

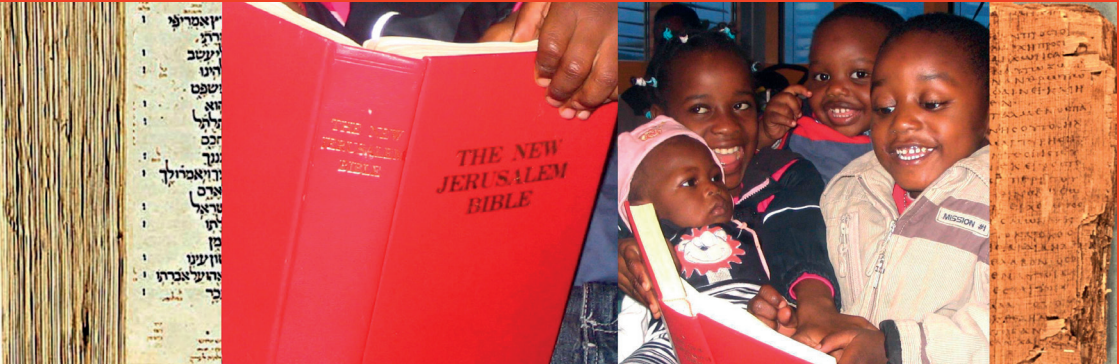
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BiAS - Bible in Africa Studies

# THE BIBLE IN CONTEXT

Essay Collection

Lovemore Togarasei



UNIVERSITY OF  
BAMBERG  
PRESS

## **Bible in Africa Studies**

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

Bible in Africa Studies

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

edited  
by

Joachim Kügler, Lovemore Togarasei & Masiwa R. Gunda

in  
cooperation  
with  
Ezra Chitando  
and  
Nisbert Taringa

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# The Bible in Context

Essay Collection

by

Lovemore Togarasei



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*Joachim Kügler – Lovemore Togarasei – Masiwa R. Gunda*

*This book is dedicated  
to my parents  
for their exceptional parental gift.*

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Last, but never the least, I would like to express my gratitude to my wife, Betty, and my children, Tanaka and Farirai, whose love and support give the energy to wake up and face each day.

## ***Introduction:***

### ***My personal journey with the Bible***

#### ***Growing up***

I cannot remember when I was first introduced to the Bible. All I know is that I grew up knowing more biblical stories than traditional folklore. With my parents being Christians, I remember the many times when the Bible was read to me before I was disciplined. “He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him” (Proverbs 13:24), my father would read to me. Often moral lessons were punctuated with quotations and/or examples from the Bible. I remember one day my mother reading me 1 Corinthians 15:33, “Bad company ruins good morals,” when she met me in the company of a group of young boys who were known for bad behavior in the village. The same continued when I went to school. Both at assembly and in class during scripture lessons, the Bible was read to inculcate morality in us.

#### ***“Take a biblical name, drink no Coke and eat no bread”: First conversion and baptism***

When I was born my parents were Christians. They, however, left the religion for some time frustrated by their pastor after he was accused of adultery. But with the seeds of Christianity having been sown in me early, by the age of 13 I got converted to one of the many Zionist churches that operated in our village. Here I encountered a new reading of the Bible. At my baptism I was asked to take a biblical name as ‘Lovemore’ was considered unbiblical. As

converts, we were also told not to drink Coca Cola as it was believed to be made from tobacco. Drinking it was just as good as smoking which was again condemned. We were not supposed to eat bread from the shops as the Bible teaches, "Avoid leaven". All Western medication was considered unbiblical as one was supposed to be healed through faith in God. We were not to eat pork and were supposed to observe the full law of clean and unclean food in accordance with Deuteronomy and Leviticus. Later when I was introduced to postcolonial reading of the Bible, I realized that, existing during the colonial period in Zimbabwe, there was a lot of anti-colonial reading of the Bible in this church. The teaching was, as much as possible, meant to discourage everything associated with our colonial masters. A decade before I was converted, the church was even teaching against Western education.

***"They read the Bible wrongly":  
conversion after conversion***

My village was home to a number of other Christian denominations. At the local store, in the pastures herding cattle, at the swimming ponds and grinding mills, people would often debate the right or wrong readings of particular churches with members of the different churches supporting their own readings. The Bible was the yardstick for proving the wrongness or the rightness of the teaching and practices of specific churches. So central was it that memorizing its verses and citing them correctly in debates was to some extent a measure of spirituality.

One church that underlined the place of the Bible in its teaching and practice is the church I currently belong to:

Church of Christ in Zimbabwe. At the age of 18 I was ‘re-converted’ to this church when its members convinced me that the Zionist Church I belonged to, “read the Bible wrongly” in many ways. First, they were wrong in baptizing people in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (for everywhere people were baptized in the NT, they were baptized in the name of Jesus). They were also wrong in calling followers of Jesus ‘Zionists’ since belief in Jesus makes one a Christian not a Zionist (Acts 11:26). They were also wrong, I was told, in teaching against the consumption of bread, pork, Coke, and so on, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4). The list of the wrong readings was long and having been taught early that, “All Scripture is inspired by God for correction.....” (2 Tim. 2:16), I was left without any doubt that we were ‘reading the Bible wrongly’. I therefore got converted and had to be baptized in the name of Jesus.

*“These are myths and legends”:*

### *Encounter with the academic study of the Bible*

My whole early childhood was characterized by Bible study that when I took Divinity for my Cambridge Advanced Level examinations, I passed it with an A grade. So when I enrolled for my Bachelor of Arts degree, I decided to study Archaeology and Religious Studies. Having chosen Religious Studies I came face to face with the academic study of the Bible. ‘Spiritually challenged’ is the best way I can explain my response to the course, ‘Introduction to the Old and New Testaments.’ My two lecturers, who were both trained by Germany scholars, were

very much influenced by the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. I learnt that the books of the Bible were canonized through a process of selection and rejection. “The Bible did not fall down from heaven,” I came to know. I learnt that even the process of selection and rejection was not that transparent. I learnt about Julius Wellhausen’s four documentary hypothesis with the implication that the biblical books were composed in specific historical and cultural situations to address the needs of the compilers/collectors/authors. Through a form critical analysis of the books of the Pentateuch and the Gospels, the stories of Moses and Jesus and many other biblical figures were treated as myths and legends.

### ***Plural methods of interpretation***

As I continued with biblical studies, I soon realized that there was no one approach to biblical interpretation. Although my teachers had introduced the historical critical method, as *the* method, they later introduced us to other methods such as reader response criticism, rhetorical criticism, social scientific approaches, feminist criticism and so on. In studying the rise of the different methods, we also realized that each method was influenced by the circumstances in which the proponents of the method were when they introduced it. For example, the historical critical method was a result of the Enlightenment period’s emphasis on science and empirical evidence. Thus I soon came to learn that there are plural methods of biblical interpretation as people read the Bible in different contexts and interpret it for different reasons. This book is therefore a collection of essays I have written in the past few



years looking at how the Bible is used and interpreted in different contexts.

### *About this book*

The book contains nine chapters divided into four sections. The first section deals with the issue of Bible translation. There is only one chapter here dealing with the translation of specific biblical terms in the Shona Bible. In this chapter, I argue that biblical translation did not take place in a vacuum. The early missionaries, who were the first to translate the Bible into indigenous African languages, were indeed influenced by their ideologies in the way they translated specific terms.

The second section of the book focuses on the Christian interpretation of Jesus in specific contexts. It comprises of two chapters. Chapter 2 looks at the story of Jesus' healing of the leper as a model for healing in African Christianity especially in the context of HIV and AIDS. It addresses the issue of healing especially among Pentecostal and African Initiated Churches. Chapter 3 discusses the Christology of Harare Christian women. It shows that biblical Christology is understood in context with the Harare women understanding Jesus from their existential experiences.

Section 3 looks at the interpretation of Paul in context and comprises of three chapters. Chapter 4 uses 1 Corinthians 1- 4 to discuss what it means to be a church in the present African context where denominationalism is rife. It attempts to read what Paul would have said to the present divided church in light of what he said to the divided Co-

rinthian church of the first century. Chapter 5 discusses the issue of conversion in African Christianity. Specifically it addresses the question, “Does conversion mean abandonment of one’s culture and traditions?” It then uses the figure of Paul to discuss the question looking at how Paul dealt with his culture and tradition after his conversion from Judaism to Christianity. The last chapter in this section, Chapter 6, addresses the issue of the environment. It looks at how Pauline eschatology and Christology can be used for environmental conservation.

