan Draper (2008:51), this "also provides the engaged biblical scholar and Christian leader with the space and the responsibility to con-

tribute to the debate and formation of public policy in the secular state in a constructive way." This has been the cornerstone of African theologies, where the scholars were socially engaged with issues within their contexts. Interestingly, the Bible has always been a part of this engagement. This is why, "the Bible has been read within pre-colonial, colonial, struggle-for-independence, post-independence, neocolonial and globalization contexts" (Dube 2012:1-2). While these movements have happened especially in South Africa and Botswana, Zimbabwean biblical scholars have been slow in joining this shift, remaining rather with the ideal "pure biblical studies." During the struggle for independence, it was the voice of historians such as Terence Ranger that was heard speaking against the exploitation and oppression of the majority blacks (Chung 2006:41,43,61) but not much was heard from academic biblical scholars or generally the department of theology at the University of Rhodesia. The appropriation of the Bible for contemporary usage has been largely the work of ordinary readers and believers in Zimbabwe.

To effectively achieve a socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies, it is pertinent that trained readers (scholars) develop their understanding and ability to deploy "socio-historical approaches to the text of the Bible" in order to appreciate the "life situations that produced the Bible." This in a way is a return to the level of "pure biblical studies" developed during the age of reason in Europe. By way of definition, therefore, the socio-historical approach is an approach that understands ideas as contingent on the social and historical condition in which such an idea is expressed. By way of illustration, this definition entails that an idea that is expressed or developed in a time of war cannot be fully understood unless the fact of the war is taken into consideration. Alternatively, an idea that arises in a context of poverty and deprivation cannot be fully appreciated within a context of relative abundance of resources. When a woman or man says "I am poor", the statement in itself has various possibilities and potential meanings, it is as Stephen Fowl (1998:10-1) argues "underdetermined." If this

statement is to be fully appreciated in a way that can lead to understanding between the speaker and the hearer, then it is only necessary to begin by understanding the actual social and historical context within which such a statement is made. Poverty among a group of landlords in Borrowdale may be different from poverty among tenants in Mbare, yet both could be using the same phrase![8] It is critical to understand the context of the text; however, this should never be seen as an end of biblical studies, it is only a means to understand the Bible in the contemporary situation. No one expresses this reality and understanding better than Andrew Broadstock (2011:5-6) whom I quote here extensively;

> But surely the point is that, while of course the specific contexts from which the Bible narratives emerged bear little or no resemblance to situations we encounter today, the essential nature of the world, and humanity, has not changed. The physics and chemistry are the same, as is the human psyche – our emotions, needs, wants, proclivities and so on. Certain basic issues and principles relating to, for example, the economic and political organization of society remain unchanged also, and can be seen to be present at all stages of human history. As Walter Brueggemann wrote with respect to the global market downturn in 2008/9, 'while the specifics of the current market collapse are peculiarly modern, biblical perspectives are pertinent because the fundamental issues of economics are constant from ancient to contemporary time, constants such as credit and debt, loans and interest, and the endless tension between the haves and have-nots'.

Alternatively, a search for the context of the texts of the Bible can only lead us to a greater understanding of ourselves as human beings, seeing how the millennia of change have actually pre-

[8] Borrowdale is one of the most affluent surbubs in Harare, where the richest Zimbabweans live, while Mbare is the oldest surbub of Harare, which was developed by the colonial governments to house poor black workers, who were employed by the industries in Harare. Today, Mbare is used as representative of poverty. It accomodates very poor families in very small houses. Mbare is the opposite of Borrowdale!

served the core of being human essentially the same. Armed with an understanding of the social history of the Bible or most importantly, texts within the Bible, trained readers must move to the next stage of developing socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies.

