

Masiwa Ragies Gunda

AT THE CROSSROADS

A Call to Christians to Act in Faith
for an Alternative Zimbabwe



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With a foreword by Ezra Chitando



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to all Christians who search for the meaning and essence of the Christian Faith and is a birthday gift to my *Doktorvater*, Prof. Dr. Joachim Kügler who turned 60 on 12 June 2018, for the untiring work dedicated to justice, equality and the emancipation of the lowly.

Herzlichen Glückwunsch, Prof!

Acknowledgements

I want to thank people who have in different ways contributed to the successful completion of this project. I have shared ideas with friends and colleagues, whose different inputs, formally and informally, have motivated me to pursue this project to this end and whose ideas have added value to this project. While, I acknowledge the sterling contributions by different people, this document with all its imperfections and grey areas is my responsibility. I want to acknowledge my colleagues and friends with whom the nascent ideas that have finally developed into this book were first bounced against, Prof. Francis Machingura, Prof. Obvious Vengeyi, Prof. Nisbert Taringa, Prof. Joram Tarusarira, Dr. David Bishau, Rev. Samuel V. Sifelani, Mr. Jowas Mapika. I am grateful for making me realise how important it was for the future of Zimbabwe to have conscientised Christians. I also want to thank my students during the years 2011 to 2016 at the University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University, Gaul House National Anglican Theological College and the Officers Training College of the Salvation Army in Zimbabwe for having been active participants in discussing and debating the role of Christians in the development of Zimbabwe. The lecture theaters and rooms became indeed blossoming laboratories for the testing of ideas, some of which became challenged, discarded or sharpened and adopted for this project. I thank you! Some contributions are simply immeasurable, and such has been the contribution of Prof. Ezra Chitando, Prof. Gerald West, Prof. Dora Mbuwayesango, Prof. Lovemore Togarasei and Prof. Joachim Kuegler, who are all my mentors and colleagues and whose belief in my ability has made me accomplish more than I thought I could do. I am extremely grateful for all your continued mentoring, which has

sometimes gone beyond academics to my whole life. Such friendship-cum-mentoring has unlocked more in me and I am grateful. I also want to make special mention to the General Secretary of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Rev. Dr. Kenneth Mtata, who encouraged me strongly to complete the project, once we had spoken about it. My Bishop, Right Rev. Dr. Chad Nicholas Gandiya has always been very supportive of my work and in a fatherly way approving and disapproving some ideas, I am grateful to enjoy the proximity to tap into your wisdom. Finally, but certainly very important, I want to thank my wife and the boys, from whom much was taken, in terms of time and resources, in the process of writing this book but from whom so much love and support kept on coming and pushing me to excel. Thank you so much Shuvai, my beloved for you are not only a wife but also a critic of ideas. Thank you Takudzwa, Tadiwa and Anotida, you boys have a way of putting a smile even on a face stressed by the rigors of academic writing. I love you all!

Foreword

Ezra Chitando

The relationship between the academia, the church establishment and the whole people of God has always been one fraught with suspicion, mistrust and sometimes outright animosity. In the specific case of Zimbabwe, however, the introduction of formal relationships between the University of Zimbabwe and Theological Seminaries and Colleges from various denominations has been critical in mending the relationship between the academia and the church establishment. However, the whole people of God have still been disconnected from academia, and academia with a sense of superiority, has also maintained its disconnectedness from the whole people of God, opting to mostly interact with the establishment. In the past few years, the situation has started changing for the better, with a few academics becoming more and more socially engaged, and availing themselves for engagement with the whole people of God, obviously with the blessings of the establishment, on various issues related to faith and the day to day lives of believers. I am proud, to acknowledge that one of the leading Zimbabwean scholars on social engagement has been Dr. Masiwa Ragies Gunda. I am humbled to be asked to do the foreword to this book that is in pursuance of the quest to integrate academia into the nooks and crevices of everyday life in our society.

To begin with, the title of this book captures a fact that not only addresses academics and students, but the title speaks to the reality of every Christian believer in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. The crossroads is a critically important space because it presents

options to those who are on the crossroads yet being presented with options means that decisions ought to be made by those on the crossroads. No phrase can better represent the reality of Zimbabwe than figuratively present it as a crossroads! I can imagine one at a crossroads in which one road leads to the in-laws, the other to their own parents, yet another to the best-friend's place: being on such a crossroads calls for difficult decisions to be made, where and who does one visit first? These are the kinds of choices and decisions that are implied in this title and this is apt in capturing the situation and context of Zimbabwe in the present. The title further places emphasis on two concepts that Christians grapple with in their lives, that is, faith and action. The tendency among many Christians has been to emphasise faith over action or to look at faith and action as exclusive of each other, especially if the action is directed towards allegedly "this-worldly endeavours", such as political involvement. This book calls for a reconciling of faith and action for the attainment of the so-called "this-worldly endeavours", which are however intrinsically connected to the "plan of God for our lives."

This book addresses fundamental issues that should inspire every Zimbabwean Christian and non-Christians alike. The analysis of the Zimbabwean context has been done in a way that is academically sound, but accessible to non-academics. It is a refreshing and successful integration of the academia into the normal everyday life of the potential readers of this book. The introduction is used to elaborate and justify the title, showing in what ways Zimbabwe stands at a crossroads. Taking up the "Black Friday" of November 1997, as marking the beginning of two decades of crises, Gunda has done a thorough analysis of where Zimbabwe is as a nation. While taking this point as the beginning of the two decades of crises, Gunda does not limit his focus to this period,

but casts his eyes back to the colonial period, highlighting several aspects of the problems and crises which, while manifesting themselves during these decades of crises, were actually inherited from the colonial period. One such aspect is the fragmented nature of the Christian voice in Zimbabwe, which we inherited from the inception of the Church in Zimbabwe, and whose effects on Zimbabwe have been severe. This book also addresses one of the salient criticisms laid at the feet of anyone without liberation war credentials who dares criticize the post-independent black-led governments and institutions, by showing how everyone in Zimbabwe has “liberation war credentials,” either through direct participation or by association with some who participated.

The social justice analysis of the situation obtaining in Zimbabwe makes for an interesting and depressing reading. Commenting on State sponsored looting of resources through vehicles such as War Victims Compensation Fund, and the Gratuities and tenderpreneurship scandals, the book looks at how a combination of corruption and mismanagement has left Zimbabwe at the crossroads. This analysis presents the majority of the Zimbabwean crises as locally manufactured, driven by what the writer calls, “man-made structures of sin [that] have been developed in Zimbabwe to benefit a few whilst impoverishing the masses. A lot of the crises we have experienced can hardly be blamed on factors that are beyond our control.” This social justice analysis is followed by a socio-theological analysis of the position of the Church in Zimbabwe. The church is presented as both a blessing and a curse in that while it contributed immensely in the emancipation of the people of Zimbabwe seen through the important role played by missionary education in awakening the people to the reality of oppression and exploitation, it also brought with it a fragmentation that has refused to be healed, thereby weakening

the Christian voice to the advantage of political and economic leaders. This book acknowledges the sterling work done by Christians and Christian groups like the Catholic CCJP, yet it also shows how fragmented the Christian voice was when it came to assessing the relevance and validity of the liberation cause in colonial Zimbabwe. The book further highlights how the Church was further compromised by its involvement in the liberation movement because after independence, the church was no longer sure of its role in the new dispensation, creating further fissures and fragmentation.

Having clearly justified the “crossroads” metaphor, this book goes on to consider the question of “who are we, as Christians?” Where do we come from and what is our calling? These are fundamental questions for every Christian and in my years as a Christian, I must admit these questions and the way they are addressed in this book challenged me to re-think my faith and what I am supposed to do as a way of demonstrating that I am living that faith. This book takes you back to ancient Palestine, to the Jesus’ Movement and how it was a movement driven to act for the attainment of justice and fairness in the world because of the faith that God intended for this world to be run on the principles of justice and righteousness. In highlighting the centrality of these concepts to the Jesus’ Movement, this book connects these concepts to the calling of Abraham and the prophets of Israel and shows how these concepts are central to the divine plan and narrative in the Bible. These are the concepts according to this book, that should guide Christian faith and engagement or action in the contemporary Zimbabwe.

This is a book for the scholar and the believer and anyone who wishes well for Zimbabwe, Africa and the World!

1 | Introduction:

Zimbabwe stands on the precipice of obliteration or rejuvenation

The desire to be whole or complete is a natural one. We very often seek to express ourselves, who we are, and what we stand for or believe in. The platform on which we seek to express ourselves differs from time to time and according to the circumstances or the mood we happen to be in (Bakare 1993:x).

Since “Black Friday” of November 1997, we have witnessed Zimbabwe lurching on from one crisis to another. From the breadbasket of Africa, we have gradually and rapidly fallen to become one of the basket cases of Africa. As Brian Raftopoulos (2004:2) succinctly observed more than a decade ago; “As a nation, we are at the most critical point of our history, struggling to chart a peaceful path beyond our present devastating political and economic conditions.” Where once we boasted of a highly skilled human resource base, with unemployment rates as low as 15%, we now boast of a highly skilled but jobless human resource base with unemployment figures hovering around 90%, unless we follow Finance Minister Patrick Chinamasa’s contention that everyone is employed in Zimbabwe because they are doing something to survive. Our Universities and colleges continue to churn out graduates every year, throwing them onto the streets since there are no industries to absorb them. Government, in its wisdom or lack of it, has in the meantime started coming up with some weird propositions, including developing an economy where everyone is a businessman or businesswoman. In my little knowledge of economics, I suppose Zimbabwe would be the first economy to succeed without formal industry and as ministers continue to make us believe, without workers as well. Without

trivializing the importance of entrepreneurship, it appears that this is a concept that came about as a result of desperation and the need to be seen to be doing something by the government. I am, therefore, aware of successful entrepreneurs like Mr. Strive Masiyiwa, the founder of Econet, but if we ask him, there were possibly two key components that made it possible – the idea and the financing of the idea. Entrepreneurs with ideas and no capacity to access the much-needed finance will not achieve anything.

Where did this all begin? Pin-pointing the beginning of the multiple crises that we are witnessing today is debatable and subjective. We could identify different starting points, from colonization to the fast-track land reform, or Third Chimurenga. However, in this book, the starting point for our crises must be found in the infamous “Black Friday” of November 1997. If, we are right in placing the beginning of our crises in 1997, it means we have now gone for two full decades lurching from one crisis to the other and with government not showing signs that it has an idea of how to fix these crises and where they have demonstrated an understanding of what is needed to address the crises, there has not been political will to carry out the painful remedies, which include but are not limited to the investigation and possible arrest of some prominent personalities who have been fingered in corruption. The situation in Zimbabwe since 1997 has not been aided by the strong presence of Christians in Zimbabwe because to a large extent, Christians have been part of the crises that Zimbabwe has been going through. Christianity in Zimbabwe has largely lost its moral high ground from which it could exercise its oversight role of the government and state. Instead, the Christian establishment has, during the same period, been acting and behaving more and more as the state and government. The question, at this point, is,

why have we decided on 1997 as the starting point of our decades of crises?

The “Black Friday” is associated with the payment of gratuities to veterans of the second Chimurenga, which brought about political independence to Zimbabwe. I am not at all suggesting here that it was wrong to pay a token of appreciation to war veterans, but at the same time, I am not suggesting that there was no problem with the way the whole case was handled by government. In fact, one of the major problems emanating from the gratuities, was that, they had not been budgeted for by the government. Since the payment of unbudgeted for “gratuities” to liberation war ex-combatants in 1997, Zimbabwe has witnessed unparalleled economic meltdown for a country that is not at war. In 1997, as a response to the unbudgeted expenditure, the Zimbabwe dollar lost a huge chunk of its value overnight meaning the value of people’s savings and earnings in cash were wiped out without notice (Raftopoulos 2004:12). As more money was put into circulation, it is simple economics to see that this single act had the effect of driving prices of basic commodities up as well as inflation. Too much money chasing few goods made the goods more expensive, and this affected most of the working class because their salaries were not adjusted to cushion them against these price increases.

Living standards were greatly affected and this resulted in the uncoordinated “food riots” of January 1998, as people tried to salvage their livelihoods from government manufactured poverty. The same year (1998) saw Chief Svosve and his people occupying their traditional land, which was currently the commercial farm of a white commercial farmer and the government of Zimbabwe responded by brutally removing Chief Svosve and his people,

while protecting the “property rights” of the commercial farmer.¹ Central to the action of Chief Svosve’s actions being the fact that “loss of land means losing one’s fathers and the home of one’s childhood” (Mason 1970:106). All they wanted was to go back and live in the land of their birth (Bakare 1993:43). This act by Chief Svosve is interesting in that it came 18 years after independence and with no solution in sight on the land question, even though the land question was the main push factor behind the second Chimurenga. People had gone to war in order to reclaim their traditional lands, from which they had been driven out by the colonial regimes and white settler communities. Land is not simply land, it connects the living and the dead, it is the source of life for the living, it is the accommodation of the dead forebears, who are interred into the ground or in mountains. Being removed from these lands, was a form of disenfranchisement of the living and the living-dead. Reclaiming the land of the ancestors was an act of reconciling the living and the living-dead (Mbiti 1969, Joubert 2002). It is true that there were several constraints that made it difficult for the government to carry out a land redistribution exercise, yet the same government found “solutions” to the same constraints during the third Chimurenga fast-track land reform exercise, suggesting the lack of solutions was because government was acting on the basis of political expediency and not the common good.

Since the “Black Friday”, it has been one economic problem after another, the “radical land reform program”, which began in 2000 saw Zimbabwe’s agriculture sector failing to produce enough food

¹ See Fortious Nhambura’s Celebrating the Pioneers of Land Reform, *The Herald* 30/07/2015, which clearly articulates the role of the late Vice President, Simon Muzenda in the thwarting of the moves by Chief Svosve. www.herald.co.zw/celebrating-pioneers-of-land-reform/ accessed 12/07/2017.

to feed its people, fuel shortages came on board – forcing motorists to sleep in queues hoping to find petrol or diesel and making petrol attendants “big men and women” overnight as people sought “favours” from them. The “empty shelves” season of 2007 and 2008 as well as “cash shortages” of the same period meant those two years were among the most painful for ordinary Zimbabweans. People resorted to going to neighbouring countries to purchase groceries. Chitando (2013:84) writing of that period says “inflation [was] reaching the stratosphere, unemployment soaring and millions of citizens fleeing into economic and political exile.” Now, beginning 2016 and continuing into 2017 and with no end in sight, “cash shortages” have resurfaced in the country, people are sleeping at banks now with no guarantee that they will get their money from the banks. People work so hard to earn their money and now they are expected to work even harder to access that money from the banks! What Gunda (2012:22) observed in the light of the challenges of 2007-2009 rings true in the present as well, when he writes;

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

Since the government induced economic meltdown beginning 1997, Zimbabwe has also witnessed political problems of varying degrees and natures. The sharp pain caused by the loss of value of the Zimbabwe dollar in 1997 led to the formation of the National

Constitutional Assembly (NCA), which brought together Churches, Labour and Academia to try and force government to change course (Raftopoulos 2004:10). When this did not happen, as expected, the NCA birthed a political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), to challenge the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party, the governing party then and still the governing party in 2017. The formation of the MDC and the defeat of the government sponsored Constitution in the Referendum of February 2000, saw an unprecedented wave of political violence in the country after the end of Gukurahundi in the 1980s. Every election since 2000 has witnessed political violence, which has become an acceptable political tool of coercion for those who differ with the established positions of the ruling party and the supposed retaliation by those in opposition on ruling party sympathisers and activists. Hundreds of people have been murdered in politically motivated violence across the country. While leaders have been fighting for political preservation of themselves and their loot, the country has been burning with no one to put out the fire! Raftopoulos (2004:12) is right in observing that;

As the 1990s drew to a close, the political scene was marked both by signs of a strong emergent opposition and the menacing presence of coercive party structures being used to consolidate the position of a weakening executive. The millennium opened on a promising, but also threatening, balance of political forces.