The last section is on the interpretation of the Bible in specific political and social contexts. Three chapters make up the section. Chapter 7 looks at how New Testament political ethics, specifically Romans 13:1-7, were interpreted in a context of political polarization towards and after the Zimbabwe 2002 presidential elections. Chapter 8 also looks at the use of the Bible in the context of political polarization. This chapter, however, looks at how the Bible was interpreted by those in support and those against the violent Zimbabwe land reform of 2000. Lastly, chapter 9 discusses how the Bible is read to address issues of women’s dress code in a specific cultural context.

**SECTION 1:**  
**TRANSLATING THE BIBLE IN CONTEXT**

# ***Chapter 1: The Shona Bible and the politics of Bible translation***

## **Introduction**

Although the translation of the Bible into African languages aimed to avail the Bible in Africans' mother languages, it was not a completely objective process. As has already been observed by many scholars (e.g. Lafevere 1992, Levy 2000), no translation is free from interpretation. Thus translation studies, examine "the literary and cultural history of translation practices with an emphasis on the role of the ideology of the translator in the praxis of translation" (Tate 2006, 381). Translation does not take place in a vacuum. Each translator is guided by a certain ideology(ies). This chapter discusses the politics of Bible translation focusing on the Shona Bible. Specifically it looks at the translation of the word 'banquetings' into *mabira* in the Union Shona Bible, the first complete translation of the Shona Bible.

The Shona language is spoken by over ten million<sup>1</sup> people in Zimbabwe and some parts of Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia. The article discusses the history of the translation of the Bible from the time the missionaries arrived among the Shona in the 1890s to the time when

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<sup>1</sup> This is an estimate figure I arrive at on the basis that about 80% of Zimbabwe's around 12 million people, according to the 2005 census, are Shona speaking.

the first complete Bible was translated into the Shona language in the late 1940s. It discusses the political and cultural factors that influenced the way the Bible was translated. How did missionaries' (the first Bible translators) understanding of the Shona worldview influence the translation? How did the translators address the dialectical differences in the Shona language considering that Shona has five dialects? How did Shona cosmology and spirituality influence translation? To answer these and other questions concerning the politics of biblical translation, specific biblical texts (the translation of banquetings into *mabira* in 1 Peter 4:3) are analyzed. The article also briefly looks at subsequent 'improvements' to the Shona Bible to see how translators have responded to cultural and linguistic changes over the years of the use of the Bible among the Shona.

### **A brief history of the translation of the Shona Bible**

Christianity in Zimbabwe, like in most African countries, is closely associated with colonialism. Although several attempts to Christianise the country were made from as early as the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century (Weller and Linden 1984,1), all those attempts did not bear any lasting fruits. It was with the colonization of the country in 1890 that the doors to effectively evangelise the nation were opened. Various missionary bodies quickly moved in and with Cecil Rhodes' promotion of Christianity for civilization, the missionary bodies were not only given freedom to evangelise but were also granted large tracts of land for their missionary activities (Gundani 2002:122-169). These mission-

aries were very quick to realize that if their message was to be accepted, there was need for them to translate their foreign message into the language of the people. Then began the process to translate the various books of the Bible into the Shona language.

To understand the history of the translation of the Shona Bible, it is important for one to first get a picture of how the missionaries operated soon after the colonization of the country. The entry of the Pioneer Column of Cecil John Rhodes in Zimbabwe in 1890 marked the colonization of the country. As soon as the missionaries who accompanied the Pioneer Column arrived in Harare, they divided the area around Harare amongst themselves (Hallencruetz 1998:24). This was probably meant to avoid missionary conflicts as later when Pentecostal preachers like L. Kruger and E. Gwanzura, started preaching freely without observing these boundaries, some missionary boards complained to the state and the official status that the Apostolic Faith Mission had previously been given was withdrawn (Maxwell 199: 243-264). The Salvation Army went to the north around Mazowe valley, the Catholic Church went northeast to Chishawasha, the Methodist Church went southeast to Epworth and the Anglican Church went southwards to Seke. The same was happening throughout the country. The Anglican Church and the United Methodist Church concentrated their work in the eastern region of the country, the Evangelical Lutheran Church concentrated in the south-western part of the country, the Dutch Reformed Church were in the southern part. It is important to note that different Shona dialects are spoken in these different regions of the coun-

try. In the southern region where the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Dutch Reformed Church operated, Karanga is the dominant Shona dialect. In the east, Ndau and Manyika are the common dialects. The Zezuru dialect is dominant in the central region of the country, while Korekore is spoken in northern Zimbabwe (Fortune 1969, 55-67). What this means then is that when the missionaries translated the books of the Bible, they used the dialect used in the region they were operating in. Not only were the missionaries to translate the Bible, they also had to come up with an orthography of the language since the Shona themselves were then a non-literate society.

The translation of the Bible into Shona happened in various stages. Initially the different mission bodies translated different biblical texts and other worship materials. For example, as early as 1891, Andrew Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church in southern Zimbabwe wrote in his diary, "Today I found time to review the translation of Psalm 23, John 3:16 and 'Our Father'" (van der Merwe 1953, 24). Thus bit by bit the missionaries translated different texts of the Bible. By 1897 Louw had completed translating the Gospel of Mark into ChiKaranga (the Shona dialect for the southern Shona). He was also the first to complete a Shona translation of the full New Testament in 1900. Other mission bodies were also doing the same in other regions of the country. John White of the Methodist Church in Epworth as early as 1898 published his *Ivangeri ya Marako* (the Gospel of Mark) with the British and Foreign Bible Society. He used the Shona dialect of Zezuru. He followed this with a translation of the Gospel of John in 1903 and by 1907 he had translated and

published the whole New Testament. As for the Manyika dialect, translation of the Bible into Shona began as early as 1905 when E.H. Etheridge translated the Gospels and Acts followed by the translation of the whole New Testament in 1908. Another Shona New Testament was also published in the Ndaou dialect at Mount Selinda mission before 1910. In fact by 1910 there were four versions of the New Testament in Shona in Karanga, Manyika, Zezuru and Ndaou (Fortune 1969, 55-67). Obviously because of the different dialects and the different theological backgrounds of the translators, the four versions differed not only in the choice of Shona words but in theology as well. For example whereas the Catholic translations would translate prophets as *masvikiro aMwari* (God's spirit mediums) accommodating the Shona cosmology to some extent, the Dutch Reformed Church translations rather decided not to translate the word prophets, thus transliterating it *vaprofita* (prophets).

The missionaries soon realized that the parallel translation of the Shona Bible in different dialects did not make sense both financially and missiologically. Thus from the beginning of the translation of the Bible, the need for a common version of the Shona Bible was raised. But for this to be achieved there was need for a common orthography. This process was spearheaded by the Southern Rhodesian Missionary Conference beginning in 1903 (Fortune 1969, 60). It was, however, a mammoth task which took very long to see the light of the day. Several committees were put up by the Conference between 1915 and 1928 with the objective of developing this orthography. It was only after the government decided to teach the



vernacular language in schools that the process of developing a common Shona orthography was accelerated. This saw the engagement of Professor C. M. Doke of the University of the Witwatersrand in 1929 to lead a Language Committee tasked with the development of a common Shona orthography. But although the government, through the Language Committee, was responsible for the production of the final orthography, missionary influence to this final orthography was strong. For example, Fortune (1969:55-67) notes that the missionaries' earlier suggestion that Shona orthography be standardized on the basis of two dialects, Karanga and Zezuru, is the one that Doke adopted. Also in the process of standardization, notes on Karanga and Manyika forms of the Shona language were contributed by missionaries, Rev. A.A. Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church and Father Barnes of the Roman Catholic church respectively (Fortune 1969:62).