To carry out a socio-historical analysis of a given idea or text, therefore, it is important to pose a series of questions to the idea or text in order to unpack it for understanding to happen. The first question a socio-historical analyst must pose is historical: can the idea or text be (absolutely or relatively) dated? When was the idea developed and expressed? In responding to the historical question(s), the analyst must, therefore, attempt to place the text or idea in a particular historical context. The second set of questions that will be posed to the text or idea is both social and historical: what do we know about the social and historical context of this time when the idea or text was written or expressed? At this level of questioning, the social environment (included here is also the economic situation) must be sought from within the expressed idea or other sources from the same period. It is equally important to consider the historical developments (included here also the religious and political environment). Having raised these broad questions initially, it is important then to ask: what do we know about the originator (author) of the idea or text? At this level it is important to find some information pertaining to the social status of the author. Is the author rich or poor according to the social conventions of his society? What have been the historical experiences of the author? With these questions, we are in a position to situate ideas and texts within the socio-historical context in which they have emanated and in my thinking this is prerequisite to understanding ideas even if they are underdetermined.

A third set of questions to the idea or text under study is targeted at the social function of the idea: how is the idea or text related to the general aspiration of the society? If the general aspiration is justice, peace or democracy, this question must try to unpack the

relationship between the idea that has been expressed and this general aspiration. Is it an idea that is in agreement or disagreement with the general aspiration of the society? Through the mediation of this question, the analyst can also consider even the implicit connotations that are in-built within the idea, especially because of the thinking that most ideas are underdetermined. How is the idea related to the situation of the analyst for which the analyst is searching for a solution? This aspect is critical because analysts do not operate in a vacuum but are dependent on other factors in determining their course of work. Is the expressed idea carrying with it enough under-determinacy for it to be appropriated for contemporary usage? This is so, especially for scholars from the developing world who must always carefully balance between scholarly theoretical and pragmatic demands imposed on them by the situation of their societies. Being one among many such scholars, it is not enough to understand ideas or texts "in their social and historical contexts" without relating how such texts impinge on the contemporary contexts of our people.

This second stage is the understanding and deployment of "reception historical approaches to the Bible" in order to understand the history of usage, of impacts, effects and influences of the Bible on different communities, especially the contemporary community within which socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies are being done. Sawyer (1999:2) defines reception history as "the history of how a text has influenced communities and cultures down the centuries." Reception history provides trained readers with the skills and techniques of uncovering the usage of the Bible or some texts of the Bible in different contexts over time, by different individuals and groups. Within the Zimbabwean context and the African context generally, the Bible's history is essentially in two critical parts, the Bible as an object and the Bible as a text! In many communities where the Bible was brought in by outsiders, it was "used both as a closed object of power and as an

opened object with particular things to say" (West 2012:87). According to Gerald West (2012:87-88);

> As a closed object the Bible could be used by someone who controlled it to compel others to speak the truth and do their bidding; as an opened object the Bible contained knowledge that was of use in a context of contestation. The Bible, it would seem, shared certain features with the sword and the pistol.

Indeed, "as ultimate symbols of power, the Bible and the gun enable their users to claim and deploy specific forms of authority to critique, determine, or regulate the very basic character and structure of human existence" (Ngwa 2012:2). I would add that the Bible also shared the same features with the land and water; both were associated with life-giving characteristics. Through a reading and especially obedience to the words of the Bible, individuals could have a life of happiness and abundance both in the here and now (through formal employment during the colonial era, Christians were seen as loyal servants than non-Christians) and also in the afterlife with the guarantees of salvation for those who followed the prescriptions of the Bible. I am aware that these promises were equally abused to mask the blatant exploitation that was structurally sanctioned by the racist-colonial structures. However, these promises were essential in the prosecution of the liberation wars in many African countries. According to Kenneth Ngwa (2012:18), "assessments of the Bible's impact on Africans and Africans' impact on the Bible range from unsettling to ambiguous to tragic to empowering and liberative." Through reception historical analyses these convergences, contradictions and paradoxes are easily exposed, especially because these approaches are "phenomenological" in nature, allowing for the facts to be stated without necessarily taking a position whether such usage was right or wrong. Through reception history approaches, it is possible to see who is doing what with the Bible!