Since the colonization of Zimbabwe towards the end of the 19th century by the British Empire, Christianity has rapidly established itself as the most dominant religion in the country. It is impossible to establish with certainty, the number of Zimbabweans who are practitioners of traditional religion, especially because traditional religion can easily co-exist with other faiths in the same individual. In that case, our position that Christianity is the most

dominant religion in Zimbabwe, is made here knowing fully well that among many Christians, both Christianity and traditional religion continue to co-exist peacefully, which could also suggest that there is a high prevalence of traditional religion in Zimbabwe. There is, however, a caveat to the prevalence of traditional religion, it is mostly practiced privately and in secret. Since the colonial era, a propaganda onslaught by missionaries and colonial governments denigrated traditional religion to be backward and, therefore, shameful for anyone to be seen to be following the traditional way of worship. What that means, is that Christianity is the most dominant publicly practiced religion in Zimbabwe. That the majority of Zimbabweans are Christians, means the political and economic problems we have witnessed in Zimbabwe have happened under Christian watch! Christians have been perpetrators and victims of the multiple crises that have bedeviled Zimbabwe since 1997. How can a well-meaning faith, as we constantly hear from preachers, become part and parcel of the malaise that is eating at the heart of a once vibrant and thriving society? There has been greater fragmentation of the Christian voice in Zimbabwe as the crises multiplied from 1997 and as many industries were shutting down, throwing people onto the streets, jobless and hopeless, Christianity has become one of the most thriving “business opportunities” for some Zimbabweans. This scenario has led to the rise of the concept of “Gosprenueurship” developed by Rejoice Ngwenya, and fronted by some of the mega-church prophets and apostles in Zimbabwe (Vengeyi 2013:329-30).

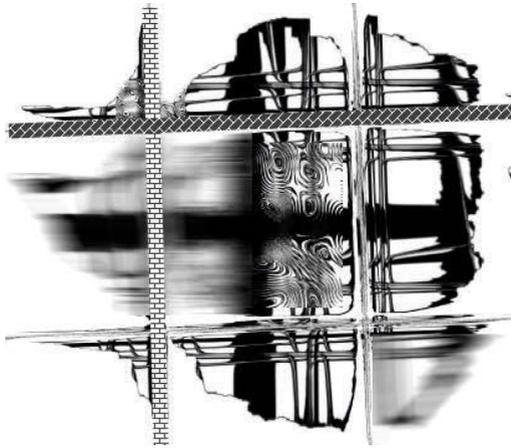
The picture painted above is indeed a sickening one for many well-meaning Zimbabweans! What inheritance are we bequeathing to our children and those that will come after them? Is this the only Zimbabwe that we can envision? What, a short while ago, was a decade of crises (Gunda & Kuegler 2012:16) is now two dec-

ades of crises and unless well-meaning citizens, especially Christians, do something we may as well witness the crises entering into their third decade. Indeed, “denying that Zimbabwe experienced [and continues to experience] a crisis of staggering proportions...is tantamount to dishonesty of the highest order” (Chitando 2013:x). There are two critical questions that I am posing to every Zimbabwean reading this book, particularly, Zimbabwean Christians: What have you done as a Christian to sustain or disrupt this situation? As Christians in Zimbabwe, can we not or should we not imagine, believe in and act to establish an alternative Zimbabwe? These two questions, are what I grapple with in this small book with the hope of sparking to life the spirit of the Christian faith in all of us to wrestle with the crises in our society and to put Zimbabwe on a path to justice, equality, equity and fairness, in short, let us restore Zimbabwe to a society that pleases God! When confronted with the injustice of the colonial systems, Canaan S. Banana (1986:7) made a commitment, to which we may need to align ourselves, as he argues;

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

Being a Christian is a deliberate commitment to stand for the affirmation of life and this affirmation is believed and to be lived out. It is not enough to say ‘I believe in the sanctity of human life or life in general’ unless we also proclaim that ‘I act for the protection and defense of human life and life in general.’ One of the major challenges exposed in all these crises is that at independence, we dropped our focus and let leaders to run with it while we cheered them on in the hope that they were playing for us. Gerald West’s words, describing apartheid and the post-apartheid period

in South Africa is very instructive for our own context. He writes; “The struggle against apartheid has been won. We have celebrated “the new South Africa” in democratic elections. But ... there are those who have voted but for whom much has still to change. So the struggle is not yet complete” (West 1995:15). Indeed, the same can be said of the evils of colonialism in Zimbabwe, while colonial masters were defeated, the evils of oppression, deprivation, injustice and inequity have remained firmly in place for the majority of Zimbabweans. This places Zimbabwe on the crossroads, the onus is on us to choose which way we go with our beloved Zimbabwe.



2 | At the crossroads: A social justice analysis of the context

If our young people see their leaders habitually engaging in acts and words which are hateful, disrespectful, racist, corrupt, lawless, unjust, greedy, dishonest and violent in order to cling to the privileges of power and wealth, it is highly likely that many of them will behave in exactly the same manner. The consequences of such overtly corrupt leadership as we are witnessing in Zimbabwe today will be with us for many years, perhaps decades, to come. Evil habits and attitudes take much longer to rehabilitate than to acquire. Being elected to a position of leadership should not be misconstrued as a license to do as one pleases at the expense of the will and trust of the electorate (ZCBC 05/04/2007).

Bringing a visitor to Zimbabwe, depending on which part of Zimbabwe you take your visitor to, they may draw completely opposite conclusions on the state of life in Zimbabwe. This is especially true if the visitor only visits Harare. Take the visitor to northern suburbs and they will certainly conclude that Zimbabwe is a thriving society with many rich people seen in the cars and houses that individuals own. Take your visitor to the eastern and western suburbs and they will certainly conclude that Zimbabwe is a very poor country with most of the citizens unemployed and just surviving! These observations are critical to the understanding of the paradox that Zimbabwe has become, a thriving society on the one hand and a struggling society on the other hand. While some are swimming in obscene wealth, others are languishing in stinking poverty! Interestingly, all are Christians! What is happening to our society? Why are we at this crossroads?

The economic meltdown triggered by the payment of “gratuities” to “War Veterans” of the liberation struggle in 1997 torched several fires that continue to burn in our society today. According to Paul Themba Nyathi (2004:71);

In the face of pressure from War Veterans, led by Dr. Chenjerai Hunzvi and the fear of losing the war veterans for his political preservation, Mugabe capitulated to their demands, and without consulting Cabinet or considering the budgetary and economic repercussions, Mugabe went ahead and unilaterally offered the approximately 5000[0] war veterans cash gratuities of Z\$50000 each, free healthcare and education for their families, and Z\$2000 monthly pension for life. This resulted in the immediate crash of the Zimbabwe dollar, which halved its value overnight in what is known as ‘Black Friday’ in November 1997.

I am aware that some would want to take this assertion to label me an ungrateful Zimbabwean who was liberated but fail to appreciate the sacrifices made by the fighters. That is far from the truth because I speak as one who had fifteen brothers participating in the war of liberation with some of my own brothers paying with their own lives for the independence we “supposedly” have today. I speak as a son of a man who was arrested by the Smith regime for coordinating the material support for freedom fighters in our rural village and who was only released from prison after independence. I speak as one whose grandmother broke her leg as she clandestinely transported food to the freedom fighters, even as they were supposed to be indoors in respect of a curfew imposed by the Smith regime to try and starve the freedom fighters. I speak as one who was made to understand the abnormality of life at a tender age as I was constantly made to witness the crisscrossing of our village by government soldiers, freedom fighters and the so-called Madzakutsaku of Bishop Muzorewa. I speak as one, who at a tender age was made to understand the reality of death and to fear it, as we became watchers for our parents, shouting on top of my voice “Baba, simudzai maoko (Father, lift up your hands!)” as Smith soldiers drove past our fields to show that we were not armed lest we would be shot dead on suspicion of being freedom fighters and armed. Finally, I speak as

one who loves Zimbabwe and who knows that on this whole wide earth, even as it is now a “global village”, there is only one small part of the village, which I can confidently call “my home!” For these reasons and others, I have not stated here, I will speak honestly, to myself and to you, dear reader. Those gratuities were given not as gratuities as such but as “tokens for political preservation” by those who had feasted for 17 years forgetting their comrades-in-arms after independence and who feared the feast was coming to an unplanned end!

The reality of the gratuities is that government chose to make fifty thousand Zimbabweans happy for a few months while sacrificing the future of millions and generations not yet born. A workforce that was already reeling under the impact of government’s Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), was further placed under a new but still debilitating situation as they saw their savings and earnings being eroded overnight as the Zimbabwe dollar was devalued by the single action, that saw more than 2 Billion dollars being introduced into the economy without any properly constituted economic policy to back it up. A lay man like me, can clearly understand that if one boy has ten girls chasing after him, he becomes extremely dear unlike if only one girl was interested in him. This injection of cash drove prices of commodities up meaning the income that workers were getting could only now buy a fraction of what it could buy before this cash injection. With companies crying foul, workers’ salaries were not adjusted in accordance with the devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar neither were they adjusted in line with inflation figures obtaining after the “gratuities”. Workers and ordinary Zimbabweans were

the greatest victims of that “moment of madness”² for political preservation. Since then, workers have been coerced spectators in a game in which they have been the field and ball! Since then, hardworking men and women of Zimbabwe have nothing to show for their hard-work except the scars of hard-work, for there has not been any reward for hard-work just greater punishment for it! The best sports fields know no reward except being abused by teams and players day in, day out! Sometimes, in fact, most times, bad pitches enjoy peace and tranquillity for teams and players keep away from them or in some cases they are only used when one team sees an opportunity for an unfair advantage over their opponents, such is the case of Zimbabwe. The good pitches have been battered left, right and center while the bad pitches are only used for the unfair advantage they present to those who know the terrain! The fact is that, with the benefit of hindsight, the so-called “gratuities” were bad for ordinary Zimbabweans, including the real War Veterans who had been neglected since independence unless they died during the few days of honeymoon brought about by the abundance of cash to spend, otherwise, ever since that payment, the neglected War Veterans have suffered even more post-gratuities than they did pre-gratuities with a few exceptions.

Closely connected to the gratuities but named differently was the War Victims Compensation Fund, which blew into an embarrassing scandal that made Zimbabwe a joke of a society. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with compensating victims of war,

² Mugabe only acknowledged the atrocities once in 1999, at the funeral of the late Vice-President Joshua Nkomo describing it as a moment of madness (*The Southern Eye* 02/07/2013 <http://www.southerneye.co.zw/2013/07/02/gukurahundi-dabengwa-demands-apology/> accessed 12/07/2017).

that is a noble idea. The problem in Zimbabwe, was that this was another sorry excuse for those in the know to loot state resources. Most of the real victims of the war, those who were maimed, orphaned and widowed by the War were not the ones who were compensated, instead, those who had been lining their pockets as high ranking and high net worth individuals in Zimbabwe, were the ones who rushed to allocate themselves huge sums of money in compensation for their sacrifices towards the liberation of this country. If anything, the War Victims Compensation Fund proved indeed that we were a country in trouble, among the top ranking civil servants supposedly driving the society were individuals who were declared “90 to over 100% disabled” most of them examined by War Veterans chairman, Chenjerai Hunzvi;

Hunzvi himself claimed 117 % disability but was only awarded 85%. Vice-President Joice Mujuru claimed to be 55% disabled. Other notable people who received compensation after claiming high disability levels include Oppah Muchinguri (65%), former ZBC manager Robin Shava (100%) and Vivian Mwashita (94%). First lady Grace Mugabe’s deceased brother Reward Marufu claimed 95% disability (Nehanda Radio 2011).

How could someone, so severely injured, be still good enough to be a minister or service chief? The fund reeked of corruption, greediness, injustice everything but good intentions! Tax-payers’ money was siphoned into the pockets of the few and well to do individuals. Those deserving of compensation were ignored, most never knew of the existence of such a fund until it was exposed through some litigation in the courts of law with newspapers widely reporting on what had been happening in the country. In short, the War Victims Compensation Fund was a vehicle through which national resources were looted by a few individuals who had already been well compensated through their appointments into senior civil service offices after independence. This possibly

justifies the view by Max Gluckman (1963:127) that “in African political life, men were rebels and never revolutionaries.” In elaborating the distinction between rebellions and revolutions, Scholz (2004:23) writes;

A rebellion is the overthrow of a government, whereas a revolution is the overthrow of a social order in favour of a new system of social structures and values. A rebellion replaces one set of individuals with another, while a revolution brings about a fundamental change in the social, political and economic conditions of society. Rebels want to take the place of the rulers they displace, while revolutionaries want to build a new social order.

The developments in post-colonial Zimbabwe appear to testify to this characterization of rebellions. We replaced the white faces from the colonial times with black faces but to the same effect! Interestingly, most of them were and are Christians!

The problem with trying to cover up a hole by putting it in a bigger hole is that every time you must be willing to dig a bigger and deeper hole! This, dear reader, has been the unfortunate case of Zimbabwe. Once you whet someone’s appetite, be prepared to address his/her needs all the time, especially, if you whet the appetite in less than straightforward ways. The “gratuities” and “compensation” needed cash, which was fast running out, other means of payment had to be found. Land came into play in 2000, soon after the rejection of the government sponsored Constitution – a decision, which I think most of us today regret for, even though it was a bad constitution maybe it would have solved some of the problems that continue to bedevil us today – in a referendum. That also was interesting for it was merely 2 years after Chief Svosve and his people had been brutally and ruthlessly dealt with by the government for daring to occupy a farm that had been created by chasing their parents from their ancestral lands. What had changed in those two years? This is interesting, the desire

remained the same, political preservation remained the goal, only that two years earlier with the government still courting the Western powers, occupying white owned farmland was bad for political preservation. However, two years later, with War Veterans threatening to turn on their former buddies who were now greedily looting state resources for themselves while ignoring their foot soldiers, political preservation demanded sacrificing the white farmer. After all, politics is a game of numbers, four thousand white farmers compared to fifty thousand war veterans and many others who depended on them meant millions of black Zimbabweans. Land reform, radical and violent and certainly unplanned became government policy! For once, let us move away from the petty and trivial dichotomy of suggesting that critiquing the manner of the land reform exercise is in itself a rejection of the need for a land reform exercise. In fact, from the 1990s, various people in Zimbabwe, prominent and not-so prominent had already been questioning government on why no land reform was happening even as the 10-year moratorium had elapsed. I also understand that there were many legal hurdles in the way of government, but the same government found a way to hurdle over the challenges after the 2000 referendum, why did they not do the same in the 1990s? Dear reader, the government did not want land reform then, it was against their goal of political preservation at that time. Once, some white farmers resorted to take government to court to challenge the land reform, government responded by forcing the white Chief Justice out of office, appointed one of their own in that office and most importantly, with a two-thirds majority in Parliament enacted the enabling laws to make what had been an illegal exercise legal! Why was this not done in the 1990s? We had black jurists who could become Chief Justice and ZANU-PF had

99% majority in Parliament, the two ingredients to the “success” of the Radical Land Reform or Third Chimurenga.