The government approved the Doke orthography in 1931. Although some missionaries had reservations on the orthography, generally they welcomed it. The Missionary Conference then started the work of producing a Shona Bible on the basis of this common orthography. This Shona, in the common orthography, came to be called 'Union Shona' since it tried to present Shona language that unified the five Shona dialects. The Mission Conference left this work (of producing a Shona Bible in Shona orthography) to Rev. Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church. In 1941 his translation of the New Testament in Union Shona was published by the British and Foreign Bible Society. The translation was well received but not

without criticism. The problem of dialects resurfaced. The major criticism was that it was essentially a Karanga translation. Father Buck who tested it with Shona speakers from all the different dialects concluded that some 40 alterations would be necessary in the first two pages alone if the translation was to be understood by the greatest number of Shona people in all the regions of the country (Fortune 1969:63). Be that as it may, Rev. Louw's translation was the first Union Shona translation. After its publication he continued with the translation of the Old Testament in Union Shona and in 1950 the whole Bible in Union Shona was published (van der Merwe 1953:38). The problem of dialectal differences was only resolved in this translation by having a glossary of words in other dialects (*Mashoko pane dzimwe ndimi*) as an appendix to the Bible.

### **The politics of translation: general**

Having briefly traced the history of the translation of the Shona Bible in the last section of this article, let me now turn to look at the politics involved in this process of translation. However, before I do so in the next section, let me in this section briefly define translation and consider some of the factors that influence the process of translation. Peter Newmark (1996:5) gives a simple definition of translation. He defines it as, "the transfer of the meaning of a text (which may be a word or a book) from one language to another for a new readership." This is a simple definition, one which presents translation as a straightforward, objective, process. But as Newmark him-

self acknowledges, translation is not a simple and straightforward process. It is a difficult operation especially in the case of the missionaries among the Shona who were not native speakers of the receptor language. As J.C. Kumbirai (1979:61-74) notes, translation can be horizontal (from one contemporary language into another) or vertical (from an ancient language to a contemporary language). Because Bible translation involves consulting both contemporary and ancient languages like Hebrew and Greek, it is a blending of both horizontal and vertical translations. The translator needs knowledge not only of the source language and the source world but also of the receptor language and the receptor world. Often and especially in the case of the translators of the first Shona Bible, the translators did not have much knowledge of the source texts and source world. A. A. Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church who was responsible for translating the earliest Shona Bible, had not even completed his basic theological training (van der Merwe 1953:12). Also, as we have seen above, missionaries began translating the Bible into Shona hardly a few months after they settled among the Shona. Obviously they were themselves still learning both the language and the customs of the people. English and other European languages Bible translations were used to produce Shona bibles and this should have limited the translation to the missionaries' Eurocentric worldviews. The Shona Bible, like other African languages Bibles, was therefore a translation of other translations (Mojola 2004:i-iii).

Another factor that influences translation is that there are no two languages that are identical, either in the mean-

ings given to corresponding symbols or in the ways in which such symbols are arranged in phrases and sentences (Nida 2000:126). Translation is therefore a decision making process (Levy 2000:148-159) making it the most direct form of commentary. It is thus not an objective process as noted above. The translation of 'a drunkard' (Greek *methusos*) (1 Corinthians 5:11) or 'drunkards' (1 Corinthians 6:10) in the Union Shona is a case in point here. The Shona Bible translates these as *kana anosinwa doro* (Singular) and *kana vanosinwa doro* (Plural). This means someone or some people who sometimes drink beer. Reading this the Shona, most of whom would not bother to compare the translation with English Bibles concluded then that a Christian should not even taste beer. Thus it is not surprising to find some Shona readers of the Bible today who think that being intoxicated by wine is not against the Christian teaching since the Bible (1 Corinthians 5:11) forbids beer (*doro*) not wine consumption. The translation of a drunkard therefore was a commentary meant, not to avoid alcohol abuse, but any drinking of beer.

Obviously understanding Christianity from Eurocentric perspectives, the missionary translators of the African Bibles sought to present such a Eurocentric form of Christianity in their translations. Although translation requires that one minimizes his or her biases, putting this into practice is often difficult if not impossible. It has been observed that translations are not made in a vacuum (Lefevere 1992:14). This is because translators function in a given culture and at a given time. They are therefore often influenced in their work by the way they understand

themselves and their culture. J. N. Amanze (1998) describes how European missionaries to Africa understood themselves and the people they were to minister to. He says, “Salvation (for the missionaries) was only possible if they (the Africans) renounced their past, that is, their beliefs and practices and show willingness to live according to the Christian principles. This involved a wholesale transformation of African ways of life for Africanness or blackness was, to the Europeans, a symbol of evil” (1998:52). An analysis of the way they translated some texts into the Shona language, as I shall demonstrate in some detail below, reflects this. This attitude to the receptor culture and religion affected the way they translated the Bible. As Mojola (2004:i-iii) says, considering that African languages and cultures are closer to the cultures of the ancient biblical worlds than they are, for example, to European languages and cultures, it could be argued that basing an African translation on a European version was likely to produce more translational difficulties and distortions than would result by working from the original source texts.

Translation to André Lefevere (1992:2) also has to do with authority and legitimacy and ultimately power. It is not a “window opened to another world”, but rather, it is, “a channel opened, often not without a certain reluctance, through which foreign influence can penetrate the native culture, challenging it and even contribute to subverting it.” This was more often in the translation of the Bible into African languages as translation marked the introduction of African orthographies by the translators. For this reason, Musa Dube is therefore right to think of bib-

lical translation in Africa as the “colonization of local languages” (1999:33-59). Let me then look at how some of these ‘political’ factors influenced the translation of the term ‘banquetings’ (KJV) or ‘carousing’ (RSV) in 1 Peter 4:3 in the Shona Bible.

### **Politics in the translation of the Shona Bible**

Before I proceed to discuss the politics of the translation of the Shona Bible, let me define what I mean by ‘politics’ in this paper. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language: the unabridged edition (1971) has seven entries defining the word politics. The first entry defines politics in the general sense in which the word is often used, that is, as the science or art of political government. However, for purposes of this article, I find the sixth entry as the most appropriate. Here politics is defined as the “use of intrigue or strategy in obtaining any position of power or control” (The Random House Dictionary 1971:1113). Following this definition, I use the word ‘politics’ to refer to strategies used by Bible translators to influence the meaning of the texts to the recipients of the translated texts. Therefore in this section I consider the strategies used by the missionaries to influence the meaning of the Bible to the Shona readers by looking at how the word ‘banquetings’ was translated into Shona.

Studies on the politics of the translation of the Shona Bible are scarce. Apart from Dora R. Mbuyeyesango’s study of how local divine powers were suppressed through a translation of the Christian God into Mwari (2001:63-77), I am not aware of any other such studies. Mbuyeyesango’s

study traces the history of the translation of the biblical God into the Shona Bible. She looks at some of the terms that early missionaries used to render the biblical God in Shona; terms such as *Wedenga*, *Mudzimu*, *Yave*, etc until there was a general consensus to use Mwari. Her conclusion is that the use of Mwari to translate the biblical God was a ‘political’ move meant to win the Shona to Christianity. She writes:

The missionary translation of the Bible was aimed at replacing the Shona Mwari with the biblical God in everything else but the name. If the missionaries had come to introduce a new God to the Shonas, they might have met much resistance, as happened in the earlier mission ventures. The adoption of the Shona name Mwari for the biblical God was in reality the religious usurpation of the Shona. The missionaries took the Shona captive by colonizing the Shona Supreme Being (Mbuyeyesango 2001:67).

It is not only in the translation of the name of the biblical God that the missionaries sought to win the Shona from their religious and cultural practices. The translation of ‘banquetings’ into *mabira* in Shona was another attempt to win the Shona. In 1 Peter 4:3, the author gives a list of vices his readers had turned away from. These are given in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible as, “----- lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries.” I am interested in the translation of ‘banquetings’ into the Union Shona Bible, the oldest Shona Bible. Banquetings is rendered as ‘*mabira*’. If the adoption of Mwari as a name for the bibli-

cal God was a usurpation of the Shona, translating banquetings into *mabira* (thus presenting *mabira* as vice) was a total blow to the Shona religion and cosmology. This is because of the place that *mabira* played among the Shona.