The final stage of socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies must of necessity focus on hermeneutics. How do we bridge the gap between studying the text of the Bible and its usage in

history and the desire to use the text of the Bible in the contemporary community? At this level of our studies, the four determinative principles that led to Banana's call to re-write the Bible, Europe's separation of church and state, essentially therefore a debiblification of the public sphere or even my proposal for a critical biblification of the public sphere must become the central hermeneutical principles for our socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies. These four are justice, equality, equity and fairness as hermeneutical principles. In other words, texts of the Bible can be interpreted from the perspective of how they can contribute to the attainment of these four ideals in the contemporary community. These principles can also be witnessed as part of liberation hermeneutics. "Liberation hermeneutics in general use the Bible as a resource for struggle against oppression of any kind based on the biblical witness that God does not sanction oppression but rather always stands on the side of the oppressed to liberate them" (Ukpong 2006:56). While liberation hermeneutics were particularly critical in the fight against colonialism, there is no doubt that they remain relevant in our context. However, liberation hermeneutics are not exhaustive of the potential of the Bible to be positive hence one can include "transformational hermeneutics" (Nadar 2012) in search of socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies. When Jonathan Draper (2008:48-9) was searching for the right hermeneutics for a secular age, he concluded that

> our biblical hermeneutics for a secular age lies in the recognition that reading is and should be transformative. When Christians read the Bible honestly and openly, they need to be changed ... a new understanding is related to a new praxis... Transformative engagement with the text leads to transformative engagement with our social, political, and economic contexts and to the insertion of the prophetic word into public sphere – not as an attempt at a new Christian hegemony, but as a contribution to the public discourse on the part of a faith tradition that is normative for a particular faith community.

Transformational hermeneutics must use the Bible as a resource for the changing of lives of community members for the better,

based on the biblical witness that God's intervention in history or in human activities has always been for the betterment of human life. This transformational activity of God is a theme that runs through the Old and New Testaments. Socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies must seek to transform the community in which it is done in order to establish justice, equality, equity and fairness in human relations.

Besides transformational hermeneutics, socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies are also well served by the deployment of the hermeneutics of inclusion. The kingdom of God is big enough for all created by God and as can be attested in the ministry of Jesus, heaven rejoices when one soul is added to the kingdom in the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:1-7). What the contemporary context demands from socially-engaged biblical scholars is 'a more imaginative and creative hermeneutic' which allows the Bible to speak to modern life, while enabling us, first, "to appreciate the biblical material in its own culturally specific uniqueness and then to explore the extent to which it may suggest a 'paradigm' or 'an analogy' for our own day" (Broadstock 2011:7). The hermeneutics of inclusion acknowledge the centrality 'exclusion' has played in ordering our society in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods of our history. Even the Bible has been an instrument of exclusion, something that was instrumental in pushing Banana to call for a new Bible that would be inclusive, a Bible that would include stories of all peoples. The dichotomy between exclusion and inclusion is aptly expressed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2008:163) when she argues that

> religious communities and biblical studies face a theo-ethical choice today: We can strengthen global capitalist dehumanization, or we can support the growing interdependence of people; we can spiritually sustain the exploitation of capitalist globalization, or we can engage the possibilities of radical democratization for greater freedom, justice, and solidarity. Religion can either foster fundamentalism, exclusivism, and the exploitation of a totalitarian global monoculture, or it can advocate radical democratic spiritual

> values and visions that celebrate diversity, multiplicity, tolerance, equality, justice, and well-being for all.

In an age where fear-mongering has become widespread, inclusion has been presented in some fora, especially through the agency of conservative Christian activists, as anti-Christ and not biblical. Instead, I agree here with Martin Prozesky (2009:250) who

> focuses on the nature of a perfectly loving God, a notion obviously shared by our Christians. What would such a God want from South Africa or any other country but the highest standards of justice, generosity of spirit and action, respect, freedom and concern for others? And would such a God not want these things for everybody, for a love that excludes even one of us is not a perfect love? Lest this seem more philosophical than theological or biblical, let me make clear that it was in fact the New Testament in Luke 15: 4ff that first showed me that total inclusivity is integral to the ethic taught by Christ, for it tells of the person who does not rest till all 100 of his sheep are in the fold, and extends the point to God in heaven. Ninety-nine percent is not good enough, let alone 75%. It will already be clear from these arguments that a secular state accords far better with the nature and will of such a God than any other kind of state.