The beginning of the new millennium could not have started any worse than it did in Zimbabwe, the land reform induced poverty in Zimbabwe gave rise to fuel shortages in the country, which triggered unprecedented price hikes on all basic commodities, which then saw Zimbabwe experience world record inflation rates. The economic meltdown continued to eat away what was left of the workers’ income resulting in too many strikes for the few who still had jobs. We witnessed the precarious food shortages of 2007 – 2008 that forced Zimbabweans to flee to any place in the world they could secure a place to live. Some even braved the war zones, with Zimbabweans bravely taking up jobs in terrifying places like Iraq and Afghanistan. How could a nation, well-resourced with natural endowments suffer so much? How could a President sleep peacefully with so much suffering going on in his/her country? We were conveniently told that sanctions, imposed by Britain and her allies at the insistence of the Morgan Tsvangirai-led MDC, were the reason for our suffering, some believed the “gospel of sanctions” others refused to buy it. Tellingly, when delivering the Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Public Lecture at the University of Zimbabwe, Vice President, Retired General Dr. Constantino Guvheya Chiwenga was quoted as having said;

Even if the country was under sanctions, there were so many (issues) that were not affected by sanctions, but the leadership was just hiding behind such in some things that they could solve internally and some people who were not constitutionally mandated to do so were now making decisions that affected the smooth operations of the State and they would fire people left, right and centre, those they felt they did not like,” he said. When we were going around the country this other day with President Mnangagwa and Vice President Kembo Mohadi, we saw bridges which were built long ago, but with no roads to connect them. For example, the

road from Karoi to Magunje which is supposed to link with Victoria Falls, thereby cutting the journey by half, but 38 years down the line it was ignored by the old dispensation (Herald, 28/06/2018).

Interestingly, this is instructive coming from a man, who has been at the forefront of blaming sanctions and literally forcing Zimbabweans to accept that it was sanctions and not mismanagement that had contributed the most to the problems we were experiencing. Now, that Mugabe has gone, we are now told that sanctions are not really our biggest problem, yet some among the top echelons of ZANU (PF) and Government continue to peddle the sanctions-lie.

The question of sanctions is a difficult one to address comprehensively in a short piece like this one, and certainly, it cannot be addressed by a lay man in economic theory, like myself. However, from my lay man's perspective, the problem was not that we did not have \$20, instead the problem is that we refuse to account for the \$10 that we had. Like the "Gratuities" and the "War Victims Compensation Fund", sanctions became another ruse to loot state coffers by those whose fingers were long enough to reach out into treasury coffers. Is it not surprising that when most of us were reducing the sizes of our belts, or more precisely, when we were adding new holes to our belts to deal with our decreasing waistlines and expanding trousers and skirts, others were effectively extending their belts, as they showed signs of thriving amidst such poverty? As clearly articulated by Vice President Chiwenga, we should have been doing much better as a country even with the so-called sanctions or targeted sanctions. The question is, why did we not thrive?

The turn of the millennium saw the unprecedented widening of the gap between those who have and those who did not have.

There was movement in both directions, those who had been high up through honest hard work saw a new Zimbabwe that basically punished such people and began their downward mobility to join the masses in the classes of those who do not have. Hard work and honesty ceased to be virtues for those who wanted to thrive in this new Zimbabwe. On the other hand, those who were daring and were willing to pay the right price for political protection suddenly accelerated into the ranks of those who have in abundance. Education, which once was the key to success, became an albatross on many people's necks! The educated masses became the laughing stock of our society, teachers, once revered for being the bedrock upon which our thriving society hinged became the laughing stock of the society. Some students were given pocket money, enough to pay all the teachers at their school for the whole term! The rich became obscenely wealthy while the poor endured stinking poverty! In the process, the moral compass of our society became dysfunctional, what was once immoral became moral and what was once moral became immoral, this is where we are today. A people with a faulty moral compass!

In order to justify this moral, economic and political malaise, a new animal was invented in the name of entrepreneurship, we were made to believe that those who were excelling had forsaken the useless education, which trained people to be employees by deciding to make their own employers. Indeed, such a shift would have been great for this country but where are their companies? Where are the products they are making? Where are the services they are offering? Nothing, nothing and nothing! All we saw were the mountain-top villas, top-of-the-range cars and photos on Facebook of holidays in some of the most expensive places on earth. Dear reader, there was no evidence of entrepreneurship anywhere in the country, other than the normal places where we have al-

ways seen enterprising individuals like Gazaland, Siyaso and Glen View Area 8. Most of the so-called companies were tucked in some briefcase, somewhere only to be produced when government tenders were being advertised. Our so-called entrepreneurship programme was as aptly stated by others as “tenderpreneurship” by individuals well-connected to senior officials within the corridors of power, that is, if they were not mere conduits by the powers-that-be themselves for, you guessed right, siphoning out state resources into private pockets. Instead of improving the livelihoods of Zimbabweans, these high-sounding policy declarations have been nothing but strategically positioned platforms for coordinated state-resources looting by an organized cabal led by senior government officials. For, how else can we explain the fact that each of these policy declarations has seen the gap between the rich and poor widening instead of narrowing?

If the Constitutional Referendum of 2000 was free and fair and violence free, the same cannot be claimed for elections held in Zimbabwe from June 2000 to the last byelections held in 2017. Elections are supposed to be an opportunity for ordinary citizens to freely and willingly assign their collective power to a group that will govern the nation on their behalf. All things being equal, election season is supposed to be an open market for political contenders to go to the people and market their product with the people deciding, after listening to all the marketing done by all the players, whose product they think would work well for them! We do not have to all be shareholders of Econet, Net One or Telecel for us to use their products, do we? Do we all have to be shareholders of Standard Chartered Bank, Stanbic Bank, CBZ or NMB for us to be account holders with these banks? We do not even have to be members of Dynamos Football Club, Highlanders Football Club or CAPS United Football Club for us to be their

supporters, do we? Why then, do political parties think we should all become card-carrying members for us to vote for them? Being forced to become members is inadvertently taking away from us our power to make informed decisions on whose product offers us the best solutions within our context. That is why we consider a lot of factors before we open bank accounts or before we buy our mobile line. Zimbabwe has, in the new millennium, been moving towards the “political partying” of every Zimbabwean leading to many Zimbabweans becoming members of all political parties for fear of victimization if one is found not to have the membership card of the party in front of you. We do not have to be party members for us to exercise our right to vote, we are potential buyers and the political parties are sellers, let them convince us to buy what they are selling or better still, let us tell the political players what product we want, and they must come up with programmes and policies that address our aspirations!

Unfortunately, the political environment since 2000 has been such that political parties in general have ceased to be sellers and have become bullies who have resorted to bullying their way to power! When you sell a good product, it is easier to convince people to buy and those who buy can willingly become your volunteer marketers as they speak glowingly about the product they bought and even direct others to the same seller! However, when you sell rubbish products, those who buy will realise their mistake and will warn others from making a similar mistake making it extremely difficult to sell anymore products from your stock. This is the problem of the current millennium elections in Zimbabwe! The product on sale has been thoroughly discredited that instead of trying to market it in persuasive ways, it was shoved down the people’s throats by bullies who did not care what the people wanted, they just had to consume what had been prepared. Reminds

me, dear reader, of a friend who visited Nigeria and booked himself into some cheap lodge, whose webpage spoke glowingly of the meals they make and many other services they offered, including world class point of sale machines for all international credit cards. They even had a brilliant menu brochure, which they even gave their guests every meal time but interestingly every day, they did not have any of the meals on the menu, just the “Today’s Special”, which was obviously not on the Menu card! At the end of the day, the guests had to eat what the chef had decided to make for that day! They still needed cash payment from their guests because their POS machines were down every day! Is that not the case with our politics? Since 2000, what is it that we have been voting for?

Violence, politically motivated violence, has become our reason to vote! Most of us have voted not because we wanted to vote but because we had to vote in order for us to preserve our very lives. We have voted because we have been bullied into voting and, therefore, many of us have even voted for people who did not even attempt to sell even a dead donkey. They just said, we could be the dead donkey and off we ran to the polling station. Those that tried to resist were made examples of what could happen and realizing that the most difficult transition is from one girlfriend/boyfriend (wife) to two and not from two to twenty, we knew if one could suffer this fate, many of us could suffer the same fate! For my friends, the most difficult challenge is moving from no pint of beer to 1 pint of beer and not from 1 pint of beer to a crate! The fundamental transition was, in the first scenario, from 1 to 2 and, in the second scenario, from 0 to 1. Once political violence became a tool that could be used to get votes, it became a snowball, growing as it hurtled down from one election to the other – violence begets violence and more violence! Violence and counter-

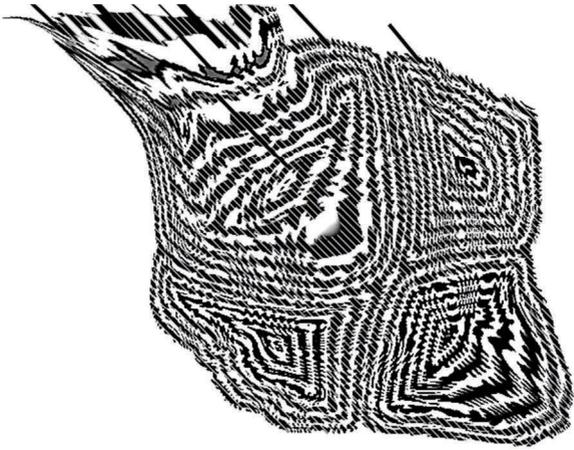
violence, which is still violence has now become the political narrative of our elections. I have one explanation for this surge in politically motivated violence in our society, the market sellers are selling rubbish products that no sane person would willingly buy hence they have resorted to bullying the buyers into buying the product regardless of whether they want it or not!

The political players in Zimbabwe, especially those wielding state power, from the colonial to the post-colonial times have largely defined and branded their political opponents in terms that make the use of violence not only desirable but necessary and acceptable. In order to whip up emotions and hatred for the freedom fighters, white colonial settlers defined, and branded freedom fighters as mindless terrorists bent on disturbing the peace brought about by colonialism (Lapsley 1996:34). Articulating on the post-colonial Zimbabwean crisis, and drawing on Nazi experiences in Germany, we are informed that

Once an enemy has been defined and branded as an alien or belonging to a different race, its violation and elimination is viewed as not only justifiable (in defense of national interests) ... but also as redemptive (cleansing the nation of impurities) ... While the enemy was the 'unpatriotic Jew' bent on sabotaging the nation at every opportunity in Nazi Germany...in Zimbabwe the enemy was the 'white farmers' conspiring with the British, Americans and local black puppets within the MDC (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya 2011).

In short, man-made structures of sin have been developed in Zimbabwe to benefit a few whilst impoverishing the masses. A lot of the crises we have experienced can hardly be blamed on factors that are beyond our control. Droughts have hit us more often in this new millennium, that is true, but we still did manage to handle the much more severe 1992 drought as a country, did we not? Self-serving policy pronouncements have been central to the mis-

trust and anarchy that has crept into our society, if laws are not respected by those who enact them, and those connected to them, who really would believe in the so-called “rule of law” except those citizens who are not well-connected, who are, therefore, afraid of being made scapegoats by an elaborate system that values the life and comfort of the very few top officials? Is this our fate or can we re-envision a new fate for ourselves? As Christians, are we not ashamed that all this has happened under our watch and even then, most of the perpetrators of these evils are supposedly our “brothers and sisters in Christ”? Where have we been, as Christians and as the Church, as our society lost its moral compass?



3 | At the crossroads: A socio-theological analysis of the church in Zimbabwe

If the church adopts an ascetic attitude towards political participation then, it becomes socially irrelevant, as it would be other-worldly in orientation and denying involvement in issues which affect its members (Chimuka 2013:32).

As Churches, we confess to have failed the nation because we have not been able to speak with one voice. We have often not been the salt and the light that the Gospel calls us to be. We, therefore, confess our failure and ask for God's forgiveness (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006:10).

The church in Zimbabwe has largely been a blessing to the people of Zimbabwe. Through the church, the people of Zimbabwe were exposed to a faith that not only gave people the hope for a blissful life after death but equally equipped people with the knowledge of a life diametrically opposed to the life that the colonial regimes were offering them. Where the colonial regimes suggested black people were only good for labour for the attainment of comfort for the white folk, the church brought a text that suggested all human beings were willed a life of comfort and happiness by God. Even though most white missionaries were co-opted into the programmes of the colonial governments, the "Good News" of Jesus of Nazareth still filtered through to the black majority. Even though some white missionaries and their local collaborators over-emphasized the "pie in the sky gospel," the real Gospel of justice and freedom still filtered down to the black masses. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the church played a sterling role in restoring the humanity of the dehumanized black majority. Since, the 1890s, when the church was successfully planted in Zimbabwe, it has grown from strength to strength.

Among the key contributions of the church to the emancipation of the black majority was through its social services wing, that is, through the school and the hospital – the church left an indelible mark on the life of black Zimbabweans. Where the colonial governments sought to deprive blacks of formal education, the church opened up mission schools for the blacks and where hospitals were mostly established in urban areas, to treat the blacks who were working for the white masters – to prolong their servitude, the church in Zimbabwe opened up mission hospitals across the country, especially in the areas mostly populated by the black masses. Sound theology was put into the services that the church was bringing to the black masses. The schools and hospitals were platforms for evangelism and training and the results of this aspect of the church’s mission was evident in that the liberation war was mostly driven by people who had been mentored in the mission schools. Even though some white missionaries were vehemently opposed to the war of liberation, the education they had opened up to the blacks had allowed them to reason on the injustice being dished out to their people every day by the colonial regimes. There were, however, some white missionaries who actively supported the war of liberation because they believed the “Good News of Jesus of Nazareth” did not approve of the treatment that blacks were getting from the colonial regimes.

Away from the indirect roles played by the Church during the colonial era, the formation of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) saw some white missionaries taking up a much more direct and confrontational approach to the eradication of the falsehoods communicated by the Smith regime regarding what was really obtaining in the country during the war years. The CCJP took it upon itself to document and publicize the atrocities, which were being committed by the Smith regime, which was by

far more severe and brutal than the atrocities allegedly committed by freedom fighters, which the State media was hyping to the International community (Chitando 2013:85). The work of the CCJP was critical in painting the freedom fighters for who they really were, that is, freedom fighters and not terrorists! The International community was swayed from a negative perception of freedom fighters to one of indifference or even to a positive perception. The church, through the CCJP, was successfully extricating itself from the role of a handmaid to the colonial regime. For that, dear reader, we have every reason to celebrate Christianity in Zimbabwe!

There is, however, something that was particularly bad about the church that we got at the end of the 19th century in Zimbabwe! The biggest problem with the Christian faith in Zimbabwe is that we got a fragmented Christian faith packaged in the form of multiple denominations, which hardly preached the same gospel! According to Zvobgo (1996:3-6) between 1890 and 1893, missionaries from at least five denominations arrived in Zimbabwe alongside the Colonial settlers. In the schemes of the colonial settlers, “Churches were seen as partners in the development of the colony and for many years churches were at the service of the settler regime’s agenda” (Ruzivo 2013:3). The multiplicity of supposed Christian voices was the greatest weakness of the church in colonial Zimbabwe and unfortunately, it remains the greatest weakness of the church in independent or post-colonial Zimbabwe. Having multiple denominations meant that competition was inevitable and because the denominations were competing, many a time, a Christian proclamation was opposed and challenged by another Christian proclamation. Where some denominations supported the war of liberation, others were actively offering support to the colonial regimes to maintain their grip on power and

privilege, some of which naturally filtered down to white missionaries as well. In some cases, denominations were divided between those who supported the black majority and others who supported the minority colonial regimes. Such a divide in the church was so apparent in the reactions to the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Program to Combat Racism, which offered support to freedom fighters during the war, a program that was endorsed by the Christian Council of Rhodesia (CCR) (Lapsley 1996:34). On this programme, Bishop Paul Burrough of the Mashonaland Diocese of the Anglican Church said;

I believe that the conscience of many Christians was outraged recently by the action of the World Council of Churches. The outrage was because the Council said in effect that the violence which is inherent in Apartheid must, in the name of Christ, be answered by violence. This seemed to deny Christ's Gospel (Lapsley 1996:34).