## The place of *mabira* among the Shona

*Mabira* is the plural form of *bira*. In traditional Shona society *bira* was a very important ritual. The ritual expressed the full Shona world view.<sup>2</sup> The Shona believe that the universe is a spiritual world where they, as human beings are ontologically linked to nature, fellow human beings, the ancestors and God (Banana 1991:23). The ancestors occupy a very important place in Shona religion and cosmology. The ancestors (*vadzimu*-plural and *mudzimu*-singular) are spirits of one's patrilineal and matrilineal relatives who died as adults. For one to be a *mudzimu* he/she was supposed to have lived an exemplary life; being morally upright and having left children. He/She was also supposed to have received a proper burial with all rituals and ceremonies properly observed; otherwise his/her spirit would haunt rather than protect the living family (Turaki 2006:480). *Vadzimu* are responsible for the well being of their living family members. They are the mediators between the living and the Supreme Being. This is because the Shona believe that *kukwira gomo hupoterera*

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<sup>2</sup> 'Mabira' can generally be used to refer to all Shona rituals to appease ancestors. Chabudapasi (1970:65-66), for example, also uses the word 'bira' to refer to *kurova guva* (ritual to bring home the spirit of a dead relative).



meaning that God is so great that approaching him directly is perceived as being disrespectful to him. He therefore should be approached indirectly through the ancestors. Among the Shona, like in most traditional African societies, ancestors are the symbols of family, tribal and ethnic unity, community cohesiveness and custodians of kinship, religion, morality, ethics and customs (Turaki 2006:480). Thus although the Shona were monotheistic,<sup>3</sup> their religion was complicated to outsiders who often took their belief in ancestors as some form of polytheism. The ritual of *bira* should be understood in the context of this Shona world view.

Although we can talk of *bira* (singular), there were in fact many types of *mabira* among the Shona. *Bira* was a ritual feast meant to give offerings to the ancestors. It could be for appeasement, for thanking or for honouring the ancestors for the protection of the family. *Mabira* were therefore meant for specific purposes: asking for rainfall (*mukwerekwere*), giving a name (*kugadza zita*), bringing home the spirit of the dead (*kurova guva*) and many other ceremonies. Generally a *bira* took place as follows:

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<sup>3</sup> I am aware of the debate concerning traditional African religions and monotheism. Contrary to the position I take in this article, there are scholars who think that the view that African traditional religions were originally monotheistic is a result of Christian and Muslim influences (Bediako 1997:98). The debate is on whether ancestors were some 'gods' themselves or were intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Being. Nürnberg (2007:33) thinks because ancestors, in most cases, did not speak in the name of the Supreme Being then they were authorities themselves. I think otherwise.

The head of the family organizes the brewing of beer, possibly collecting contributions of grain from close family members. The women brew the beer. When it is ready, the whole extended family gathers, with other relatives, in-laws and neighbours. Offerings of beer (and some times snuff) are made to the spirits and the remainder distributed to those present. The ceremony often involves traditional music with singing and dancing (Bourdillon 1997: 71-72).

I need to emphasise that there were indeed many *mabira* and sometimes following slightly different procedures from the one described above, depending on each Shona tribe. However, all in all, *mabira* were meant to venerate the ancestors. They were associated with beer drinking, meat eating and general feasting. It was the occasion when members of the extended family and indeed the whole tribe came together. Therefore participation in the *mabira* gave one a sense of belonging and indeed identity. Thus Charles Nyamiti (<http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/nyamiti.htm>), referring to ancestor veneration in general, says, the cult (of ancestral veneration) was characterized by solidarity (relationality, totality and participation. Often the ancestral spirits took the occasion, through their mediums, to talk to the living advising them on issues of life. Depending on the type of the *bira*, *mabira* involved all members of the family from young to old. What then were the effects of translating banquetings into *mabira*?

## The politics of translating banquetings into *mabira*

I mentioned above that the Shona traditional worldview appeared polytheistic to an outsider. There is little doubt that the missionaries who translated the Shona Bible considered *mabira* to be some form of worship and therefore idolatry for the Shona Christians who continued participating in them. Talking about how the Dutch Reformed Church came to the Shona people of southern Zimbabwe as a day star (Morgenster), van der Merwe (1953:18) describes the Great Zimbabwe ruins, where most *mabira* used to take place as, “once the centre of pagan worship.” Translating banquetings into *mabira* was therefore not just a translation but an interpretation meant to deal with what the translators thought to be the Shona people’s hindrance to fully embrace Christianity. Just as Musa Dube (1999:33-59) noted in the translation of demons into *badimo* (ancestors) in the Setswana Bible, that such a translation was a structural device used by the missionaries to alienate natives from their cultures, the same can be said on the translation of banquetings into *mabira*. Except for achieving their objectives of alienating natives from their cultures, I find it difficult to understand how banquetings was specifically translated *mabira*. The word translated *mabira* is the Greek word *potos* which Rogers and Rogers (1998:577) translate to drinking or drinking parties. Now *mabira* were not drinking parties for the Shona. Although drinking by both the living and the dead was part of the ritual, the Shona did not understand this to be a party. It was a ritual, whose significance was communication between the living and the dead. As M.F.C. Bourdillon (1998:228) says, during these rituals,

the living asked the ancestors to take care of the family, protecting it from illnesses and other misfortunes. Also if the family (the living) considered the spirits (ancestral) have been failing in their obligations towards them, the formal address of the spirits by the living could involve harangues with shouts of support from the attendants.

To use Musa Dube's language (1999), translating banquetings into *mabira* was therefore dropping a cultural bomb that shattered and fragmented the Shona culture. Reading the translation in the context of the whole verse (1 Peter 4:3), the Shona readers of the Union Shona Bible were told that the time they had played *mabira* was over and doing so as Christians was as bad as worshipping idols. What comes out loud and clear from this translation then is the missionaries' attitude to the Shona culture and religion. They did not respect the Shona religion and culture. For them the whole Shona way of life was a life of iniquity. Through the translation of banquetings into *mabira*, all traditional Shona ceremonies associated with *mabira* were demonized. Participation in them was seen as participation in idol worship. The result of this has been Shona identity crisis and total colonization of Shona culture and religion. Writing on the problems of pastoral care among the urban Shona, Tapiwa N. Mucherera (2001:45) correctly notes that when most Shona urban Christians go to seek pastoral counseling, often it is on issues of personal and religious identity confusion caused by the demonisation of their traditional religion by the missionaries.

Translating banquetings into *mabira* has succeeded not only in demonizing the Shona culture and religion but also in dividing Shona families. As described above *mabira*, were occasions for the extended family to come together, know each other as individuals and commune with the living dead. It was also a time family members learnt to cooperate, forgive each other for whatever evils that had developed among them and learnt to honour the family structures for the good of all. With its demonisation, the extended family has been broken up and in some cases rivalries created. Christians who no longer want to take part in *mabira* are often accused of witchcraft by their traditional relatives. Since they do not want to participate in the honour of the departed, family misfortunes are attributed to them. Divided, the Shona have therefore been conquered by the missionary translation of banquetings into *mabira*.

### **Not *mabira* but *kuraradza*: Improvements to the Union Shona translation**

The entrance of native speakers into the business of Bible translation has seen some improvements made to the Shona Bible. In 2005 the United Bible Society published *Testamente Itsva MuChishona Chanhasi* (The New Testament in Today's Shona). This New Testament has 'corrected' some of what the translators thought were wrong translations in the Union Shona Bible. For example instead of translating a drunkard *anosinwa doro*, they have translated it *chidhakwa*. This is the right translation of a drunkard. They have also translated banquetings to *kura-*

*radza*. Indeed in the context of the vices mentioned in 1 Peter 4:3, *kuraradza* is the best meaning for banquetings. It is understandable to say the author of Peter had in mind drinking parties when he mentioned banquetings than to think that he was referring to ancestor veneration (*mabira*) whose practice is not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament. There has also been attempts to try as much as possible to use the contemporary Shona language but without losing the dignity of the word of God. Thus translators have avoided using what M.F.C. Bourdillon (1998:233) calls *chitaundi*, Anglicized Shona language. Unfortunately besides having modern translations, the Shona still believe that the Union Shona Bible *is the Bible*. Often modern translations are approached with suspicion, being understood to be more of interpretations than translations. It is therefore not surprising for many to question the sacrality of modern translations.

## Conclusion

In this article I have looked at the politics of translating the Bible into the Shona language. I have approached the subject understanding politics as a strategy used by someone to obtain a position of power and/or control. I have looked at the politics of the translation of the Shona Bible by first tracing the history of the translation of the Shona Bible. Here I have highlighted the contribution of different mission bodies and their realization of the need for Union Shona in the light of the five dialects of the Shona language. I then focused on the translation of 'banquetings' in 1 Peter 4:3 highlighting the effects of

translating that word into *mabira*. Underlining the centrality of *mabira* in Shona religion and culture, I have concluded that such a translation was influenced by a Europeanised Christianity which saw nothing good in the Shona, their culture and their religion. It was a translation meant to evangelise and to conquer, “a cultural bomb” in the words of Musa Dube.