From the proposed hermeneutical approaches to the Bible it is clear that as we search for justice, equality, equity and fairness in our society, not only should the Bible be read socially and contextually, it should be read politically as well. A political reading of the scriptures is not only legitimate; in our context it is actually desirable! This desire leads us directly into another aspect of socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies.

The second aspect of the envisaged biblical studies is that, instead of attempting to divorce the Bible from Christianity and Christians by suggesting the studying of the Bible as literature, there should develop a critical Christian strand of biblical teaching that informs contemporary faith and conduct; a strand that balances the desire for the spiritual with the reality of the everyday needs and challenges. The failure to reconcile academic studies with

confessional studies of the Bible have led to the development of parallel and sometimes even contradictory paths, one that is entirely focused on the distant past and another that is entirely focused on the messianic future! Indeed, among many believers most interpretations

> centre so much on the spiritual and interior needs of the people that the connection between the Word of God and the realities of every day [life] becomes secondary, almost irrelevant. Ominously this kind of biblical faith is being promoted with particular effect in countries of the Third World; that is, precisely among those peoples for whom the facts of material deprivation, violations of human rights and sheer exploitation are the most pressing concerns (Kalilombe 2006:442-43).

The contradiction of our lives is that the more people suffer at the hands of this world's powers the greater they divert their attention away from the source of their pain, exploitation and suffering. One of the major aims of socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies is to articulate the fact that poverty and oppression are the result of deliberate decisions that the people of means make. Poverty and oppression, then, are not impersonal forces that are endemic to economic structures rather; they are human creations (Hoppe 2004:17, Mosala 1989). Being human creations, they stand in opposition to the will of God and people of faith are, therefore, obliged to oppose such human creations and not sustain them through silence. Contrary to the puritanism of earlier historical critical approaches adopted especially by Departments of Religious Studies, this strand of biblical studies is not only desirable; it has become indispensable to the quest for a just and democratic society.

From this perspective, time has come to acknowledge that information and knowledge that comes from the labours of biblical scholars can either be useful or useless. I argue here that biblical scholars cannot sit on the fence because the fence is actually on the side of the one who erected it, gone are the days when the fence was hypothetically in the middle! Socially and contextually

sensitive biblical studies must, therefore, strive to discover "a relevant hermeneutic for the reading of Scripture capable of engaging and renewing the peoples of Africa" (Punt 1998:274). This should be the focus of scholarship: to give direction and to participate in the transformation of society for the better. While there must be genuine reservations on the nature of the role of scholars in the transformation movements that seek justice, equality, equity and fairness; Sarojini Nadar (2012:392) has, with good reason, argued on the need for an interventionist method. She writes;

> An apt way to explain this conscientisation motive is through the wisdom gleaned from a famous Chinese fortune cookie – 'Knowing and not doing are equal to not knowing at all'. In other words, sharing the liberating knowledge gained from my academic work, and helping my community understand the roles of women in church and society, is what makes my knowledge valuable. Socially un-applied knowledge gained in the academy becomes therefore equivalent to 'not knowing at all'.

We may argue on the degree of intervention but there is no denying the essence of what Nadar is saying and advocating. Scholars are mostly employed to study their environment and their knowledge must be employed in society to achieve the aspirations of citizens. Biblical scholars are not different from medical, environmental and many other researchers. Their success must always be aligned with how much their knowledge helps society to overcome challenges that negatively affect the community. This is why it is critical that a Christian strand in biblical studies be developed in order to create a platform for collaboration and closer engagement between scholars and faith practitioners.

While there are many alternative viewpoints regarding the essence and, therefore, the potential of the Bible to positively impact a society in search of justice, equality and equity, I agree with Joseph Grassi (2003:1) and expand his view to cover the Bible. Regarding the New Testament, Grassi writes:

> the roots of the New Testament are based on prophetic justice with the following basic views of the land: 1) There are limited

> resources; 2) it is a designated sacred gift from God; 3) it was meant to be equally distributed. In this view, what one person has in abundance while others have considerably less is definitely evil.