Following this clear condemnation of the Program to Combat Racism by the Bishop to the Diocesan Synod, Father Arthur Lewis then moved a motion;

That this Synod supports the Bishop's condemnation of the decision of the World Council of Churches to grant financial aid to terrorist organizations. Synod requests the Bishop to follow this up by making the strongest representations to the World Council of Churches to reverse its decision and use the money to spread the Christian gospel of love and reconciliation (Lapsley 1996:34).

Interestingly at the 1971 Anglican Consultative Council in Nairobi and after discussing the WCC Program to Combat Racism's Special Fund, the Council concluded:

In our judgement no public action of the Churches during the past 25 years has done so much to arouse public discussion on a moral issue. It has given to ordinary people an indication of the fact that the Churches are ready to stand by the oppressed and exploited even when there is some risk to themselves. It has com-

pelled Christian people to recognize that the Church is not necessarily on the side of the wealthy and powerful. This recognition has been disturbing and cleansing. From the point of view of the total witness of the Church in the world, the majority of us find this action of the WCC to be the most important thing it has done in its history. Therefore, we endorse and commend to Anglicans everywhere the WCC program (Lapsley 1996:36).

What this back and forth clearly attests is that Christian on Christian was the order of the day regarding the lives of the black majority in Rhodesia. There were those that appeared to care by proclaiming non-violence when the actual violence was that, which had placed a minority of White settlers as masters of the black majority. Unfortunately, some White missionaries, themselves beneficiaries of this violence did not want to see this violence hence they labelled freedom fighters, “terrorists”. The supposed collusion between white missionaries and colonial regimes, was one of the reasons that led to the rise of African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe, who directly or indirectly became bedfellows with the freedom fighters (Manyonganise 2014:162).

The coming on board of some denominations and individual Christians in the war of liberation, while good then, created also another challenge on the role of the church in independent Zimbabwe. How was the church to relate to the new black majority government, which had been a bedfellow during the war? How was the church to relate to the new black majority government, which had been an enemy during the war, for some? None, from across the divide in the church, was in a better position. For those that were bedfellows with the liberation movement, could they extricate themselves from this marriage of convenience and reclaim their role of oversight over the new government? After all the problems that they had suffered together in the bush, could they bring themselves to becoming the voice of the voiceless,

which character trait had been responsible for bringing them into becoming bedfellows? The church was in a critical and difficult place. The context of the Church after independence is likened to that of the Church in post-World War II Germany through the eyes of Jürgen Moltmann. According to Scholz, when Moltmann returned to Germany he observed that;

In civic life, in politics, and especially among the Christian churches, reconstruction had taken the form of restoring the pre-war status quo. The churches, he wrote, had installed themselves comfortably in post-war Germany and gained more influence on education, the press, politics and economics than was good for them, for they were being used by powerful politicians and economic interests... Something similar has happened in Zimbabwe (Scholz 2004:19-20).

On the other side, there were those who had refused to see sense in the quest for liberation, who had, therefore, consistently preached a gospel of non-violence, as if colonization was not violent enough on blacks, as a way of maintaining the status quo. Could these Christians bring themselves to critique the excesses of the black government without attracting the wrath of the majority for being unrepentant colonialists? Could they change their gospel and start praising the new government without attracting the wrath of the majority for being opportunists who flew with the wind always? The church at independence was caught between a hard place and a rock, and the appointment of Rev. Canaan S. Banana as the first President of Zimbabwe did not make the situation any better for the church. It appears to me that only the CCJP maintained its critical position of standing for Justice and Peace and the essence of the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, seen particularly through their work of documenting the atrocities committed in Matebeleland and Midlands provinces during the

Gukurahundi era, which has been labeled “a moment of madness” by Robert G. Mugabe.

What are we seeing here, a history of inconsistency and contradiction is a phrase that sums up the church very well in Zimbabwe. The multiple voices we inherited from the initial planting of the church in Zimbabwe continued through the colonial era and have remained firmly intact. In fact, the voices have multiplied even more and in the period, that we are particularly interested in from 1997, the voices have become too many and too distant from each other that we may be tempted to start thinking of Christianities in Zimbabwe and not simply Christianity. During this period, however, we saw Christians coming together and actively sponsor the creation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), the body that must be credited with forcing government to appoint a Constitutional Commission, which came up with the Constitution that was eventually rejected in a Referendum in 2000. The success of the NCA in this regard, shows the power and strength of the Christian voice when it is coordinated and singular in its pronouncements. If there was any doubt, as to the inherent power of the Christian community, then the work of the NCA in its original version clearly demonstrated that the church could be such a powerful institution with the power and clout to extract response from an arrogant government. The formation of the MDC, from the work of the NCA also shows that the church was intrinsically connected to the quest to dislodge a government that had become drunk with power that it was now disengaging itself from the ordinary people who had always been its bedrock. The church, at that time, chose to stand with the people, just as Jesus had done in 1st century Palestine. The next key attempt by the church to summon its power and clout, was somewhat underwhelming! When the decade of crises was now in full swing, church leaders

under the umbrella of Heads of Christian Denominations (HoCD) came up with *The Zimbabwe We Want* document, which was a far cry from the magnitude of the problems that ordinary Zimbabweans were enduring. Then, instead of acting for transformation, the church opted to join the fray of academics and opted to theorize for transformation. The church even opted for diplomacy instead of preaching the gospel, that is, rejecting oppression, repression and exploitation while leading the way in demanding liberation, freedom and justice. The competitive spirit was playing havoc with the Christian voice once again. Great opportunities have been missed because the church spoke with forked tongues.

While part of the church saw the multiple crises as manifestations of man-made structures of sin in our society that needed to be dismantled in order to re-establish a society built on justice, equality, equity and fairness, others saw the crises as a platform for propagating a gospel of prosperity, which would be sweet music to the ears of weary Zimbabweans, who saw no hope in the ways of this world and looked up to heaven for solutions. While the former was pointing towards the structures put in place by the government, thereby challenging the legitimacy of a government that was responsible for the mass production of poverty and deprivation among its own citizenry, the latter was driving people's attention away from social structures that made them jobless and penniless to the existence of spiritual structures that could only be fought through a spiritual warfare (see Anderson 2004, Togarasei 2013). While one voice laid the blame squarely on the government and its policies, the other laid the blame squarely on an individual's prayer life. Prayer warriors were thriving while prayer weaklings were being devoured by the devil seen through their suffering and lack. In short, the government was not to blame for your

problems, you were your own enemy! Miracles, wealth and health were all there for the taking only if one prayed hard enough and if they seeded enough to reap a bumper harvest. The mainstream voice, suddenly saw itself under siege and government was obviously cheerleading as Christians took each other down! The prosperity preachers do not have to explicitly come out in support of government policy or programmes, the message itself, implicitly absolves the government of any wrong doing in the economic and social malaise bedevilling the people.

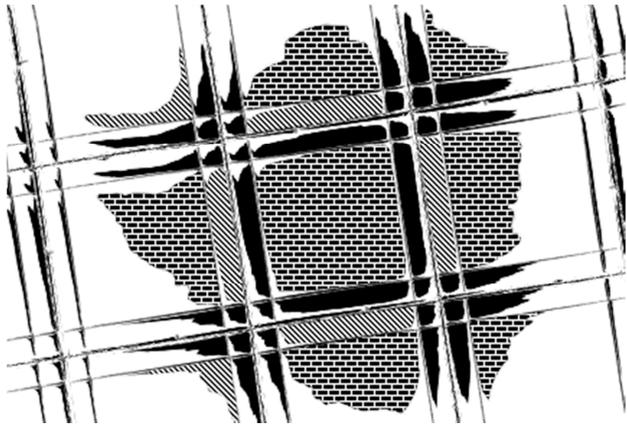
Among the most useless inventions by the church during these crises, was the so-called “National Day of Prayer” projects. While these were roundly supported from across the divide of the church, they only served to trivialize the reality of suffering that the people were enduring. Sermons, invoking phantom spiritual enemies of Zimbabwe were roundly celebrated and well covered by the state media, showing just how useless they were in exposing the real problems and perpetrators behind the crises in Zimbabwe. In calling for national days of prayer, the church was just showing the government or all other perpetrators that it was up to the bully to stop his behaviour else he would die a bully! Why were there no National Days of Marching for Freedom and Justice targeted at known institutions and personalities who were known to be and who even acknowledged to be perpetrators of injustice and violence? Dear reader, I am not opposed to days of prayer, we need them! I am opposed to replacing action with inaction disguised as “greater action”! Imagine a day, when Bishops in their robes with their staves, clergy in their collars and Christians with their Bibles marching for freedom and justice, who would stand up to the peace-loving Christians of this beautiful country? Instead, what did we get and what did we give – long prayers, prayerful songs, many tongues, huge praises and some faint

whispers of freedom and justice! Would Jesus, Our Lord and Saviour call for a day of prayer or a day of action? We, the Christians, have become the worst enemies of Zimbabwe for refusing to give direction to the way this country must be governed. I am not even thinking here that we should worry about who is governing the country, we should decide, how this country is governed (Mtata, ZCC General Secretary 2017).

Something bothers me the most in all these developments. The church, as at independence, is in no small trouble with the developments in Zimbabwe. How must the church relate to the people who have been central in the mass production of hopelessness through the systematic entrenchment of structures of sin that are responsible for most of the crises that we have witnessed in these two decades? This difficult situation, dear reader, arises because bluntly speaking, the church is the perpetrator and victim of these man-made crises. How does the church extricate itself from itself? What am I saying? The authors of the crises outlined in the previous chapter were predominantly Christian, belonging to one or another of the multiple Christian voices in our community. The looters of state resources through the various vehicles, publicly presented as government policy blueprints, have been predominantly Christian! The perpetrators of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe have been largely Christian! The people who have been behind the buying, selling and hoarding of cash are largely Christian. The people who are behind the culture of profiteering in Zimbabwe are Christian. The people who are supposed to investigate crimes and bring the perpetrators to book but who decide to look aside and sometimes bring victims to book are Christian. As Chitando (2013:87) rightly observes regarding the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC)'s *Pastoral Letter* of April 2007; "the bishops lay bare the contradictions that characterized

society. [However], it is surprising that they do not question the depth of the faith of the members. Indeed, they do not pause to ask how it is possible for members who share the same faith, participate in the same rituals, to proceed to cause pain on one another.” In fact, everything that has gone wrong in Zimbabwe has been under the watch of Christians mostly. In a way, we are what is wrong with Zimbabwe today!

Is this what we are called to as Christians? Can we re-trace our steps back to re-discover what it means to be Christian? Can we re-imagine an alternative Zimbabwe that will thrive even as we reclaim our faith in Jesus Christ? Dear reader, I believe that you and I can reclaim our faith in Jesus Christ and that you and I can act to establish a just and fair society that we all can be proud of.



4 | Called to what? A socio-historical interrogation of the Jesus' movement

The oppressed find in the biblical text resources for their struggle. Liberation interpreters, both the lay people participating in the reading and the scholars who have the liberation of the oppressed their primary academic agenda, read the biblical text through the lens of grinding poverty, rampant disease, premature death and socio-political powerlessness. In the text they find the assurance that their suffering is not willed by God but unjustly imposed by those in power and that God is on the side of the oppressed (Schneiders 2006:100-101).

Many times, I am asked, whether there is one voice in the Bible and why, if such a single voice exists, there are so many Christian churches that clearly do not agree on many things? Why should one Bible, with the single voice of God inspire disunity among the readers of the same Bible? This is a complex question that would require attention in its own right. What I will do in this chapter, is to address briefly the question of our calling as Christians. To begin with, from Genesis 1 to 18, there are several cases of human wickedness that angers God, suggesting that God had intended for peace, harmony, righteousness and justice among the human beings created by God, seen especially, in the disobedience in the garden of Eden (Gen. 3), the murder of Abel (Gen. 4), the fornication between the sons of God and the daughters of men (Gen. 6) and the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). However, these chapters suggest that left to their own devices, human beings were likely to forego justice and righteousness as the strong overpowered the weak. This made God, to set apart, an individual and line of persons through whom God's project of establishing a society based on righteousness and justice would continue. This is the background to the choosing of Abraham and in Genesis 18: 19, God explicitly states the charge that is laid on Abraham. The

charge or duty or responsibility laid on Abraham by God is for him to “lead his descendants in righteousness and justice” (Bruckner 2001:133-4, 142-146). Even though specially set aside, Israel was not always faithful to the charge laid on Abraham and throughout her history, she strayed from this path. This led to the setting apart of the prophets.

One of the defining characteristics of ancient Israelite prophets, was the fact that while they were mortals, they were a special group of mortals who were specially set aside for a particular mission in the service of God, the God of Israel, Yahweh! The process of being set apart has been widely understood as “calling”. An individual was “called by God” to serve God! Such an individual became a servant of God whose mission was to proclaim God’s word, especially of displeasure towards the actions of the people. According to John Hayes (1971:159), Hebrew prophets “were certainly concerned about the future – especially the immediate future – but they were also concerned with the whole fabric of their contemporary culture... they were preachers and spokesmen who addressed their contemporaries with their understanding of Yahweh’s will and word.” Prophets were meant to show people where they were going wrong and how they could redress their misdemeanors at the same time they also were supposed to communicate to the people the potential consequences of their actions. Time and again, the Lord raised prophets to warn Israel and to cajole Israel to do what was right and pleasing to God. Yahwism or the religion of Israel in the Old Testament, was a religion that challenged the worldview dominant in the Ancient Near East that time. McConville (2006:20) is right when observing that “biblical Yahwism is found, through the pages of the Old Testament, in critical dialogue with the powers and ideologies of the region, and in life-or death conflict with them. Israel's confession of the 'one-

ness' of Yahweh (Deut. 6.4) is embedded in a work that is itself a redrawing of the religious and ideological map of the ancient world. The belief in Yahweh as one is a response to the monopolistic imperialisms that perennially threaten to absorb and obliterate Israel.”

From the formation of the Israelite state, the desire was always to establish a community that would be just and fair to all, citizens and strangers alike! Israel was supposed to be the state that would infect and affect her neighbours to move towards justice and fairness in all their daily living and transactions. The attempt at a king-less society was to realise this dream because kings were behind most of the atrocities committed against most ordinary people in the known world of Egypt, Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia, the so-called Ancient Near East (ANE). In the presentation of Israel as the chosen people of God, the Old Testament makes it clear that God intended for justice and righteousness among all people but as it was proving impossible, as kings sought to grab everything made by God for their private and selfish desires. God then moves from trying to instill justice and righteousness in all people at the same time, instead “God's purpose to bring into being a human society that lives according to justice and righteousness in his creation is carried forward by means of his chosen people Israel” (McConville 2006:70). In this region, justice was always determined by one's standing in the face of the king! Instead of infecting the region with her just and fair ways, Israel was the one who was infected by the unjust and unfair ways of the region and from the establishment of the monarchy (1 Sam.8:4-6), Israel was lurching from one injustice to the other. Israel, the project of God for the establishment of justice and righteousness in the world became a failed project. God, however, did not give

up on the project and through the systematic calling of prophets, God continued to try to bring Israel back to her original calling.

The incarnation in Jesus can best be understood within the context of God's attempts to persist with the justice, fairness and righteousness project. The world could re-discover its goodness only if it could be led onto the path of justice and fairness and for that to happen, one small society acting as a pilot project could accomplish a great deal of that transformation. Our reading of the Jesus narratives in the New Testament must be "in a conscious and structured project of action for social or personal transformation" (Schneiders 2006:100). Imagine what a small pinch of salt can do to whatever it is mixed with! Alternatively, imagine what a small injection of light can do to a room covered in darkness! Israel was supposed to act as a transformative agent to the world, the "Light and Salt" of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). Since the use of mortal prophets had failed to achieve this goal, God came in the form of a man, Jesus of Nazareth to push this agenda forward. The Gospels tell the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ and as they are written from within the community of faith that followed the teachings of Jesus, "the intention appears to be to demonstrate more fully how to live as a faithful follower of Jesus" (Squires 2006:160). For too long, we have tried to divert from the very real and historical aspects of our faith by trying to focus entirely on the spiritual and abstract aspects of the same, to the demise of the justice and fairness project of God while benefitting the unjust and unfair ways of earthly empires, which we (as co-opted Israel) are supposed to fight and replace. Like ancient Israel, we have largely been infected and affected instead of us being the infecting agents.