I, however, do want to end by noting that the politicization of the translation of the Bible was not the work of missionaries only as even modern translators also are influenced by the politics of the day: their educational, doctrinal, personal, social and even denominational sensitivities (Mojola 2004:77-104). As Lefevere, whom I cited above, noted, translation does not happen in a vacuum. However, translators must, as much as possible, avoid bias and deliberate interpretation in their translation. Missionaries should indeed be given credit for the work they did in translating the Bible into the Shona language. It should be emphasized that they did their work under very difficult conditions: without native orthographies, with limited knowledge of the native languages and world views, with very few educated natives to seek opinion from, and so on. This, however, should not be used to exonerate them from clear politicization of the translation process. More work therefore needs to be done as work continues to revise African Bibles translated during the missionary era. As Mojola (2006:1315) correctly argues, “it is vitally important that biblical exegesis be done in the languages in which the majority of believers interact with

the word of God- their mother languages.” For this to happen, he goes on to say that, the pioneering translations of the missionaries need to be revised, more translations need to be made for those languages lacking vernacular Bible translations and more culture, age and gender sensitive study Bibles need to be produced in many African languages. Over and above this more work also needs to be done to educate African Christians on the effect of translation on Scripture. It is my conviction that an awareness of the ‘the politics of translation,’ will help modern translators to avoid some of the problems caused by the missionary translations of the Bible into African languages.

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## **SECTION 2: JESUS IN CONTEXT**

**Chapter 2:**  
***Jesus' healing of the leper as a model for healing  
in African Christianity: reflections in the context  
of HIV/AIDS<sup>1</sup>***

**Introduction**

Healing is central to African Christianity. African Independent Churches and Pentecostal Churches, especially, have healing at the centre of their ministries. It is therefore not surprising that even in the current context of the incurability of HIV/AIDS, some of them claim powers to heal the disease. Jesus' healing ministry is of great inspiration to them. In fact, the influence that Jesus has in most societies - especially here in Africa - cannot be over-emphasized. His memorable sayings (e.g. render to Caesar the things of Caesar and to God the things of God) are oft quoted, not only by preachers and theologians, but also by politicians, economists, scientists, et cetera). For example, in a public lecture on taxation, Ambassador Terry Miller (2007) titled the topic of his lecture "To Render Unto Caesar: Tax Policy for Developing Countries." Before getting into the lecture he had to explain, "It's a little unusual to base an economic presentation, and certainly

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<sup>1</sup> The first version of this paper was presented as 'Jesus: Scientist and Humanitarian' at the BOLESWA conference on the Relevance of the Humanities in African Universities held at the University of Botswana, 26-27 February 2007. I am grateful to comments made by participants.

one about taxes, on a scriptural reference from the Bible, but I thought Jesus' dialogue with the Pharisees on the subject of taxation raised issues that are still of paramount importance to us today." Thus the figure of Jesus has had the most abiding influence on humanity. This influence is not only on those from the Christian fold, but among Muslims too. Corroborating this point, Martin Forward (1998:123) has this to say, "Yet the figure of Jesus binds Christians and Muslims together, whether they wish him to or not. He is not just the central Christian figure but is claimed by the Muslims as a prophet, appearing in Islam's Holy Scripture, the Quran." In both these religions, but especially in Christianity, Jesus is used as a model of human existence. He demonstrated how justice must be administered, how to treat children, the poor and the marginalized, and women, and generally how each individual must conduct his/her life. He therefore remains *the* example to many Christians although Michael Griffiths (1985:75) and Tom Driver (1981:32) are right to caution against imitating literally all that Jesus did and said, noting that Jesus lived in a world different from ours today.<sup>2</sup> Although writing independently, both authors agree that since Jesus lived in a world different culturally and technologically from our modern world, his words and deeds should not be imitated literally to address modern issues.

It is with this abiding influence of Jesus in mind that this article approaches the subject of healing in African Chris-

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<sup>2</sup> For example it would be absurd to say since Jesus did not travel by car, his followers must also not travel by car.

tianity. There are several healing practices by Christians in Africa. Even in the current context of HIV/AIDS, which scientists have declared incurable, several Christian denominations continue to claim powers to heal the disease, with many individuals also believing that they have been healed of it. Naturally, in a world where science seems to reign supreme, there have been several criticisms of those who claim to have the powers to heal. I therefore wish to discuss the possibility of talking about healing in the context of HIV/AIDS using Jesus' healing of the leper (Mark 1:40-45; Matthew 8:1-4; Luke 5:12-15) as a model for understanding African Christian healing.<sup>3</sup> As shall be discussed below, this miracle provides a holistic form of healing which compares very well with the African understanding of healing.

The paper is divided into five sections. In the first section I will give a brief discussion of how I approach the miracles of Jesus. I will then, in the second section, introduce the miracle of the healing of the leper. The third section will discuss Jesus' holistic understanding of healing as shown in the healing of the leper. The fourth section discusses healing in African Christianity before the final section analyses how this healing compares to Jesus' understanding of healing as demonstrated in the healing of the leper. In the conclusion, I then argue for the possibility of healing even in our context of incurable HIV/AIDS.

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<sup>3</sup> I use the phrase 'African Christian healing' here to refer to healing practices by African Christians through prayer. Sometimes this is referred to as faith healing (Byaruhanga-Akiki and Kealotswe 1995:45) or supernatural healing (Wilkinson 1998:4).

## My Approach to Jesus' miracles

The healing of the leper (Mk 1:40-45; Matt 8:1-4; Lk 5:12-15) is one of the many miracles of Jesus recorded by the gospel writers. These miracles are usually classified into two broad categories: healing miracles and nature miracles.<sup>4</sup> The question of the historicity of Jesus' miracles has long boggled the minds of scholars and indeed a lot of ink has been spilt on this subject. There are on one hand those who, influenced by the spirit of the Enlightenment (emphasis on science/ provable evidence) dismiss the miracles as “an unhistorical ‘gleam’ born of longing and poetry which has attached itself to the historical figure of Jesus” (Theissen & Merz 1996:281). Such scholars have pointed to widespread stories of miracles in the Hellenistic world. They believe that the miracles of Jesus arose as Christians reacted to the idea of a *Theos Aner* (divine man) which was prevalent in the Hellenistic world (Corrington 1986:330). On the other hand there are those scholars like Geza Vermes (1973) and J. P. Meier (1994) who argue for the historicity of Jesus' miracles JP Meier (1994:630), for example argues, “Put dramatically but with not too much exaggeration: if the miracle tradition from Jesus' public ministry were to be rejected in *toto* as unhistorical, so should every other Gospel tradition about him.” Such scholars refer to two main reasons for the historicity of Jesus' miracles. First is the argument that the miracles can be located squarely within the historical setting of Jesus' life (Forward 1998:78). Here reference is then given to

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<sup>4</sup> Healing miracles are sometimes further subdivided into cures, exorcisms and the raising of the dead (Fuller 1966:27-30).

many examples of healers during the first century C.E. Geza Vermes gives the example of Rabbi ben Dosa who was a well-known first century C.E. miracle worker. Even Jesus' question to the Pharisees who were accusing him of using the power of Beelzebul in his miracles, "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?" (Lk 11:19), implies that other Jews also practiced exorcism. Second, are Jesus' healing methods. His use of saliva in healing the stammerer (Mk 7:34) and the blind man (Mk 8:23), follow a common healing practice during his time. Saliva was believed to have some medicinal powers. Also before healing the madman of the Gerasene, Jesus also inquired the name of the devil (Mk 5:9). Documents from this period show that this was thought to be a means of exerting control over the demon (Daniel-Rops 1962:304). From this my own position is that although questions can be and have been raised on Jesus' nature miracles,<sup>5</sup> there is general agreement among New Testament scholars (a position I also share) that Jesus was a healer. Among African Christians, it is Jesus' healing capacity then and now which has attracted many to the faith. Reading his many healing miracles,

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<sup>5</sup> Nature miracles have been so called because in them Jesus seems to have acted against the laws of nature. For example his feeding of crowds using very little food (Mark 6:30-44) surely goes against nature: naturally twelve baskets of left-overs cannot be collected from five loaves and two fish. As a result some liberal scholars like J. Know (1954:166) have interpreted the story of the feeding of the five thousand by saying that Jesus and his disciples distributed their own small store of provisions and their own example stimulated a contagious generosity among others.