There are various themes and texts that can become central and critical in the construction of a Christian strand within socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies. The principles of justice, equality, equity and fairness that have been central to this study are all essentially biblical principles. Even though some texts are over two millennia old; their observations and perspectives remain relevant both as Christian principles but equally as principles that go beyond Christian faith. According to McClanahan (1999:186-87);

> The key principles of law that underline the Mosaic law – love of God and neighbor – remain in effect, but now even they take on a renewed understanding with the salvation demonstrated in Christ...The texts of the Bible, then, come alive when we can discern the principles embodied in specific scriptural commands or guidelines and transfer those principles to our own times and translate them into meaningful and applicable instruction (Torah) for the people of God today.

We are living in an age where the issues of credit and debt, loan and interest, the rich and the poor are causing untold suffering in many communities. All over the universe, the rich have power over the lives of the poor, while rich nations dictate what policies must be followed by poor nations and more food is getting thrown away as more people are sleeping on empty tummies. The paradoxes and contradictions are endless! In such a context, what can be the "meaningful and applicable instruction" from Deuteronomy's "naming the unwillingness to aid the poor a sin (Deut. 15:9)?" (Hoppe 2004:31). It is the duty of biblical scholars to distill the high sounding jargon and articulate in common language the fact that "Deuteronomy reflects a socioeconomic situation that needed a more equitable distribution of resources, a goal that the book sees as attainable" (Hoppe 2004:31). A goal that could be attained if

> the judges (*shophetim*) and officers are obliged to 'judge' (or perhaps 'rule' the people according to 'righteous judgment' (*mishpat tsedeq,* Deut.16:18); justice (*mishpat*) is not to be perverted, because that would frustrate the cause of the 'innocent' (*tsaddiqim*); rather, Israel must pursue justice-righteousness (*tsedeq tsedeq*, v. 20) (McConville 2006:79).

Even though there are attempts by some to spiritualize poverty or even justice-righteousness, several texts suggest that these concepts were both religious and social because the categories religious, social, political and economic are alien in ancient biblical times. I, therefore, agree with scholars who argue that "poverty is against God's will" (Kügler 2012:1) or as Hoppe (2004:71) regarding the prophet Amos;

> The prophecy of Amos is an unrelenting attack on the social evils that helped create poverty and a dependent underclass in eighth-century Israel. Amos excoriated the wealthy because they seized the lands of the poor, corrupted the judicial system, and manipulated the economy for their benefit.

Therefore, the development of resources that prioritize justice, equality, equity and fairness is not only an academic necessity; it is also a faith obligation for Christians. On an issue that impinges on a contemporary economic hot-potato, Biddle (2011:126) observes

> The distinctive element of the biblical proscription against taking interest on loans to the disadvantaged does not derive from egalitarian political theory, ethical notions of justice or fairness, or the natural law arguments propounded by medieval theologians. Instead, it extrapolates Israel's insight into the redemptive character of Israel's God expressed in Israel's constitutive exodus experience. Israel's God liberated the exploited, demonstrating favor toward the downtrodden. To exploit, then, is to fail to reflect God's character as God's people; it is to align with those who oppose God's purposes; it is to become Pharaoh.

It is critical for scholars to articulate the intrinsic connection between these perspectives and the faith in God and Jesus Christ.

Speaking against the structures of sin that have been responsible for the mass production of poverty and hunger in the world is not being this-worldly, it is being Christian. Contrary to the fear that incorporating a Christian strand in biblical studies may lead to the rise of confessional Bible studies only, such a development has the potential of developing a platform for cooperation between scholars, religious leaders and ordinary believers. This collaboration does not necessarily call for the abandonment of critical engagement. In searching for justice, Christians are being honest followers of Christ and Christians must be aware that such a quest may lead to great pains yet a deliberate avoidance of pain cannot be taken as an obligation of being Christian (Broadstock 2011:9, Gunda 2012c:521).

This observation is critical in addressing the challenges of "other gospels" which tend to coalesce on the collaboration between God and Pharaoh at the expense of the exploited. In fact Rieger (2007:viii) convincingly demonstrates how

> Christ has often been understood in terms of the ruling empires: the Christ of empire became the Christ of the church. Even if this identification is not explicit, our most common images of Christ are top-down images. Christ is on the side of those who are successful, who have made it. This attitude defines even the images of the Christ who cares about the downtrodden and the marginalized, as we imagine a Christ who lifts them up, who integrates them into mainline society so that they, too, can benefit from the powers that be and find their place in empire.