Jesus was born into a Jewish family during the hey days of the Roman empire in the 1st century of the Common Era, popularly

denoted as AD in many books. I will not bother you, dear reader, with some minute details but will present you with simplified details for easy reading. The Romans' first involvement in Judean politics was through the recognition of Herod the Great as King of Judea by Octavia around 31 BCE (Harding 2003:77). The Jews were scattered throughout the Roman empire owing to previous deportations under several other empires. Major Jewish centers were, however, found in Palestine and Alexandria in Egypt. While the Roman empire had taken over political power from the deposed Greek rulers, they adopted much of the cultural practices of the Greeks, established through their policy of Hellenization, which sought to make all subjects of the empire Greek in language and custom. While, the Jews or ancient Israelites had experienced life at the hands of different empires, there was some common thread that made all the empires look like one continuing empire – injustice, unfairness and unrighteousness were all the dominant ways of empire. This basically means the desire to establish a just and fair society remained necessary as even though the world was witnessing constant changing of empires, the essence of governance had remained the same across the different empires, they were all sponsors of injustice and unfairness! Jesus is born into this environment with the mandate to lead a revival of God's project to infect the world with justice and fairness and to inculcate a desire for righteousness among the people.

In his manifesto in Luke (4:18-20), Jesus makes clear what his movement stood for in a world that considered injustice normal and acceptable, the Jesus' movement was going to swim against the current! It is not surprising that the Jesus' movement was considered a threat by all established institutions of power of that time because they were perpetrators and beneficiaries of the in-

justice prevalent that time. In order to establish a movement that would infect the world with justice and fairness, Jesus, as God had done in ancient Israel, called some men and women to become part of this justice centered and driven movement. At no point, does Jesus try to make this project look or sound like an easy stroll down the garden path because swimming against the current would be difficult. This young movement was pitting itself against institutions with centuries of entrenched systems of power. At every given opportunity, these institutions would mobilize their resources to silence and stop the movement in its tracks for they saw what it could achieve if left unchecked. Those that were called by Jesus were ostensibly called to become “fishers of men” as we grew up singing but what exactly does this mean? One of the earliest propagators of the values of the Jesus’ Movement, the Apostle Paul invites both Jewish and Gentile believers to “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom.12:1) and according to Stephen Fowl (2011:45-46);

Of course, offering one’s life back to God in a world that is hostile to God may result in martyrdom. However, the crucial point in Romans 12:1 is that believers offer their bodies back to God as a living sacrifice. The offering of living bodies may result in martyrdom, but the primary dispositions and activities that follow from offering oneself to God as a living sacrifice are directed at how believers are to conduct themselves in the world.

They were called to be agents of transformation whose duty it was to remove men and women from the clutches of the unjust empire to a community where they will be free and where they would be givers and takers of justice and fairness, equality and equity and only then would they experience the goodness for which God had always willed the Chosen people and the world. The movement was going to fish people from the empire pool, a pool where empire like all greedy institutions had cleverly presented as the

only pool, suggesting to its victims that there is no alternative to what they had. Jesus comes to present to those in the empire pool that actually there is an alternative pool with cleaner and warmer water and even with better supplies of food and most importantly without predators, which were constantly injected into the empire pool by empire itself.

What did the Jesus movement stand for? In what ways were seemingly harmless Jesus' activities challenging the injustice of his time? What can we say were the central beliefs of this movement, which develops to become the Christian faith? These questions will be dealt with below in a way that should help us understand what we are all called to, as Christians. Whereas in ancient Israel, a few individuals were called to be prophets and whereas Jesus may have called initially a few individuals to help in setting the movement rolling, we are also fully cognizant of the fact that Jesus called and calls all Christians to become agents of transformation. You and I are called, and we have to live out a life that will propagate the essential beliefs of the faith. In the following paragraphs, I will try to dissect what it meant to be called into the Jesus' movement and what it means for us as Christians today. As we seek to engage with "the mind of Jesus" it is critical to understand that as Christians, we read the Bible or biblical texts "in the effort to act ethically, personally and socially...finding a way to read the text that will...enable present day Christians to confront new problems with what Paul called 'the mind of Christ'" (Schneiders 2006:102-103).

Nowhere do we find better answers to what the Jesus' movement stood for than in the manifesto of Jesus found in Luke 4:18-22 and Matthew 5:1-48 with some variation between the two. From these two texts, I will pay more attention to the passage in Luke for its brevity and clarity on what we want to highlight here. What

we do with this passage can be done also with the Matthew passage. I want to highlight key elements that came to define the Jesus' movement and why it became loathed by both the Roman officials and the Temple officials in Jerusalem, the two centers of power in Israel of Jesus' time. These texts constitute what I call the manifesto of Jesus, they are the blueprint of what Jesus and those who would follow him were committing themselves to do. To begin with, the activities of the movement were not to be carried out based on the intelligence and sheer brute force of the workers, instead, what gave Jesus and his followers the strength to pursue this project was the fact that "the Spirit of God" (Lk. 4:18) would be upon them. Even though the work of the movement was to affect the physical world of 1st century Palestine, the strength to carry out the work of the movement was to be sourced from God, the real author of that project. We are wrong, if as Christians, we think we can bring justice to this world based on our numbers or our strength. We need to act under the guidance of the "Spirit of God". That, however, does not mean the work we are called to is "spiritual" in the sense of some invisible accomplishments, our work is real and must affect the physical world in which we live. Without the "Spirit of God", the followers of Jesus would not be able to undertake the arduous task of carrying out the mandate of the movement. It is not surprising that after the crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection, the apostles were a bundle of fear, only gaining strength and confidence after the outpouring of the "Spirit of God" upon them (Acts 2).

The first major commitment of the movement was "to preach the good news to the poor" (Lk.4:18). Much debate has been invested by scholars into understanding the meaning of "poor", who qualifies to be defined as poor? I fully appreciate the fact that poverty and being poor can be very relative, that is, these categories can all

be circumstantial. The man who has nothing to eat and who owns nothing is defined as poor but among billionaires a man who is worth a hundred thousand can describe himself as poor. It is, therefore, important that we try to understand how Jesus understands the category “poor” in the context of his inaugural statement of intent. The “poor” of Jesus in this text are combined with other categories of persons and we can learn a lot more from looking at the poor within this literary context. The poor are mentioned alongside prisoners, people living with disability and the oppressed people. Within this context, I think those scholars who have understood the poor in this text to refer to the man who owns nothing of particular note, one who struggles to feed oneself, one who struggles to dress oneself are correct in that understanding. According to Leslie J Hoppe (2004:143), “In most of the texts that have been considered, the poor in question are the materially poor. Even in the texts in which “the poor” becomes a metaphor of a religious reality, the socioeconomic meanings of this term are never excluded. This should be evident because these ancient Israelite and early Jewish texts do not speak very often about “poverty.” They almost always speak about the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, the widow.” The poor man spoken of by Jesus is most certainly not the “poor in spirit” as averred in Matthew but the real materially poor man. If the poor are those lacking in material possessions, what could be “the good news” appropriate to them? What can be “good news” to a hungry man than the provision of food? What can be “good news” to a sick man who cannot afford the cost of treatment and healing than providing them with the necessary treatment and healing that they yearn for? The “good news” to the poor must of necessity be a promise and a delivery of that which they were lacking in. The ministry of Jesus is full of instances where the “good news” is

being delivered to the poor through the miracles of Jesus – the poor who were the main crowds around Jesus are the beneficiaries of Jesus’ feeding miracles (Lk.9:10-17; Mtt.14:13-21; Mk.6:30-44; Mk.8:1-9).

The good news was two-pronged, it sought to address the short-term needs of the poor by providing them food for immediate use, this is critical because the human body is not a machine or some lifeless structure that can survive without a constant supply of its material needs. But the good news also sought to address the fundamental and structural “causes” of the material lack, experienced by so many people. How was it possible that in a bowl with fifteen fish with fifteen people sharing three people ended up with all the fish while the other twelve were left with nothing? The usual explanation on laziness and foolishness that is peddled so often does not do justice to the real causes of poverty and lack in society, not of Jesus’ time and not ours either! The powers that be had put in place a systematic structure that was responsible for “legally robbing” from the hard-working masses for the aggrandizement of the few elites. Poverty was mass-produced by empire; the poor were man-made and not self-made! Proclaiming “good news” to the poor, was, therefore, challenging those responsible for the mass production of poverty in the land (cf. Chitando 2013). The Jesus’ movement was, therefore, not only promising food for the day to the poor, it was fundamentally promising to uproot the system that was responsible for their impoverishment, that was the good news! The eradication of poverty was central to the mandate of the Jesus’ movement, not eradication of “spiritual poverty” but “material poverty”! “In comparison with Matthew's version of this beatitude (Matt 5:3), it is much easier to claim that Luke was not speaking about some sort of “spiritual poverty” but the actual experience of life on the margins that was the fate of the poor”

(Hoppe 2004:151). The world bequeathed to us by God has material resources enough to feed all of us, but due to greed and mismanagement of the resources, we now witness as Jesus witnessed in his time, that there are few who are busy throwing material leftovers away while many are struggling to get by. This situation is opposed to God's will of a just and fair world.

The second commitment from the manifesto is “to proclaim release to the captives” (Lk.4:18). This second commitment is not divorced from the good news that Jesus stood for. Cases of people being arrested and incarcerated for crimes they did not commit are prevalent in our times, and they certainly were present during the time of Jesus. In fact, empires have always put in jail people who committed no particular crime except that they were suspected of rising up against empire. The Jews, who were thought of as highly nationalistic would have had many wrongly incarcerated by the Roman empire. For such persons, the only good news that would appeal to them was for them to be released from their captivity. While, I am aware of spiritual captivity from spiritual forces, there is nothing in the Jesus manifesto to suggest that Jesus was speaking of those in spiritual captivity but those who were in physical captivity. The area from which Jesus came, Nazareth in Galilee, was one of the worst affected regions of Palestine because it was the region most associated with attempts to overthrow the Roman system and authority. This is the region from which the Zealots emanated. The people that Jesus was referring to are most likely the ones who had been put in jail on politically motivated and trumped-up charges (Hoppe 2004:144).

The third commitment from the manifesto is the “recovering of sight to the blind” (Lk.4:18). In this third commitment, people living with disability are the special focus. The restoration of total body use or the removal of the dis-abling factors is a critical com-

ponent of the mission of Jesus. While the Gospels present this commitment as manifesting in the restoration of full body use, it is best to understand this commitment as the commitment to a creation of an enabling environment that allows those living with disability to lead their lives with little to no obstacles. People living with disability are among the most vulnerable persons in society, especially, in societies that do not value the removal of dis-abling conditions. Most societies look at people living with disability as a liability to state resources, there are societies where individuals are denied citizenship on the basis that their condition will put a strain on national resources. Persons living with disability were and continue to be abused by their able-bodied friends and relatives as beggars and to do various other chores. The Jesus' movement had a strong commitment to removing the vulnerability by creating an enabling environment that would see them becoming full members of their communities. This commitment is articulated in the Gospels in the form of the restoration of use of body parts that were once out of use, sight restored (Mtt.9:27-31; Mk.8:22-26; Lk.18:35-43); alongside the restoration of sight to the blind, we are told of many other infirmities that were removed by Jesus as he went about preaching in villages and towns across Israel. The infirmities dealt with were both physical and spiritual, demoniacs were restored to normal life much in the same way the deaf, lepers were restored. In short, through this commitment, the Jesus movement operated with the policy of "none to be left behind!" All those considered as liabilities by the mainstream authorities were all welcome into the new society that the movement was creating. Everyone following Jesus was to commit themselves to actively removing dis-abling conditions in order to make all feel they can go about their lives with little need for pity!

The fourth commitment from the manifesto is “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Lk.4:18). The good news we spoke about earlier appears to reach its epitome in this section of the verse. The real good news is the news of liberation from oppression! The greatest enemy to people realizing their full potential has always been the existence of oppression and oppressive systems that make some persons laborers while others are made free-consumers. Systems that make some producers through hard-work and others consumers without a drop of sweat. Jesus would have been all too aware of these oppressive systems from his understanding of life in Galilee where people were heavily taxed (Hoppe 2004:144) to finance the luxurious living conditions of the elites of their time. The movement was committing itself to fighting oppression in all its manifestations. In other words, the Jesus' movement was standing up for justice, for there cannot be a true liberation that is not accompanied by justice! While setting at liberty would be regarded as confrontational to the oppressive systems, it was also a call for those joining the movement to commit themselves to upholding justice in their own lives. The wrong things being done by the current powers-that-be could not be practiced by those within the movement. The movement was offering an alternative way of life! It was revolutionary! The greatest commitment for those belonging with the movement was not what they believed in terms of abstract and philosophical doctrines but what they committed themselves to doing in their everyday lives. In truth, this is why we believe that the Christian faith is a way of life and not simply a set of beliefs!

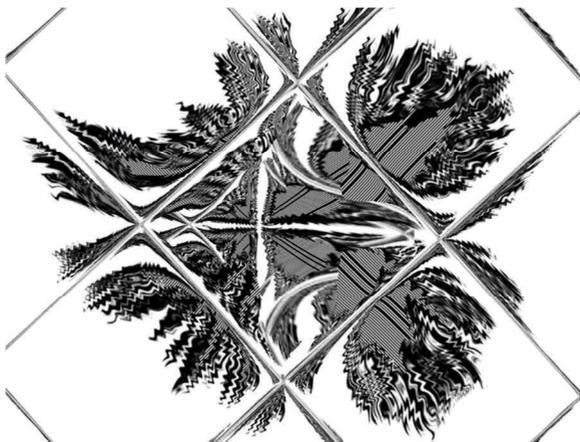
The lives of those who joined the Jesus' movement were supposed to be lives that provided short-term relief to the poor while working for the eradication of man-made poverty in society. The world created by God had enough resources to take care of all its inhab-

itants and there was no reasonable excuse for the existence of extreme wealth and extreme poverty at the same time in the same community. Members of the movement were also committing themselves to standing up for all those living with dis-ability and were also committing themselves to removing disabling conditions in order to lessen the hassles of surviving on those members who had been blessed differently by God. We do not all have to be miracle workers to restore the functioning of non-functioning body parts, rather we all must be committed to creating an environment where those non-functioning body-parts do not become a social burden for our brothers and sisters. Members of the movement were committed also to making life bearable for those who were wrongly incarcerated by the authorities and providing those that are being falsely accused with shelter from the authorities. When we are aware that individuals are being falsely accused, there is a lot that we can do to help them. Finally, members were committing themselves to fighting against oppression while promoting liberation and justice in the movement. These commitments will naturally lead to what the manifesto calls “the acceptable year (time) of the Lord” (Lk.4:19).