African Christians therefore see in Jesus the healer in whose footsteps they should follow. My argument here is that in Jesus' healing of the leper we find a model for African Christian healing and that in the light of Jesus' understanding of healing as reflected in this miracle, it is possible to talk of healing even in contexts of HIV/AIDS.

## **The Healing of the leper**

The synoptic gospels agree in their telling of this story. As source critics have long argued, this is probably because both Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source.<sup>6</sup> We are not told where the healing took place. Matthew (8:1) tells us it was after the return of Jesus from the mountain on which he gave the great sermon while Luke (5:12) tells us it was in one of the cities. Wherever Jesus was, the evangelists tell us that a man who had leprosy approached Jesus, knelt before him and told him that if he wished he could make him clean. Jesus then had compassion over him (some ancient manuscripts say he got angry<sup>7</sup>),

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<sup>6</sup> Source critics argue that similarities amongst Matthew, Mark and Luke are a result of the dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark in the writing of their gospels (Brown 1997:55-56).

<sup>7</sup> Though this reading is found in a few manuscripts, many scholars consider this to be the original wording of the text (e.g. Hooker 1991:79). This follows the textual critical approach that the more radical (difficult or unfriendly) the text is, the more likely it is to be the original one. If we accept this reading the problem, however, is to explain why Jesus got angry. Although many explanations have been proffered, I am of the opinion that Jesus could have been angered by the Jewish laws that declared this leper an outcast. For me this would explain why Jesus went on to touch him.

stretched out his hand, touched him and declared, “I will, be clean.” With these words, the evangelists tell us that the man was cleansed. After healing him, Jesus then ordered the man not to tell anyone but rather to go to the priest to be declared ritually clean for him to be accepted back into society. Though the evangelists do not tell us whether or not the man went to the priest, it is reasonable to conclude that he did so since failure to do so would make him remain an outcast. This is because only the priest had the authority to declare a leper cleansed (Leviticus 13 and 14).

## **Jesus’ Understanding of Healing**

Like most of the healing miracles of Jesus, the healing of the leper follows a pattern that is still followed by modern doctors today. First is diagnosis, that is, a statement describing the problem. In our story of the healing of the leper, Luke (5:12) gives this diagnosis quite explicitly, “While he was in one of the cities, there came a man full of leprosy....” Once the doctor has diagnosed the problem, the next step is to provide therapy (cure). In most of Jesus’ miracles, this comes in form of a statement of cure which is the solution to the problem (Mk 2:5 par., Mk 3:5 par.). In this miracle, Jesus did not just make a statement but “stretched out his hand and touched him” (Lk 5:13). If the diagnosis is correct, therapy should lead to cure which can only be demonstrated through specific proofs. In the case of the leper we are then told that immediately the leprosy left him (Lk 5:14).

Possibly like HIV/AIDS today, in biblical times, leprosy was a dreaded disease as it was incurable. Because leprosy was regarded as contagious, those diagnosed to be lepers were therefore treated as outcasts. They were not allowed to come in contact with other human beings. The law stipulated a six feet distance as the closest a leper could get to a whole person. Lepers therefore stayed at the outskirts of villages usually in groups as the Lukan story of the ten lepers confirms (Lk 17). Whenever they passed through villages they had to make a warning cry shouting "Unclean! Unclean!" It is because of this stigma attached to the disease that AE Harvey (2004:110) has this to say about leprosy, "The real terror of the disease was experienced not so much in the physical suffering it involved, as in the ritual uncleanness which was imposed on the sufferer." This is particularly so when one considers that during those early times, it was not uncommon for people with some other skin diseases to be considered lepers. Leprosy seems to have been used at that time to cover various skin diseases some of which could be treated as the legislation concerning the treatment of lepers says in Leviticus 13 and 14. In the story Jesus touched the leper. As Morna D Hooker (1991:80) says, although touching was a normal action in healing stories, it was amazing in this circumstance as Jesus knew fully well that he was putting himself at risk not only of contracting the disease but also of being considered ritually unclean. Why then did Jesus touch the leper? For many Christian readers Jesus, the divine Son of God, transcended the contagious power of the disease. But it is also possible that Jesus knew that this man had no leprosy but some other non-

contagious skin disease.<sup>8</sup> He therefore did not hesitate to touch and heal him. That he was healed is confirmed in that the leprosy left him. Whether the healing was as instant as we are made to believe by the evangelists cannot be established. If the man had some sores, it is reasonable to believe that they took the normal time to heal. As MD Hooker (1991:80) says, a cure from leprosy could not be so immediate. It should have taken long perhaps as the story of Luke 17 shows. What left 'immediately' then was the power of leprosy. This happens even in modern medicine, once one takes the correct medication, the bacteria causing an illness can immediately be destroyed but it usually takes some time for the symptoms of the disease to disappear.

One would expect that after healing the leper Jesus would then send him away as he had received what he was looking for, that is, health and wholeness. But Jesus understood the social and religious impact of the disease he had treated. He knew the *history* of the disease, the *language* people used to discuss it, the *religious and theological* beliefs people had about this disease. Having addressed the scientific problem of the leper, he had to address the social problem associated with the disease. At this point it is important to make the distinction made in medical anthropology between 'curing a disease' and 'healing an illness'. John Dominic Crossan (1994:80) has written at

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to deny Jesus' divinity but the reading of this story shows that the evangelists' emphasis was to show how Jesus brought at the centre of his ministry those who were marginalized in Jewish society.

length on this subject. Citing Leon Eisenberg and Arthur Kleinman, he writes, "Patients suffer 'illnesses', physicians diagnose and treat 'diseases'. Illnesses are experiences of disvalued changes in states of being and in social function; diseases in the scientific paradigms of modern medicine, are abnormalities in the structure and function of the body organs and systems." In other words, diseases are cured but illnesses have to be healed. When the leprosy left the leper, Jesus had cured the disease. But curing on its own was not enough, he had to go further to heal the illness. As Donald Capps (2000:167) says, the leper had both a disease and an illness, "the personal and social stigma of uncleanness, isolation and rejection." Jesus knew that scientific treatment on its own (the curing of the sores) was not enough. As a result, after curing the man he told him to go and show himself to the priest. According to the Levitical laws (Lev 13:49), it is only the priest who could certify that a leper has been cleansed and so could be accepted back into mainstream society. Without the priest's certificate of cleansing, the cleansed leper would remain isolated and stigmatized by society. It is this consideration which makes Jesus' healing of the leper a model for African Christian healing even in contexts of HIV/AIDS.

### **Healing in African Christianity**

Africans view life holistically without separating it into biological, psychological or other dimensions of life. A person is therefore healthy when he/she is able to participate in his/her society. As D Dube (1989:112) puts it,

“For Africans, health is defined in terms of the fulfillment of all the roles expected of a human person.” Healing is therefore approached in this holistic way; it is supposed to enable a person to function fully in his/her society. The sick, his/her relatives and the healer first want to establish the cause of the disease. Usually this is located in the spiritual world with witchcraft often cited (Bourdillon 1993:115-121). As K Larby (2006:447) correctly notes, in traditional African cosmology, God (or other divinities) is believed to be the ultimate source of sickness and health. The ultimate causality of diseases and ill-health is therefore assigned to the supernatural, be it the ancestors, God, or other evil spiritual forces like witchcraft and sorcery. Diseases are believed to have both natural and supernatural causes (Shoko 2007:210-211). The curing of the symptoms of a disease is thus not considered complete healing. Rituals to appease the spiritual beings are important for healing. As Larby (2006:447) elaborates, treatments based solely on scientifically observed cause-and-effect relationships are not believed to be able to meet the health needs of the sick. The community needs to know what caused the disease. It is therefore not uncommon that even if, through the use of biomedicine, all the symptoms have disappeared, the community will approach a traditional healer or a Christian prophet/prophetess to tell them the cause of the disease and to perform a fitting healing ritual. The need to know the cause of the disease among Africans is so strong that it is not surprising that even in the case of a wound caused by a fire, the sick and his/her family would like to know why the particular victim was burnt at that particular time. This attitude is based on the

African cosmology which is very spiritual. Any healing should therefore address both the physical and spiritual aspects of the ill.