The essence of the gospel of Christ, therefore, is not that it calls for inclusion of the downtrodden into the structures and systems of empire; the same empire that created the poverty and deprivation that afflicts and tramples them. The understanding is that the Gospel of Christ calls for the liberation of those under exploitation and their inclusion into a new kingdom which guarantees justice, equality, equity and fairness for all. That Gospel is transformative because it seeks to destroy the "structures of sin" that are created by exploitative systems. Jesus Christ being the focal point of

Christian readings of Scripture provides the best resource for the dismantling of the gospel that proclaims the reconciliation between God and Pharaoh by proclaiming that the Torah can be summarized into two love commandments (Matt. 5:21-28), which when put into practice do not leave room for injustice (Kealy 2007:115).

In this section, I have already stated that for biblical studies in Zimbabwe to claim relevance, it must reconfigure itself into socially and contextually sensitive, that is, it must begin to seriously deal with issues that are important to Zimbabweans. As John Pobee (1996:162) rightly observes; "the scholarly study of scripture is not an island unto itself; it is answerable to the hopes and fears of the society in which it is done." I have also argued that even though the Bible can be studied as literature, the situation obtaining in Zimbabwe is such that the Bible is not simply literature; it is the scriptures for Christians, who make up at least three quarters of the population in Zimbabwe. I am arguing that developing a Christian strand in biblical studies is therefore not simply possible, it is obligatory for socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies. The last dimension is that it should become the platform where biblical scholars and believers engage each other in search of praxis-oriented knowledge.

Socially and contextually sensitive biblical studies demands to be done in the academy up to a certain extent after which its demands are clear: it demands to be a meeting point for trained readers and pragmatic ordinary readers. Here a re-creation of Gerald West's (1995) "Academy of the Poor" is advocated for. This academy brings together scholars and ordinary Christians who bring their different and differing experiences to the meetings. They also bring along their own reading techniques and sometimes even texts that they read in different contexts. West has already highlighted one of the greatest enemies to a movement of this nature, which is, power relations! West (1995:454) argues

> Provided the unequal power relations between ordinary and trained readers are acknowledged and foregrounded, provided the

> trained reader is willing to learn 'from below', and provided the poor and marginalized continue to empower and be empowered, there is hope for something truly transformative emerging from the interface between trained and ordinary readers of the Bible.

This was the most exciting dimension to the academy of the poor as outlined by West; it is an academy where all are teachers and students! Only this way can scholars be truly in "solidarity with the wretched of the earth whose culture is deeply religious" (Mendieta & VanAntwerpen 2011:10), a solidarity that can lead scholars to also learn what the ordinary readers "are up against" and "how they cope with their situation" (Mendieta & VanAntwerpen 2011:10). On the one hand, the trained scholars can learn from the untrained readers and the survival instincts that drive the interpretations of ordinary readers. Experience from the liberation war when ordinary readers made use of the Bible demonstrates that "resistance to empire, as in Christ's own time, is closely tied to recognizing the subversive potential of those who suffer and those who are trampled underfoot" (Rieger 2007:141). It is from that context that Kalilombe (2006:443) argues that "[L]iberation theology is of practical use only in the measure in which it is practiced by these ordinary people; otherwise it remains a merely intellectual activity indulged in by comfortable academics." Insights from academic research can be distilled and made accessible to ordinary readers, but there can never be an underestimating of the importance of the pragmatic attitude of ordinary readers. Such academies can, therefore, become the platforms where academic reading techniques and ordinary pragmatic reading techniques can cross-fertilize to produce a critical response to everyday challenges. This critical response is what I call in this work "a critical biblification of the public sphere."

From early on in this work I made it clear that my engagement with Banana was inspired by the realization that his call seems to fit the current struggles in Zimbabwe even though his call was directed to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The need for the acad-

emy of the poor has been rationalized by other scholars already. According to Musa Dube (2012:22);

> In the African continent where the struggle for justice and empowerment still continues, the role and place of scholars becomes an ethical issue. Should a scholar ignore the struggles of the communities and maintain conversation only with other scholars? How should one situate their scholarship in the community for social transformation?