What then are the key markers of the acceptable time of the Lord? I am indebted here to Bishop Michael Curry (2017) who notes three defining characteristics of the Jesus’ Movement, that is, the movement is life-giving – whereas the powers of this world thrive on taking away life from workers, ordinary citizens, people living with multiple forms of disabilities, political opponents who are incarcerated on trumped up charges, the Jesus’ movement restored the life of all those whose lives had been taken away by the empire. Second, the Jesus’ movement was liberating – whereas the powers of this world thrive on oppression and exploitation of the masses for profit and personal aggrandizement, the Jesus’

movement was there to bring liberation to the masses. The movement stood for the total eradication of all forms of deprivations while advocating and acting towards the realization of the equality of all persons. Finally, the Jesus' movement stood for the replacement of selfish interests with love – there was no way that one could stand for life and liberation without such principles being undergirded by love. We can only give life and liberation if we love. These three elements sum up all we have said about the Jesus' movement. We are called to be agents of life, liberation and love and these elements must always guide us in our lives as Christians.

For, with these commitments, the movement would have succeeded in sowing the seed of a just and fair society in which righteousness would be the normal way of life. Those who were called by Jesus and by implication all of us who profess to be Christians today are called to share in these commitments. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus, one who commits themselves to fighting the evils of this world, most of them man-made evils but some of them spiritual evils. The greater fight is for the eradication of man-made evils and for that, we have a lot to learn and accomplish.



5 | Empire capture of the Jesus' Movement and the new manipulated faith

But the newly gained influence came at a cost. The Emperor Constantine, promoting the expansion of funded support for the poor in the cities, put the administration of these funds exclusively in the hands of the bishops, as a result both the bishops and the poor were brought under a certain control... The poor were brought under the control of the church: being taken care of by a particular church and its bishop meant that they could not move to other places and that they were listed on that church's poor rolls; even begging required a permit with the bishop's signature.... Gradually, the bishop became "controller of the crowds" The bishops became responsible for the defense of law and order (Rieger 2007:75).

The initial growth of the Jesus' movement revolved around the key characteristics of life-giving, liberation and love and it is not surprising that the initial inroads are made into the groups that were the greatest victims of these inhuman deprivations built into the systems and structures of the Jewish state and Roman empire. The potential of this movement to change the world for the better were quickly picked up by the established systems leading to multiple persecutions targeted at Christians, even before they had the numbers to scare the system. While the numbers were still negligible, the teachings and commitments of the believers were clear for all to see that they would not be easily corrupted into the system. Several attempts were made to corrupt the teachings of the movement, even very early. I think the "spiritualization of poverty" in the Beatitudes (Mtt.5:1-48) clearly testifies to some of these early attempts to divert the movement from the real issue of the mass-production of poverty by the Roman empire. The capture of the movement by the powers that be started very early

once the institutions of power realized the full potential of the movement.

The capture targeted and continues to attack the three key values of the movement: The life-giving commitment or value must be watered down by emphasizing an aspect of the good news while downplaying a key aspect of the good news. The question of heaven is an important aspect of the Jesus' movement, but it does not replace this world! Heaven is the reward we get for being agents of life, liberation and love in this world. Gradually, empire has sponsored a gospel of heaven-bound persons who must now believe that they must make a choice between wanting this world or wanting heaven, that it is impossible to want this world and heaven at the same time. Instead of having life-giving as a value for followers of Jesus, empire abstracted the concept of life to some spiritual and invisible reality that has nothing to do with the material deprivations of this world. The commitment to liberation must also suffer the same fate as life-giving. To begin with, empire does not preach oppression or exploitation, that will become too obvious and, therefore, too easy for their opponents. Empire will also proclaim liberation, however, the liberation they proclaim is now also an abstract concept, highly spiritualized and far-removed from the realities of oppression and exploitation of the masses then and now. The emphasis on spiritual liberation from the spiritual forces is all in the best interests of empire for it diverts the attention of the masses from their real oppressors to some imaginary oppressors. The movement was not only set up to liberate people from demonic oppressions, that was just a small component of the activities of the movement, the bigger component and focus is on material oppression and exploitation by man-made systems and structures. It is liberation from such systems that the movement was specially focused on. Whereas, the

movement was driven by love, the new gospel sponsored by empire is driven by self-interest and consumerism. What's in it for me? Instead of joining the movement for the good of being part of the movement, which brings life, liberation and the fruits of love to those who are deprived of these values, people were recruited with the hope of extracting some personal material advantages.

Whereas, the movement had always demanded sacrifices from members for the sake of the common good, empire-sponsored gospel now emphasized investment for profit, bring one get four or ten! The gospel had started sounding capitalistic! These nuances of the gospel are alive today and make it extremely impossible for us to speak with certainty on why the gospel appears to speak more to those who felt the movement was dangerous once before! Why has it become easier for political demagogues to feel comfortable within the precincts of the Church? Why has it become easier for perpetrators of injustice in our society to even clap hands and ululate when the gospel is being preached? Even when presiding over an industry driven by the sole motive of profiteering, why do Captains of Industry find solace in coming to listen to the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth? The doctor who refused to check on my late cousin because we had no cash was leading the praise and worship at Church, how is that possible? Is the preacher not the same guy who was involved in the murder and disappearance of political opponents during the past election season? Why has the Church become so easy for all to find a home even those who do not share the values of the Jesus' movement? In fact, it appears that easy targets are singled out for scapegoating while the real culprits take positions of comfort at the heart of the church. Single mothers, people living with HIV and AIDS, key populations such as commercial sex workers, sexual minorities and people living with disabilities are all targeted one way or the other while

those responsible for making and entrenching structures of sin in our society are given comfortable places within the institution that is supposed to be a movement for the restoration of life through the proclamation of liberation to all that are enslaved by these man-made structures, the structures that these major benefactors of the church are responsible for making.

While the project of capturing the movement began early on, by the 4th century after the death of Jesus, that project had possibly reached its zenith. As observed by Rieger (2004:73-75), the Roman Emperor was convinced that the Christian God, was the all-powerful God, and he converted to Christianity. While giving space to the church, he was also capturing the church to aid in his desire to rule the world. The benefits of becoming “state religion” came at a cost, which meant some aspects of the faith were manipulated to serve empire. Bishops became responsible for “law and order” in the empire, as their position as being people with influence over the masses (mostly victims of the empire institutions) was used to shield empire from its victims. The movement was transformed from a movement to an institution, this transformation is critical and has far-reaching consequences. As a movement, what Jesus started was always dynamic and in motion, always ready to decipher in what ways empire was taking away life from people and in what ways empire was enslaving people. A movement is quicker to react and is continuously recruiting new agents. Institutions are by nature much more stable organisms, they thrive on predictability and take their time in responding to changes and developments in their surrounding environment. Institutions are bureaucratic. The institutionalization of the church from the Jesus’ movement must stand out as one of the greatest achievements of empire’s attempts at capturing the movement in order to bring it into the service of empire. As em-

pire was fighting against rebels, the church was fighting against heretics (Christian rebels), while empire needed the help of the church and its God, the church needed empire and its forces to put down heretics. In an environment where religion, politics and economics could not be separated, the church and empire were fast becoming one (Rieger 2007:75). The church even got richer than the members of the church and instead of the church giving to the members, it has continued taking from them!

From our earlier analysis of church and Christian faith in Zimbabwe, it appears to me that what we got as Christian faith from the beginning was largely empire captured Christian faith with small sparks of the values of the Jesus' movement. We have continued with this Christian faith but once in a while, the sparks of the values of the Jesus' movement do come to life and something of the Jesus' movement is recovered leading to positive social transformation in our society. One of the most dangerous things about captured faith is that it portrays itself as the only way and as it plays into the hands of empire, it gets significant publicity. When Father Arthur Lewis, an Anglican priest became a Senator in Ian Smith's Parliament in 1976, he painted the context of Rhodesia as the fight between Communism and Christianity when proclaiming; "We must know what we are defending. This is nothing less than the survival of what is left of Christian civilization and the values and standards, the belief in right and wrong, which Communism exists to destroy" (Lapsley 1996:47). It bullies those who want to follow the values of the Jesus' movement. In the history of the Christian faith in Zimbabwe, a few examples of empire captured Christian faith can be identified.

To begin with, the Christian faith of the times of imperial Europe had no problems in putting itself in the service of the colonial regimes. The role of missionaries in the colonization of Zimba-

bwe has been well documented by historians of Zimbabwe and of Christianity in Zimbabwe. It was a missionary who deliberately misinformed King Lobengula on the clear intentions of the settlers. Further, missionaries volunteered to be chaplains to the colonizing party. This was with the knowledge of the plunder that these settlers were planning against the indigenous people of Zimbabwe (Zvobgo 1996:2). The Anglo-Ndebele war of 1893 was basically incited by Christian missionaries, with Father Prestage of the Roman Catholic Church and Rev. Shimmin of the Methodist Church the leading supporters. Prestage says of the Ndebele kingdom;

I trust the Matabele kingdom will be smashed up. It was founded upon a basis of injustice – a powerful military organization set in motion for the self-aggrandisement of the King and his advisers at the expense of the denial and violation of the natural law to his subjects and his tributaries, who were deprived of security of life, security of property and the sanctity of the family. The Matabele system of government was a system of iniquity and devilry (Zvobgo 1996:7).

How ironic! What Prestage says about the Ndebeles succinctly expresses what the system he was urging to attack the Ndebeles was like as well, if not worse! Bakare (1993:53) rightly observes that “Christians have not lacked in ability to plunder, exploit and destroy the fibre of the earth in the search for material profits.” Indeed, Christianity and Christians were part and parcel of the plunder of Zimbabwe from the early days of colonialism. On the other side of the missionary divide stood Bishop Knight-Bruce of the Anglican Church, who in response to the Anglo-Matabele war remarked;

I entirely and emphatically repudiate any share in the sentiment that “the sword” is a necessary factor in the Christianising of these savage nations, or that the only road for the preaching of Christianity is cleared by destroying their power; and I here dis-

tinctly assert that no letter written or speech made urging on a war with the Matabele has ever had any sympathy from me (Zvobgo 1996:9).

This is interesting because indeed Knight-Bruce still believed to a certain extent on the sub-human nature of the indigenous Africans but was still convinced that the white settlers were wrong to attack them and clearly rebuked the missionaries who had advocated for the war.

In the outbreak of the First Chimurenga war, a war against the expropriation of vast tracts of land from the indigenous populations, most missionaries were on the side of the enslaving white settlers and even armed themselves and helped in the massacre of indigenous peoples during that conflict. Rev. George Eva of the Methodist advocated the brutal suppression of the Ndebeles when the first Chimurenga broke out, writing;

In the last war the Matebele were not beaten, the only real victory was at Bembesi, the first Shangani battle was more or less a draw and the second was a decided defeat for our forces, which were totally inadequate to cope with them, so that the Matebele had never been thoroughly beaten by the White man and until we give them a thrashing we may expect periodical outbreaks such as this and many of us will lose our lives (Zvobgo 1996:27).

Missionaries largely blamed the Ndebeles for the outbreak of the war and completely forgot that they were themselves invaders and plunderers. They were agents for the emasculation of the Ndebeles and the Shonas, yet, they conveniently were suffering from selective amnesia, only remembering the Ndebele “wickedness” while deftly not seeing that they were the visitors who had forced themselves upon an unwilling host. What was the gospel of that Christian faith? Where did it stand in connection with the values of the Jesus’ movement?

All denominations became recipients of the loot plundered from the indigenous people in the form of land, the coveted means of production for the indigenous people. The Anglicans were promised 3000 acres of land wherever they placed a Mission. The Dutch Reformed Church were granted land in Masvingo measuring about 12000 acres. The Methodist Church received stands in Mutare and Harare all measuring 3000 acres each and Hartleyton mission was established on a farm measuring 11,528 acres. The Salvation Army received 3000 acres in the Mazowe Valley. Land measuring 12000 acres in Chishawasha was given to the Jesuits in recognition of the work of Fr. Alphonse Daignault's service to the BSA Company's sick (Zvobgo 1996:3-5). These land "gifts" to the Church were widespread throughout the country. A cursory survey of land ownership in Zimbabwe clearly attests to the fact that churches own large tracts of land throughout the country: land, which they did not buy from the indigenous people; land, which was not given to them by the indigenous people but rather land, which was given to them by the settler colonial regimes as a token of appreciation for their participation in the subjugation of the indigenous people. Indeed, "land was grabbed from its rightful owners and some of it was given to the missionaries to establish mission farms" (Bakare 1993:61). Through these gifts from the colonial regimes, churches were seriously compromised in the dissemination of the good news to the poor, in their mandate to proclaim liberation and love in order for all to have abundant life! Instead, churches became vehicles through which life was taken away, oppression and exploitation were normalized and hate and hurt visited the indigenous people. "Caught up in property ownership, including land, the church is unable to fulfil its prophetic role, even to question the injustice caused by inequitable land tenure" (Bakare 1993:69). To be a good Christian for an indige-

nous person meant to be a good servant of the settler community under those circumstances! To be a good Christian meant to give away one's right to freedom, life and to be loved!

At independence, empire was not buried nor cremated! At independence, empire re-branded itself and quickly absorbed the newly formed establishment to its goals of selfish interests watered by the exploitation of the masses. How can we explain the fact that churches were basically silent when the Gukurahundi "moment of madness" was ravaging innocent people in three provinces of Zimbabwe? When we thought independence was a realization of the good news to the poor and exploited masses, it turned out to be a renewal of the captivity and exploitation of many Zimbabweans and the Church was deafening in its silence. Church leaders were busy enjoying their newly found elitism, seeing as most had replaced the privileged white church leaders; they became blinded to the values of the Jesus movement to which they had turned during their fight for life, liberation and love! The churches were silent as the scourge of corruption reared its ugly head in the infamous Willowgate scandal. Did we even hear the voice of the churches when it became clear that land reform in the 1990s had taken a wrong turn with the sudden interest in creating a new bourgeoisie among the people we thought had the interests of all Zimbabweans at heart (Banana 1996:245-246, Gunda 2015). Why didn't the church lead by example, resettling people on vast tracts of land they had gotten from a wicked system? Why didn't the church demand land reform as a part of the good news they were preaching to the poor and exploited masses? Instead, one of the leading lights among Christians, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in 1992, actually opposed government's attempt at redressing the unfair land tenure inherited from the colonial era, leading Bakare (1993:75) to remark;

What is interesting is that the Commission for Justice and Peace has been a champion on various issues of peace and justice in Zimbabwe, but not on the unjust land tenure acts...If the director of the Commission for Justice and Peace was serious about this piece of legislation, the starting point for him should be to ask all the churches who own so much land given to them by Rhodes “to give it back to the poor and follow Jesus.” The fact that the church owns so much land amidst a landless majority is embarrassing enough.

In a society led by death-dealing merchants of empire, the voice of the churches was only heard vociferously when they jumped into the queue of people condemning “homosexuals” who had nothing to do with the socio-economic and political challenges being experienced in Zimbabwe then. Cue, the condemnation of homosexuals had been opened by none other than the face of empire in Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe himself in 1995. Churches were still acting in the service of empire! To date, no Church in Zimbabwe has taken time to pray, meditate and seek the guidance of God on the emotive plight of sexual minorities, who continue to be erased out of the history of the church. This period was characterized by what has been identified by others as “State Theology, understood as a theology that blesses injustice, canonises the will of the powerful, and reduces the poor to passivity, obedience and apathy” (Banana 1996:11). The will of the powerful became the Gospel, the deprivation of the poor became a non-issue to many in the church establishment. A response to this state theology, has largely been through Church Theology which relies on solutions developed by others in a context different from ours and continue to apply the same, instead of critically studying our context and developing a response to that context (Banana 1996:11).