It is on the basis of the above understanding that African Christians practice healing. They seek the causes of the illness or disease and offer a holistic treatment that takes seriously social beliefs and expectations. Often diseases are understood to be caused by malignant spirits that sometimes, to use Shoko's (2007:120) words, "masquerade as ancestor spirits." Thus in most African Independent Churches, many of which believe in the power of the ancestral spirits (see Amanze 1998), prophet-healers would always try to understand the spiritual causes of a disease. Even in treating HIV/AIDS, they are guided by this understanding. They take seriously, for example, the African belief in witchcraft. They do not dismiss it as of no account to one's ill-health. Instead they take that belief seriously but urge the ill to believe also that God is the healer and has power over witchcraft. Through prayer and other treatment rituals, the ill including those infected by HIV are given courage to face their diseases. Kealotswe (2001:220-231) has studied some of the healing rituals of these churches. He noted healing rituals like inducement of vomiting, use of holy waters, draining of blood and use of some sacred stones put, for example, in bathing water. More often than not the psychological impact of the healer combined with the herbs used for treatment result in the reversal of symptoms and prolonging of life. This, in the African worldview, is healing. In the case of HIV, the person may still be infected by the virus but the fact that s/he is strong and can go back to do his/her daily

chores fits their definition of healing. A number of Pentecostal church pastors I interviewed in Botswana would argue that healing of HIV had taken place on the basis of the physical strength of those healed. One pastor even said, “What do people want in healing? Is it not well-being and ability to go about with life as usual? People come here on their death beds but go back strong enough to fight a bull. Is this not healing?”<sup>9</sup> Those who claim to have been healed of HIV also use their physical strength as evidence that they have been healed. There are, however, many who claim to have been declared HIV negative after treatment by prophet-healers.<sup>10</sup> After all, they believe that with God nothing is impossible. This they say was demonstrated by Jesus who healed all kinds of diseases during his life time.

African churches also provide psycho-social healing to those with HIV/AIDS. Studies in Uganda, for example, have shown that churches are popular because they offer appropriate free techniques for dealing with the psycho-social tensions of the disease (Nyanzi & Nyanzi 2002). Individuals who participated in a study reported about their transformation from emotional distress, fear of death or stigmatisation, frustration and despair to problem-focused coping, minimisation, positive reinterpretation and/ or escapism. Whereas in most societies blame for contracting the disease is put on the infected, it was found out that in the healing churches, blame was shifted

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<sup>9</sup> Anonymous, Interview: Kasane, 27 April 2007.

<sup>10</sup> It is usually difficult to prove the truth of these claims as access to medical records is usually denied by respondents.



from the infected to the devil and his agents. At community level, Nyanzi and Nyanzi (2002) found out that, “social outcasts stigmatised for poor health are brought into the church, offered hope of miraculously recovering, empowered to confront their weaknesses and become 'living testimonies' - heroes.” It was also found out that the church family offers a social support network for widows and orphans; a net work which replaces broken natural-family ties. This psycho-social healing is likely to translate to physical healing and when strength is there, African Christians will believe healing has taken place.

### **The Healing of the leper as a model for healing in African Christianity**

One issue comes out clearly from the story of the healing of the leper. This is the fact that Jesus understood healing holistically. As can be seen in the story, Jesus did not just focus on curing the sores of the leper. He was guided by societal beliefs and expectations in his healing. He knew that the leper’s worst condition was not the sores but the social stigmatization that made him/her to stay outside mainstream society. He therefore knew that without the priest’s certificate of cleansing the leper would remain an outcast. Guided by social expectations and beliefs, African Christians also approach healing holistically. Although science places emphasis on the virus in dealing with HIV/AIDS, the majority of Africans focus on the health and functionality of an individual. These are marked by physical strength. As long as one is not ill, that is, is strong, not vomiting, not having headaches, gained

weight and so on and is able to function fully in society, even if the person has the virus, he/she is considered healthy. African Christian healing therefore focuses on reversing the symptoms of one infected by HIV to make one functional in society. When one considers this, it is therefore possible to talk of healing even in contexts of HIV/AIDS. Healing should not be restricted to the elimination of the virus from the body but to the restoration of the individual back to society. This surely is happening to people infected by HIV in a number of ways. The healing activities of African Christian prophets and prophetesses, the counseling sessions by African Christian priests and pastors has restored many infected by HIV/AIDS back to their societies. This, in light of Jesus' restoration of the leper back to society is indeed healing.

## **Conclusion**

Healing, especially faith healing, always raises very interesting debates. It is a subject approached by many with much skepticism. Often, those outside religion dismiss it as empty claims. This is because of the emphasis our modern society places on science. In this paper I have argued for the possibility of Christian healing using the story of the healing of the leper by Jesus. My point of departure was the influence that Jesus has in most societies worldwide. Basing on that I argued that the story shows Jesus' holistic approach to health and that on this basis, it can be argued that African Christians also do heal. I have pointed out that healing should not be limited to the physical body but should, as understood in traditional Af-

rican beliefs, be holistic including the spiritual and the social dimensions.

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## *Chapter 3: Images of Jesus among Christian women in Harare*<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Jesus Christ is the focus of the Christian faith. All who belong to this faith have their own images of this Christ determined by their existential circumstances. In Zimbabwe in general and Harare in particular, that women form the largest percentage of Christians has been confirmed (Chitando (2004), Togarasei (2004)). This is despite the fact that most of the Christian denominations deny these women positions of influence. This study seeks to find out that which has attracted women to Christianity. In particular it seeks to find out the existential circumstances and needs of the Harare Christian women which have led them to be attracted to Jesus. What are their images of Jesus Christ and how do these fulfill their existential needs and aspirations? In apartheid South Africa and the black American movement, for example, Christ was seen as liberator. Who is Jesus Christ then for the Harare Christian women? To address these questions, the paper is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief discussion of Christology in the New Testament. This is done to show that even the Christology of the New

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to express my gratitude to the University of Zimbabwe, Faculty of Arts Research Committee for the award of a research grant in 2005. The grant saw the success of this project.

Testament communities was influenced by their existential needs. A second section, which gives a general overview of African Christology, follows this. The third section then focuses on the Christology of Harare women. A concluding section brings the paper to a close.

The paper is a result of several interviews carried out among Harare Christian women. There are too many Christian denominations with varying christologies in Harare. It was, therefore, not possible to study all of them. To capture views from a wide base, this study grouped Christian denominations, mainly on the basis of their doctrine, into mainline churches, Pentecostal/Evangelical churches and African Independent/ Initiated Churches (AICs). At least five churches in each group were studied. Between ten and fifteen women from different social and economic groups were interviewed. Churches in high, medium and low-income suburbs were studied. Apart from interviews, my two research assistants and myself were participant observers in some of the meetings of the church women. The data collected from the field was then analysed in the light of the historical-critical approach to Biblical writings. This was out of the realization that whatever images of Jesus the women have, the chief informant is the New Testament. This explains why, this paper starts by giving a background of New Testament Christology.

## **New Testament Christology: definition and general background**

Christology, in the words of Oscar Cullmann (1963:1), “is that science whose object is Christ, his person and his work.” Christology, therefore, involves a reflection on the work and significance of Christ to humanity. It should then be borne in mind from the onset that it is Christians who formulate Christology. This explains why New Testament scholars have questioned whether Jesus understood himself as a divine being or that the divinity expressed in Christological titles was cast upon him by the believers after his death. In the New Testament it is possible to see that different Christian communities had different christologies. Several examples can be given. First, whereas the Lukan community emphasized universalistic Christology, the Matthean community on the other hand emphasized particularistic Christology. Second, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul presented Jesus as the pre-existent Christ who emptied himself and became a servant (Phil. 2:5-10). Third, John presents the same Jesus as the divine Logos who was originally with God and was God himself who functioned at the creation (John 1:1). Attempts to find reasons for such differences have shown that each community understood Jesus from its own existential needs. Even throughout the New Testament, Jesus is given different Christological titles: Messiah/Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, Lord/Prophet, Son of David, Saviour, Suffering Servant and many others. Each title suited a specific setting and specific needs of each community. For example, it has been found out that Paul pre-



ferred the title Son of God because, working among the Gentiles, he found out that it was an easily accepted title since the Gentiles' used it too. Although most of these titles had their own Jewish or Greek meanings, the early church gave them new meanings that expressed their own understanding of who Christ is. The same has been observed in African Christology. Let us turn to this.