This should be the driving motivation for the critical biblification of the public sphere, scholars and ordinary Christians must be driven by the desire to transform society for the better. In the same vein Itumeleng Mosala (1989) is quoted by Nadar (2012:389) and he is credited for having argued that

> Theologians and Christian activists must first be rooted in a community before they can begin to evoke a theology meaningful and challenging for and with a community. As painfully 'slow' as the process may seem at times, anything less than this would still be elitist or paternalistic.

In other words, unless scholars bring themselves "down" to the academy of the poor, they are mostly dealing with abstract knowledge that can never threaten the structures of sin that administer society for the benefit of the few at the expense of the majority, both locally and globally. The critical biblification of the public sphere must be driven by the realization that "morality is far too important to be left to politicians, priests and pastors—or for that matter, professors. It is the privilege and responsibility of us all" (Prozesky 2009:252) and we do well when we work together.

The academy must, therefore, be firmly within the parameters of Christianity because the key principles of justice, equality, equity and fairness are not in contradiction with the key characteristics of the faith in Jesus Christ. The academy can become a platform where the attitude of kenosis (self-emptying), clearly attested in the lives of Jesus and Paul when compared to the lives of elites of the Roman Empire, can be practiced. Paul became a fool, weak,

poor, victim of torture, and homeless (2 Cor. 11:21-27)... This attitude is foreshadowed in Phil. 2:4: "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" (Rieger 2007:51). It is this belief that should mark the academy of the poor from other clubs that are set up to establish and protect personal and private interests. With this attitude, scholars and Christians in Zimbabwe can do better than their counterparts in Western Europe and America who are criticized by Steven Fowl (2011:60);

> It seems far more plausible to argue that Christian division, particularly in Western Europe and the United States, so enfeebles the church's witness that principalities and powers, whether working through nation-states or not, need not bother harassing the church. Further, one might plausibly speculate that, should Christians overcome their current divisions to the degree that they can offer an articulate witness to the gospel, the principalities and powers will work to create the sort of hostility to the faith that will make martyrdom a realistic scenario for believers.

Fowl is right to argue that division has weakened the Christian voice because where one Christian says "God is brown" another comes and proclaims that "God is yellow." While Fowl sees this in Western Christianity, the truth is that Africa is in a similar quandary (Vengeyi 2011, Machingura 2012) because since 2000, Zimbabwe has witnessed an upsurge in public Christian contradictions, especially pertaining to the political leadership in the country. While such leaders may command greater visibility, an academy of the poor can easily command greater moral visibility in terms of re-presenting the aspirations, fears and reservations of the silent majority.

The second critical point arising from Fowl's observation is that martyrdom arises when the Gospel, which prioritizes justice, equality, equity and fairness, is proclaimed fervently in society. I must hasten to highlight here that Christians are not called to die for Christ; it was Christ who died for Christians! However, Christians are called to serve Christ especially by spreading the "Good

News" of justice, equality, equity, fairness and an eternal life to all. This call can sometimes lead to some dying for their faith (Fowl 2011:57, Gunda 2012c). "In the Roman period... a martyr is anyone who confesses his or her faith openly and dies as a direct result of that confession" (Cunningham 2011:14). In the contemporary world, that kind of martyrdom has become rare, especially because of the compartmentalization of life into political, social, economic and religious categories. It is not surprising that when confronted by negative critique from Archbishop Pius Ncube of the Roman Catholic Church, President Robert Mugabe responded by saying that religious leaders must leave politics to politicians or else they would be treated like political opponents. However, when former Anglican Bishop Nolbert Kunonga was singing praises to the President, not once did the President think it was wrong for religious leaders to enter into politics (Machingura 2012). It is now almost impossible for anyone to die for confessing that they believe in Jesus Christ! That could change if Christians begin to expand what it means to believe in Jesus Christ, which is what critical biblification is driving towards. Indeed, the task for "socially engaged biblical scholars together with all those who work with the Bible for liberation, transformation, and life, is [to contend] for the prophetic and emancipatory potential of the Bible" (West 2008:115).