In the post-2000 era, what became palpable was the division in the Christian faith. Whereas, in previous decades, the churches had

been united in their silence and indifference, the post-2000 era saw significant divisions among the Christians. As the fangs of empire grew stronger and became more poisonous, some Christians began to distance themselves from the merchants of empire and others became more vocal in their support of the empire captured Christian faith. According to Chari (2014:124), the African Initiated Churches (as well as the Prosperity Gospel preachers) have been labeled as “gullible political instruments devoid of independent thinking.” This has largely been the case because of their supposed association with ZANU-PF while the State media has labeled other churches, especially from the Mainline strand, as enemies of the state for their supposed anti-ZANU-PF rhetoric (Manyonganise 2014:165). Among the most dominant supporters or sympathizers of the government have been the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), which has been derisively called Apostolic Christian Council of ZANU-PF owing to its explicit support of the ruling party (Matikiti 2014:97-98). Matikiti (2014:98) further observes that

Other notable religious leaders roped into Zanu PF’s campaign trail included Emmanuel Makandiwa (UFI), Nolbert Kunonga (Anglican), Paul Mwazha (Apostolic African Church) and Obadi-ah Msindo (Destiny for Africa Network). The strategy was aimed at capturing popular personalities’ followers and to win them over, ahead of the planned national elections. Zanu PF hailed Apostolic churches for supporting the revolutionary Zanu PF party which they said brought the freedom of worship which the groups did not enjoy during the colonial era.

These are not the only personalities involved but they are among the stand-out personalities through whom, we can articulate in what ways they sustained the clutches of empire on the struggling Zimbabwean masses. As Vengeyi (2011:355) observed, in the post-2000 era, AICs became popular with ZANU-PF as they con-

stitute a ready and dependable support base. The majority of churches supported by their indifference and silence.

The scriptures have not been spared in attempts by empire and those who aspire to become empire-actors in their quest to bring religion under their auspices. From colonial times, political players have always actively sought to make religion play a subservient role to their machinations. From Ian Smith's declaration of having proclaimed UDI for the sake of Christianity to the Movement for Democratic Change's proclamation of their Covenant with the people of Zimbabwe, religion and scriptures have been instruments for political survival in Zimbabwe (Gunda and Mtetwa 2013). ZANU-PF as the ruling party presented itself in the light of biblical texts such as Romans 13:1-7, characterizing Mugabe as the Son of God (Machingura 2012), while the MDC led by Morgan Tsvangirai in their 2008 election manifesto invoked texts such as Isaiah 62, Psalm 105, 1 Chronicles 16:22, Proverbs 11:10 and 28:28. Giving the impression that they are righteous leaders boldly proclaiming, "When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices" (Proverbs 11:10a). Readers were supposed to realise that Tsvangirai and his lieutenants are the righteous ones and Zimbabwe in general is represented by the city (Gunda and Mtetwa 2013:165-166). We were there, we were the targeted audience, fellow Christians and we saw nothing manipulative of this use of the Bible at all! We were blinded by this apparent projection of political players as religious zealots, that what was said about post-apartheid South Africa rings true in the Zimbabwean scenario;

Despite some improvements to the social and economic situation of post-1994 residents of South Africa, the sense of victory at the end of apartheid has, perhaps, distracted resistant voices from continuing the liberative project with the revolutionary vigour of the anti-apartheid writers (Deist 1994:253).

History has a way of repeating itself in Zimbabwe, things said before independence appear so relevant in the post-colonial situation in Zimbabwe. In 1968, Bishop Kenneth Skelton of the Anglican Church wrote;

Even more disturbing is the suggestion that to be a loyal Rhodesian one has to support the political party in power; or as it is sometimes crudely put, to be 'for Smith' and 'against Wilson'. This, of course, was precisely the argument used by Hitler to persuade all Germans to support his regime. As Hitler succeeded with the German Christians, so Ian Smith appeared to have succeeded with Paul Burrough (An Anglican Bishop best understood as representing many white Christians in their support of the continued subjugation of the black majority) (Lapsley 1986:31).

At the height of the political contestation between ZANU PF and its various opponents after independence, a similar argument has consistently been pitched to Zimbabweans. To be patriotic is to see things as ZANU PF wants you to see them! There is no way a Zimbabwean could be patriotic unless they were for Mugabe and ZANU PF. Joshua Nkomo, Ndabaningi Sithole, Edgar Tekere, Canaan Banana, Morgan Tsvangirai, even Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, were all once labelled unpatriotic Zimbabweans. Similarly, it is possible that among the opposition circles, to be patriotic meant to oppose ZANU PF, even if it was just for the sake of opposition. The impact of the opposition's perceptions and definitions was clearly minimal because they did not enjoy the support of vast state resources, which were available to the ruling party. Christianity remained silent and at worst became avid spectators to this game, which cost lives in Zimbabwe.

These are clearly hallmarks of empire captured Christian faith. But that was not the only Christian faith, for if it were, we would not be where we are today. We are here today because sparks of the Jesus movement were present, even though severely curtailed

during the era of the dominance of this empire captured faith. In the next chapter, we will look at those sparks, as we begin the arduous task of trying to reclaim the unadulterated faith we inherited from Jesus.

6 | Reclaiming the faith of the Jesus' movement for an alternative Zimbabwe

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 (Gunda 2015).

If you are not angry at the situation that Zimbabwe finds itself in, then you possibly have not followed this text as well. Zimbabwe is at the crossroads because we have allowed it! Zimbabwe is at the crossroads because as Christians we have been too comfortable with a faith that serves empire instead of a faith that is in line with the Jesus movement! Even though we have been made to believe that this Zimbabwe is good, the truth is that there can be a better Zimbabwe. An alternative and better Zimbabwe can become a reality if we, as Christians, take the initiative to reclaim our faith as bequeathed to us by our Lord, Jesus Christ. It takes your deliberate commitment and my deliberate commitment to this faith for us to begin making the alternative Zimbabwe a reality. This chapter focuses on what it is that we need to commit ourselves to, in order to fulfil our calling and our mission to the world beginning with Zimbabwe. This chapter addresses the question: what is it that we must do to be true followers of Jesus and the Jesus movement? In responding to this question, focus will be on the central values of the Jesus movement, that is, life-giving, liberating and loving! These values are central to the manifesto of Jesus, to the life of Jesus and to the calling of followers of Jesus.

As Christians, we have been too comfortable with miraculous Christianity as well as with signs and wonders performed by individuals claiming to be followers of Jesus. This comfort is clearly

wired into us for being Zimbabweans born in a worldview that tends to spiritualize every aspect of our lives. We believe that everything that happens is willed by spirits, good or bad. Those that promise to deal with these spirits for us become our redeemers instead of our one and only savior, Jesus Christ. We have become so accustomed to being confounded by the display of unusual knowledge and power, seen through acts of faith-healing, miracle riches, miracle conceptions, miracle weight loss and many other miracles that we have forgotten why we are called to be Christians. These elements are not wrong in themselves, but they must be subordinate to the central calling, they are only meant to be vehicles through which the central values of the Christian faith are channeled to the fight against empire and the powers of this world. In our case, these elements have become anti-Christ because they are now seen and understood as autonomous and even as ends in themselves, thereby creating a breed of consumer Christians who are not committed to the mission of all Christians. In the case of our Lord, we must realise that

Jesus' own mission was characterized by both words and deeds, and each explained the other. Jesus' parables and teachings were prophetic utterances that often went against the grain of accepted religious wisdom and practice; his healings and exorcisms were parables in action, and his practice of including those on the margins of society as disciples and in table fellowship was a powerful witness to his teaching's validity...What Jesus taught was more a way to live than a particular set of doctrines (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:352).

We have also been comfortable with a heaven bound Christian faith based on a litany of sermons that do little to help us confront the realities of our times. How many sermons have we listened to that challenge us to stand up and take action against a death-dealing empire in our midst? How many sermons have we listened to that tell us to forget everything happening around us as

we focus on our quest to get to heaven? How many sermons have we listened to that told us that we are responsible for all the evil that is among us either because we have decided to use the structures of sin created by empire for our profit or because we have buried our heads in the sand for self-preservation because we are afraid that empire will kill us as it killed so many other people that we knew? Our Christian faith has steered us away from confronting evil and wickedness to becoming complicity in our own problems, actively or passively. How many times have we blamed demons and spirits for our problems instead of blaming the man-made structures of sin that have been specially designed to impoverish us? This is the Christian faith we have been comfortable with, but it is the Christian faith in empire and not in Jesus Christ.

In seeking to reclaim the faith of the Jesus movement, I will go back to the history of Christianity in Zimbabwe in search of the sparks of the faith, that was suppressed by the regimes, but which never died completely. The true values or a part thereof, have always been present within our churches, through the agency of some God-fearing messengers, we have always been alerted to the true values of our calling but frequently, we have been cajoled by empire to disown such as a deviation from the true faith when in truth, we were the ones being steered in a deviant faith. I will, therefore, highlight examples of these sparks so that we notice that I am not suggesting something totally new but rather that I am advocating for us to reclaim that faith because it has always been there.

Let me begin by focusing on the formation of African Initiated Churches (AICs) from the early decades of the 20th century in Zimbabwe. Several reasons have been proffered by scholars for the emergence of these churches, among them Johanne

Masowe's church, Johanne Marange's church, Zion Christian Church and others (Daneel 1971, Dillon-Malone 1978). Among the reasons given for the rise of these churches was the political emasculation of indigenous peoples by the colonial settler regimes in Zimbabwe. That the new dispensation was systematically impoverishing the indigenous people while enriching the settlers was a critical observation by these Christian movements. Even though, Christianity had been successfully planted in the country there was no liberation of the indigenous people, instead it appeared that Christianity was fostering the disempowerment of indigenous people. What was obtaining in Zimbabwe was paradoxical, how could a Christian community be so brutal and exploitative? These churches were, therefore, initiated to empower and be vehicles for the liberation of the indigenous people not only from demonic powers but from the colonial exploitative powers of the time. These churches were indeed realizing that to be Christian meant to be an individual who was a life-giving agent and who, therefore, acted (not simply preached) for the liberation of the oppressed. A Christian was called to take action against the oppressive systems that denied others life and liberation.

The missionary churches or mainline churches were driven by the sparks of the true faith when they set about establishing clinics, hospitals and schools across the country at a time when the colonial regimes were bent on excluding indigenous people from accessing healthcare and education. Setting up these institutions was correctly framed and presented as vehicles for evangelization because the gospel of Jesus was targeted at the physical person as much as it was targeted at the inner person. How best can one proclaim the good news to the poor than through providing healthcare for the healing of all those infirmities that threatened their capacity to fend for themselves and others? Whereas Jesus

would have miraculously healed some, it is clear that the hospital is in line with the essence of healing within the context of the Jesus movement. Healing had to be availed to the people and it had to be affordable and this was the hallmark of the mission hospitals and remains the case to date. This is why, we must be thankful to all the churches that set up hospitals in our communities and we are even more grateful that even AICs, such as ZAOGA-FIF have realized the importance of healing hence the setting up of Mbuya Dorcas Hospital.

Jesus is widely acknowledged as a teacher throughout his physical ministry in first century Palestine, which brings us to the role of the schools within the mission of the churches and Christians. Jesus taught the people that followed him and those that simply came to listen to him because the movement would be unsustainable unless followers were taught on two critical dimensions: followers had to be taught on the values of the movement, but they were also taught to be able to see what was happening around them. Unless people are taught to critically engage with circumstances around them, they will always be hoodwinked by those that are beneficiaries of the status quo. Remember, empire always presents itself as acting for the common good when in reality it is driven by selfish interests. Each time empire gives a dollar to an ordinary person, you can be certain that it has taken ten dollars from the same individual! Without the capacity to critically interrogate the ways of empire, ordinary citizens are left thanking empire for their poverty because they are made to think that “it could have been worse without them!” The reality though is that it would actually be much better without them! Schools were, therefore, critical in the establishment of a sustainable Jesus movement in Zimbabwe. It is not surprising that the major supplier of both software (politicians?) and hardware (freedom fighters?) for

the war of liberation in Zimbabwe was the mission school. The mission schools became the hotbeds of political consciousness in Zimbabwe because there, whether intentional or unintentional, people were taught to look around themselves and to critically analyze their situation. They did not simply invoke demons and spirits but correctly identified the man-made structures of sin as responsible for the situation of the indigenous people in Zimbabwe. It is also interesting that even though most could see the complicity of the church in their exploitation, the majority did not renounce their Christian faith, instead they correctly realized that they had been fed the wrong faith whereas the true faith advocated their liberation in this world not in heaven hence they actively sought to throw away the yoke of oppression, not demonic but physical oppression!

While the majority of missionaries were co-opted into the systematic exploitation of the indigenous people by the colonial regimes, it is unhelpful to label all missionaries as being devoid of the true values of the Jesus movement (Lapsley 1996). A few examples of some white missionaries will suffice to drive this point home. A towering figure from the colonial era in this regard is Bishop Donal Lamont of the Roman Catholic Church. Bishop Lamont was shocked with the apparent disconnect between what was preached and the lives of the preachers that he remarked regarding the presence of racism in the church and society; “This fact, more than anything else, drove me to a realization of the disparity that existed between our preaching and our practice” (McLaughlin 1996:114). Bishop Lamont was eventually prosecuted and persecuted and subsequently deported from Rhodesia by the Smith regime for standing up for the liberation of the black masses.

Among the Anglican missionaries, the names of Arthur Shirley Cripps and Bishop Skelton come to mind for their disapproval of

the systematic plundering and exploitation of the black masses and their natural resources. The work of Cripps led to the glowing praise from onlookers. “According to John White, the outstanding Methodist leader;

Cripps is a champion for better treatment and kinder relations between the races. He watches their cases in the Law Courts. If there is a miscarriage of justice, he is the man to point this out. If there is ill-treatment by the white man of his black servants, Cripps takes an interest in stopping this. When the Land Question was before the country, he was the leader and agitator for a more ample provision of land on the Reserves for the Mashona...He stood up in the Missionary Conference pleading with passion and pathos of one of the old Hebrew prophets, that there should be no restriction impressed upon any African whom God had called to preach the Gospel” (Lapsley 1986:9-10).

While clearly not advocating for the total rejection of the system that was responsible for creating servitude for the black masses, the acts and words of Cripps were clearly driven by the sparks of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Even more pointed, however, was Bishop Kenneth Skelton, who in the course of a sermon in Bulawayo on the impending and growing threats by the Smith regime to unilaterally declare independence from Britain, asked what the Church’s advice to its members regarding the UDI would be, to which he uttered;

The Church might have to advise its people that they were under no obligation to carry out the commands of a Government, which had committed such an act...Your loyalty to God is paramount, if it conflicts with your loyalty to Caesar, then you must be prepared to take the consequences, knowing what Our Lord promised (Lapsley 1986:12).

There are many such individuals scattered across the various missionary churches in Zimbabwe, individuals who did not allow empire to completely put out the flame of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. The formation of the Catholic Commission for Justice and

Peace (CCJP) was one of the most momentous strides in the realization of the true character of Christianity as a movement and not simply an institution. The work of the CCJP was to confront empire and its elites with uncomfortable truths of their deeds, when many were burying their heads in the sand, the CCJP went out to find the truth about how the colonial regime was snuffing life out of the black masses and how they had made oppression and exploitation the portion of the black masses.

Among the black evangelists, one name stands out and that is the name of a man we have been taught to despise over the years, the man is none other than Canaan S. Banana who understood the gospel and the Christian calling like not too many others of his time. Banana (1990) was clear that the faith to which we were called was a faith that demanded not mere prayers and fasts but rather that it demanded all that and more, it demanded that we stand for life, liberation and love.

After independence, even fewer lights were shining as many Christians felt the war had been won even though it was clear that the true nature of the kingdom of God on earth had not been realized in the lives of the many who had been exploited by the colonial regimes. Through the dark days of Gukurahundi, many Christians were too comfortable to confront the new reality of black-on-black exploitation and suppression that many chose not to see evil, however, the CCJP stood out with its commitment to the propagation of the gospel as they had done beautifully in the 1970s. CCJP went out to confront the new manifestation of empire with the truth of her deeds, not only was empire snuffing life out of many innocent civilians in Matebeleland and Midlands provinces, it was also denying them the fruits of liberation, of being free (Togarasei 2013:101). A few other names also spring to mind, Bishop Sebastian Bakare and Archbishop Pius Ncube who

have done a lot in trying to point Christians towards the true calling of all of us as Christians. There may be points of disagreement between my thinking and how we must act in fulfilling our mission and calling and some of the activities of Archbishop Ncube, yet I must be quick to point out that those disagreements pale into insignificance when compared to the points of continuity or agreement.