As it becomes clear to academics and Christians that the challenges of our time demand that we work together, it is critical that we find ways of making the academy operational. The academy of the poor must from the beginning be an academy that is not defined by its premises, it must refuse to be walled and fixed. The academy must be flexible and mobile, going to the people and living among the people. The desire to meet the people as they live their lives means the new academy must rely on "symposia, seminars, and teachings" (Imo 2008:60) between trained readers and untrained readers. Such gatherings must go to the people. The trained readers can make significant contributions to the academy by undertaking highly academic researches and reflec-

tions which are, however, expressed through the medium of "popular press articles and broadcast media discussions in order to reach far beyond the small world of the academy" (Prozesky 2009:244).

This is particularly critical because popular and public media have a far wider circulation than academic journals and text books. I contend that for transformation to become a reality, the action of the ordinary members of society is the sin qua non. Scholars can only assist by highlighting the areas where such action can be directed hence while it is important for professional development to publish in academic journals; it pays for society in general to make use of public media to get in touch with the people. For all I have set out to do in this study, I am advocating for a "biblical studies" that is active, proactive and reactive; a biblical studies that will not shy away from the social realities of our context. This envisaged "biblical studies" must set out to "address three publics or distinct and related social realities, namely, wider society, the academy and the church" (Bradstock 2013:173-174). Only then can biblical scholars claim to be relevant to the Zimbabwean society.

Conclusion

In 1991, Banana called for the re-writing of the Bible as a way of ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Middle East. The central reason to the cycles of violence emanating from the Middle East was seen as the "ideology of chosenness", which treated one people as superior and another as inferior and, therefore, expendable. The re-written Bible of Banana would eliminate the "ideology of chosenness" and bring equality among all peoples. Re-writing the Bible was understood by Banana as a means towards an end, the end being a society driven and sustained by principles and practice of justice, equality, equity and fairness. I argued that while the end as envisaged by Banana is shared by many in Zimbabwe and beyond, his means to that end was im-

practicable because it antagonizes believers. This study, then, set itself on a path to find another or other means to the same end that inspired Banana. First to be considered was the "way of Europe", which would banish religion and sacred texts, such as the Bible, from the public sphere. Religion and sacred texts would be reduced to the level of private matters with no input or role in public matters. This, I argued, faced the same fate as re-writing the Bible, it would seriously antagonize believers. I then proposed the partial de-biblification of the public sphere, which entails proscribing the use of the Bible or religious resources in certain places and events qualifying as public places or events; the understanding being that such places and events are open to all citizens irrespective of their religious affiliation or lack of it. It would be improper for a Muslim/Christian or Traditionalist public servant to display Islamic/Christian or Traditionalist religious messages in an office where they must serve all citizens, some of whom would feel offended being exposed to religious messages from a rival faith. My second proposal was to engage in a critical biblification of the public sphere. By this, I argued that biblical scholars and Christians (especially ordinary Christians) can come together to form a conscientious community that will deploy resources from the Bible to develop opinions and proposals that would become one of the many resources fit for the development of public policy. Such a group, modeled along the lines of the "academy of the poor" would be reactive and proactive in its quest to protect the integrity of the Bible against abuses prevalent in the public sphere. These proposals are thought of as means towards the end that was so critical to Banana! Canaan Sodindo Banana had a noble dream, his unpopular call for the re-writing of the Bible, taken in its context, can only be respected. Indeed, the Bible has a critical role to play in the public sphere in societies such as Zimbabwe that are highly religious and predominantly Christian and Bible reading.

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* The Tractatus was actually published, we know, in Amsterdam and not in Hamburg. The false place of publication, 'Hamburg', was doubtless inserted by Spinoza's publisher Jan Rieuwertsz (c. 1616-87) as a precaution, as the work was illegally and clandestinely published in violation of the Dutch Republic's censorship laws and without the name of any author or (true) name of the publisher. The choice of the false publisher's name, Heinrich Kuhnraht, was probably intended by Rieuwertsz as an arcane joke, this being the name of a well-known early seventeenth-century German mystical writer, Heinrich Kuhnraht (1560-1605).

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eISBN: 978-3-86309-299-3

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