As the crises in Zimbabwe reached unreasonable proportions in the first decade of the new millennium (2000-2010) and especially after the election of 2005, three key bodies accounting for around 80% of the Christian population in Zimbabwe came together to review the situation. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) came up with the document “The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe”, which was published on 15 September 2015 (Manyonganise 2013:143). While the unity that preceded the document from the three main umbrella bodies of Christian denominations in Zimbabwe was commendable, the document they produced was compromised by the fact that the government, which was to a larger extent responsible for the malaise the country was in, was given a privileged position and was even allowed to edit the document before it was published (Manyonganise 2013:151-152). Even though the effort has to be commended, the greatest disappointment from the document was the assertion, in the midst of so much suffering, by the Church leaders that; “We are not seeking to blame any one person, party or group. We are all as much a part of the problem, and must, therefore, all be a part of the solution” (ZCBC, EFZ and ZCC 2006:8). Unless evil is named and shamed, evil is protected and comforted! The CCJP has once again stood up to speak truth to power in their assessment of the

culture of violence and fear surrounding elections in the aftermath of the violent run-up to the 2008 presidential run-off election (Dailynews 25/07/2017). An opportunity was missed but we want to reclaim that opportunity and reclaim the faith of the Jesus Movement.

From this brief survey of the flickers of the commitment to the true values of the Christian faith and the Jesus movement, what then are we supposed to hold dear as the non-negotiables of our faith? These non-negotiables are supposed to unite us rather than the things that we have been holding on to that have only helped empire, the oppressors and murderous elites by dividing us, as Christians. First, as Christians, we are called to be life-giving agents to our community, to our Zimbabwe and to the world. Second, we are called to be agents of true liberation, not only to pray for liberation but to act for the attainment of liberation by all people of God and not only from demonic powers but from man-made structures of sin that continue to shackle ordinary Zimbabweans to a life of servitude in their own land. Third, we are called to be models of love, giving love and doing and acting for life and liberation with love. This, my fellow brethren is what we are called to!

7 | Concluding observations

It is theologically important to fit the lives and deaths of martyrs into the larger category of witness of the body because martyrdom is such a contingent activity. That is, martyrdom is always contingent on the authorities. Believers can and should always participate in the witness of the body. Whether or not the authorities will kill them for this is largely out of their hands (Fowl 2011:44).

The preceding chapters have clearly shown that the situation obtaining in Zimbabwe currently is not only unsustainable, it is an indictment on the Christians in Zimbabwe who make up the majority of the population. How can we, as Christians, sleep well when injustice, unrighteousness, inequity and unfairness have become synonymous with Zimbabwe? Where is our faith? What evidence is there for the great religiosity that we show by participating in so many religious activities? Why do we rank so high in the index of corruption? Why are fellow Christians, who happen to be politicians not ashamed of this current state in Zimbabwe?

The answers to these questions have been reiterated throughout this book, everything has gone wrong in our country because we, Christians, have been severely compromised that we have come to accept the abnormal as normal, the vice as virtue. We have lost our own individual moral compasses that we can no longer dare to challenge our politicians because we have lost the high moral ground that our faith should be giving us. Indeed, we cannot help but agree with Eagleton (1966), who averred that “religious expression should not be ceded to current imperialist and capitalist powers but, rather, that the forms and themes of religious resistance must be reaffirmed in revolutionary practice and rhetoric.” Even though this would have easily garnered popular support during the colonial era, this observation is sadly at home in our own times. Imperialist and capitalist powers have simply given

way to “indigenous exploitative and profiteering powers” that are fellow Christians. What this book is calling for, is for Christians to re-discover the revolutionary practice and rhetoric inherent in the Jesus movement from its inception but which the powers of this world have consistently tried to emasculate, with some success through the history of humankind.

The Christian leaders from across the denominational divide have a critical role to play in the reclamation of the Jesus movement from the current forms of Christendom. “According to Skelton, it is the responsibility of Church leaders to lead people to see how the imperatives of the Gospel apply to the concrete needs and situation of social and political life. This of course, is the crux. Men have got to be guided, and yet left free to decide. This was Our Lord’s own method” (Lapsley 1986:13). A concerted effort from Christian leaders is demanded to save Zimbabwe from total collapse, especially as regards how Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans are governed by whoever has been put in the offices with the responsibility to create an environment where all have equal opportunities to excel and to have abundant life (John 10:10). In this context, Christians have the right to demand certain minimum standards of governance, or of how they will be governed for them to cooperate with the governors. It should be clear to all who aspire to govern that unless they meet these expectations or at least demonstrate that they are trying to meet these expectations, then they cannot expect to be supported by Christians who make up enough numbers to find alternative governors. We have the belief that our Lord, Jesus Christ and God expects justice and we cannot demand anything less than justice from our governors. It is the duty of Christian leaders to lead the people in an evaluation exercise of how we are governed and to categorically state how we

should be governed and let the people to decide on who should govern.

While Christian leaders have a critical role to play, the role of the Bible can never be overstated. The Bible is such a critical document for Christians to decide on how a society that is predominantly Christian should be governed. Our engagement with the Bible must “not involve just, or primarily, the verbal interpretation of verbal texts, but a way of living that deliberately enters into the ocean of signification that encompasses us and seeks a way to learn, to perpetuate, and to propagate the significance of the biblical proclamation” (Adam 2006:28). What is there to show for all the years we have been reading the Bible? Is the Bible not supposed to act like a catalyst in our lives? From the preceding chapters, except in some instances, it appears that we have been reading the Bible for entertainment and not as scripture, which should inform our conduct. We are supposed to live lives that show that we are being transformed by our reading of the Bible. Since justice is such a central concern in both the Old and New Testaments, why is it in such short supply in our society? Unless we begin to be just in our dealings, then we are not being transformed by the Bible, instead, it appears that we have been transforming the Bible to justify injustice and exploitation under the guise of divine blessings. Paul is highly instructive for our times when he urges in 1 Corinthians 10:33 that believers must not seek their own advantage but the advantage of the many. In this lies true justice and righteousness and as Christians, we are called upon to adopt this principle. In seeking for the happiness of many, we are actually entrenching our own sustainable happiness.

When we put the welfare of others ahead of our own, we get realized and we are acknowledged by the powers of this world be-

cause their power depends so much on us seeking our own advantage and happiness at the expense of the advantage and happiness of the many. Is it not interesting that in response to the Pastoral Letters by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, His Excellency President Robert G. Mugabe remarked; "It is criticism after criticism, and I ask why, why, why (?). Ukatarisa mapastoral letters avo (if you look at their pastoral letters), most of them are ill-informed..." (Chitando 2013:83). While the pastoral letters need to be accompanied by actions, I must commend the Catholic Bishops for at least having the belief and confidence to verbalize their misgivings on how this country is governed and publicly proclaiming that the governance standards fall far short of what is needed to drive this society forward. Bad leaders must never enjoy a day of peace, a day without public pronouncements from Christians on what wrong they are presiding over. Further, it should not be the responsibility of the Catholic Bishops only to point out the ills and evils of our society, all Christian leaders must speak openly on the need for justice and righteousness in the way this country is governed. This country is owed multitudes of pastoral letters by other Bishops, Presidents and Apostles of the various manifestations of the Christian movement in Zimbabwe. Give the people direction and guidance. Self-preservation must never be a consideration for Christian leaders when it comes to proclaiming the gospel and the good news.

According to Jean-Marc Ela (1988:91) "Evangelizing people shaped by a certain culture must go hand in hand with their struggle for development in all aspects of their lives. Hence, the work of our faith must be understood in reference to the overall situation in Africa. We must deal with down-to-earth questions and get back to the ground level where the Kingdom of God is built day by day. For the hope for a new world that is built in the

framework of justice, peace and freedom is the heart of the Christian message.” The aspirations of the majority of Zimbabweans have been severely curtailed by a politics of patronage and an utter disregard of the equality of all citizens because only those enjoying the patronage of “big political players” are guaranteed success while the rest who are victims of the same system are blamed for not trying hard enough when it is apparent to all and sundry that success is hardly the result of hard work but of patronage by the current system. Even victims have been thoroughly immersed in this discourse that they are busy blaming themselves instead of those that are in the business of mass producing poverty through structures that will take from your hard work and give it to those that are thieving cronies of the system.

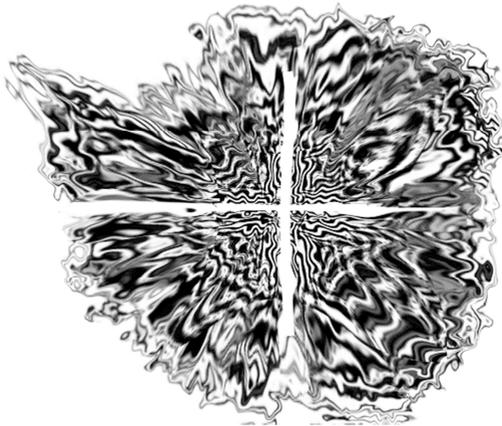
Where addressing the root causes of the current state have failed to yield results, Christians must seriously consider sponsoring alternative options for the governing offices. Here, individuals who are committed to justice and who are willing to serve their people following the model of servant-leadership, exhibited by Jesus Christ must be identified and supported to lead the country. According to Bishop Kenneth Skelton; “We have to provide, at every level of society, and especially in politics, Christians who are realists, who can see life steadily and see it whole, who know their Christian principles and are prepared to put them into practice, who are not afraid to soil their hands in what is often called a dirty game” (Lapsley 1986:14). It is unfortunate that the current crop of politicians has been parading themselves as Christians even though they have not attempted to apply a single Christian principle in their lives and governance practices. They have only been Christians for as long as it helps them to acquire more power and totalitarian authority over their subordinates and the citizens, resulting in various forms of cult-personalities in their different

parties. This has made many Christians to disengage with politics, understandable but then the impact is that they have gained even more power from that disengagement. Christians have even lost faith in the possibility of good women and men taking the reins to lead this country guided by the principles of justice, equality, righteousness, equity and fairness. Such persons can be found, and it is imperative, where current players continue to look at Christians as mere pawns in their game of politics, for such persons to offer themselves to serving the Lord through involvement in politics.

All Christians are called to participate in evangelism. Matthew 28:19-20 makes it mandatory for all Christians to evangelize and to bring more people to the Lord. Zimbabwean Christians are not an exception to this great command. According to David J. Bosch (1991:420), evangelism is “that dimension and activity of the church’s mission which, by word and deed and in the light of particular conditions and a particular context, offers every person and community, everywhere, a valid opportunity to be directly challenged to a radical reorientation of their lives, a reorientation which involves such things as deliverance from slavery to the world and its powers; embracing Christ as Savior and Lord; becoming a living member of his community, the church; being enlisted into his service of reconciliation, peace and justice on earth; and being committed to God’s purpose of placing all things under the rule of Christ.” The greatest evangelism we can do is by offering ourselves into the Lord’s service in search of peace and justice for our neighbours and our children for in their justice lies our own justice.

What a wonderful day it would be when posterity will judge us for the day we stood up for justice and made a lasting impression on the present and future of Zimbabwe. I have faith that Zimbabwe

can be saved only if Christians decide to re-claim their true faith and live in accordance with the values of the Jesus movement.



Postscript

The removal of Robert G. Mugabe as the President of Zimbabwe in November 2017 by concerted efforts led by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) but also including ZANU-PF, parliament and ordinary Zimbabweans has not effectively ushered the alternative Zimbabwe that is envisaged in this book. The personalities that directed the removal of Mugabe have always been part of the inner circle of Mugabe's regimes since 1980 and in the words of Retired General Chiwenga, now Vice President of the Republic, they were intervening in internal party politics because their friends, with whom they shared the vagaries of the liberation war were being targeted and purged by people who did not participate in the liberation war. What has happened since the overthrow of Mugabe is testimony to this selfish interest. Ordinary Zimbabweans were hoodwinked when they were encouraged to march against Mugabe because removing Mugabe was not to restore dignity to the majority of Zimbabwe but to restore unfettered access to the national cake by the cabal that led the removal of Mugabe. The situation of ordinary Zimbabweans remains the same if not worse, cash shortages persist, prices of basic commodities remain unsustainably high and there is no light at the end of the tunnel. In short, while Mugabe has gone, the country remains at the crossroads!

The disputed July 30 Harmonized elections, whose Presidential result was upheld by the Constitutional Court has also not changed the situation obtaining in Zimbabwe. The President may be considered legitimate by countries considered friendly to ZANU PF but critically, he remains illegitimate in the eyes of many Zimbabweans, who share the general perception that the election result was manipulated in his favour and that he remains

President because of the military hardware he has behind him. Most worryingly, the President's failure to acknowledge the role of the ordinary Zimbabweans in the removal of Mugabe and to use the new dispensation to reset the country means he remains a "Mark 2 Mugabe". The general populace was loud and clear after the removal of Mugabe that what they wanted was a suspension of elections until 2023, and that between the removal of Mugabe and 2023, the country was supposed to be led by a Transitional Government made by Morgan Tsvangirai and Emmerson Mnangagwa the leaders of the two largest political parties – MDC and ZANU PF respectively. That opportunity was spurned by the selfishness of ZANU PF leaders, who in the words of Patrick Chinamasa, quickly claimed sole responsibility for the removal of Mugabe, just as they have taken sole responsibility for the liberation of the country from colonialism. Elections came, they are now gone, yet Zimbabwe remains at the crossroads!

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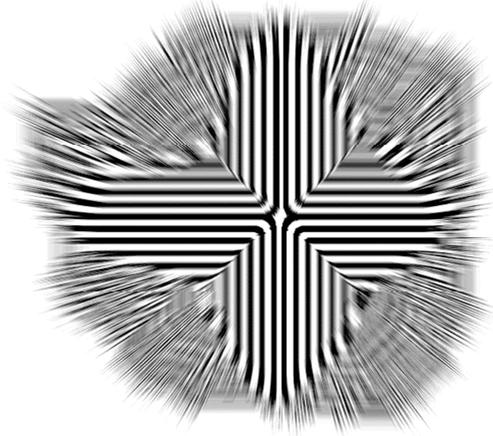
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Acronyms

ACCZ	Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe
AIC	African Initiated/Instituted Church
AIDS	Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome
ANE	Ancient Near East
BCE	Before the Common Era
CCJP	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
CCR	Christian Council of Rhodesia
CE	Common Era
EFZ	Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
GNU	Government of National Unity
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HoCD	Heads of Christian Denominations
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
POS	Point of Sale
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
WCC	World Council of Churches
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front
ZAOGA-FIF	Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa-Forward in Faith
ZCBC	Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference
ZCC	Zimbabwe Council of Churches



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Zimbabwe, a country that is made up of around 80% of Christians find itself as among the worst administered countries, among the most corrupt nations and overflowing with injustice. This paradox urges to question the role of Christianity in shaping the morality of the nation and in creating a just society for all its citizens. While acknowledging the major role played by politics and politicians in putting Zimbabwe at the crossroads, this book does not absolve the Church of complicity in making the country what it is today. Taking lessons from the Jesus Movement, this book proposes ways in which the Church can reclaim her role in shepherding the nation towards justice, equality and equity. As the current system running the nation is anti-Christian at its core, it needs to be challenged by a propagation of the authentic faith in Jesus Christ. Christian leaders are called upon to re-direct politics instead of politics re-directing the faith towards empire sustenance.



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