### **African Christology: a general overview**

African Christology (theology) was born out of the realisation that, contrary to the European missionaries' approach of teaching Africans to reject their African cultural values in order to be true Christians, "African values and customs are often closer to the Semitic values that pervade the Scriptures and the story of Jesus than the European Christian values that have been imposed upon them" (Schreiter, 1997,viii). This then gave rise to the attempt to understand Christ and his gospel from African cultural perspectives. From these perspectives, Christ has been understood as Master of Initiation (Sanon,1997), Chief , Ancestor and Elder Brother (Kabasele, 1997), Healer (Kolie, 1997) and Liberator (Magesa, 1997). Closer home, Ambrose Moyo(1983) describes Jesus as *Mudzimu* because of his intercessory powers. The effects of such an understanding of Jesus are summarised by Y.C. Elenga as follows:

1. Jesus' person is more concrete, and his presence is better felt in people's lives.
2. Jesus' person is connected to his relationship with human life.

3. The authority of Jesus' person is manifested.

4. Jesus is seen as a bearer of life.

In this case an answer to the question, Who is Jesus Christ?, is no longer a catechetical one based on the apostolic creed, but one which expresses one's understanding of Jesus in one's life. Jesus is given specific attributes which suit the specific situation(s) of the believer. This approach to Christology is the one we found among Harare Christian women. Let us then turn to look at the images of Jesus that Harare Christian women have constructed.

### **Christology of Harare women**

The images of Jesus Harare women have depend on a number of variables. The rich, the poor, the educated, professionals and so on, have different christologies. Before we look at some of the images these women have about Jesus let us mention that for most of the women we interviewed, there is no difference between Jesus and God. So in talking about Jesus, they often find the name of God interchangeable. They also did not draw any differences between Jesus and the church. All that done by the church or by fellow Christians is interpreted to have been done by Jesus.

One of the most common images Harare women have about Jesus is that of a friend and a companion. To the question, 'Who is Jesus for you?', most women answered by describing Jesus as their friend and companion. They told of how lonely they used to feel until they were intro-

duced to one of the many churches in Harare. Several house women talked of how lonely they felt when their husbands and children were at work and at school respectively. In these times fellow Christian women provided them with company. One Mrs Nyoni had this to say about Jesus, "My husband is a truck driver and sometimes he spends more than a week away on duty. During these times I used to feel so lonely that were it not for Jesus who now provides me company, I would be tempted to be involved in extra-marital affairs." Many women also talked of how city life destroys traditional ways of relating. In villages where kin live close to each other it is easy to find people who provide care to one's family when she is away. In a town like Harare such traditional social ties are non-existent and many women have found friends and 'kin' in church. Jesus therefore is regarded as the friend who can be turned to in times of need. The image of Jesus as friend and companion is also held strongly by widows. Mrs Mugove of the Church of Christ in Warren Park told us of how she was deserted by friends and relatives following the death of her husband. She said, for some time, she did not understand the purpose of her existence as she failed to cope with the pressures of losing a loved one and a pillar of her life. She said at one point she even contemplated suicide. It is at this point, she says, she attended a church service where the teaching was on Jesus as the burden bearer. The Scripture was Matthew 11:28, "Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." She said from there on she started developing a close friendship with Jesus. Mrs Mugove was so happy as she narrated to us her friendship with Jesus

that she ended by taking us into a singing session, singing the following song:

<i>Jesu ndiye shamwari yangu,</i>	Jesus is my friend
<i>Yakandimutsa,</i>	Who raised me up
<i>Yakandiponesa,</i>	Who saved me
<i>Ndakanga ndafa</i>	I was dead

Many women also see in Jesus the provider of a husband. We found out that this image of Jesus is held mainly by Pentecostal women. Mrs Kamunda of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Warren Park had this to say about Jesus:

Jesus is the one who provided me with a husband. I reached the age of 30 before I was married. I was so worried that I even went to n'angas who gave me some medicine to put in my lotion. I was told that this medicine would attract boys to me but unfortunately the medicine did not work. One day I decided to go to church. At church I was taught to pray for my problems. I was told that only Jesus is the answer to all my problems. My usual prayer was, "God, I want a husband." It was not long before he answered me and today I am happily married with five children.

Mrs Chimupungu of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) also confessed that it was Jesus who gave her her husband. She said she went to church because she was attracted by church weddings and so wanted to find a husband to wed in church.

Apart from providing a husband many Pentecostal women in Harare also believe that Jesus is the sustainer of any marriage. A Kuwadzana Family of God Church

woman who declined to be named said at one time she nearly lost her husband to a “small house” (this is a term used to describe a new practice of polygamy where men raise other families away from the matrimonial home often without the knowledge of the legal wife). She said it is through prayer and fasting with the help of other women that the husband later confessed to the illicit relationship and then abandoned it. Through women’s fellowship groups, many of the women also confessed that Jesus sustains their marriages. In these fellowship groups they are taught deportment and how to present themselves as modern women. They are also taught how to relate with their husbands so that they never think of extra-marital relationships. Even sexual matters form part of the ‘curriculum’. As Mate (2002) argues in the case of Family of God (FOG) and ZAOGA women’s fellowship groups, Harare Christian women’s fellowship groups are characterised by discourses of femininity.

One of the problems that often threaten the break up of families is the wife’s failure to conceive. In many traditional African societies, including the Shona who are the majority ethnic group in Harare, lack of children in a family is often attributed to the wife. Many Harare women in AICs have ended up in these churches in search of children. Having gone to doctors and to *n’angas* to no avail, many have testified that prophets in AICs have saved their families from break-ups. A forty year old African Apostolic Church woman said her marriage was saved from the verge of collapse when she conceived after she was given oil and *miteuro* (a prayer prescription) by a church prophet who specialises in *kuuchika* (the ritual to enable

barren women to conceive). She had spent seven years of her marriage without a child and her husband was now being persuaded by his relatives to divorce her and marry a fertile woman. Other women understood Jesus' provision of children differently. Mrs Luvinda of the Roman Catholic Church said, although she does not have a biological child of her own, Jesus provided her with many children. She and her husband welcomed their childless condition and through counseling by the church priests they adopted many orphans whom they brought up and who now treat them as their own biological parents. She attributed her husband's acceptance of their condition to none but Jesus.

In Pentecostal churches, the idea that Jesus provides children is deeply embedded that most of the members were attracted mainly by the founders' ability to deal with childlessness. Ezekiel Guti of the ZAOGA was initially known for his ability to pray for conception. Many in this church have confessed that they were called to Jesus through Guti's gift (Guti, 1997). Mai Chaza of the Guta RaJehovah Church was also known for this gift. In fact so many churches claim the ability to pray for women to get children that Mate (2002:559) has talked of women's wombs as 'Godly laboratories out of which miracles are produced' in the ZAOGA and FOG churches. Not only does Jesus provide children, he can also change the sex of the child. Like childlessness, having only children of one sex can create problems for a woman in a marriage, particularly when the children are all girls. Mrs Gava of the African Apostolic Church in Dzivarasekwa said she had problems when she bore girls only. Her husband wanted

a boy child. Even her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law started urging her husband to marry another woman to bear him a boy child. Troubled by this Mrs Gava started to go to church to seek help. She was referred to a prophet with a gift of *kuchinja nyoka* (to change sex). But for her to get his services she was urged to get converted and be baptised. This she did and in a short time she conceived and bore a baby boy. When we interviewed her she now had two boys and praised Jesus for saving her marriage by providing her with baby boys.

Harare women also believe that apart from giving them children, Jesus also protects the children from the ills of city life. Their children are at risk of drug abuse, prostitution, HIV/AIDS infection and general delinquency. A woman we interviewed at a bus terminus in the city centre, but chose to remain anonymous, said for her Jesus is the protector of her children. She said nowadays if someone thinks she can teach her children good manners on her own, she would be fooling herself. Rather, she said, it is only when you invite Jesus to protect your children that whatever you teach them they can uphold.

Another very common image of Jesus among Harare Christian women is that of a material provider. This image is mainly found among those women with poor backgrounds. Zimbabwe's ever-deteriorating economic situation has left women at the mercy of things. Widowed housewives have been worst affected. During the interviews we heard a heart-rending story of one woman. The woman, who belongs to the African Apostolic Church, said after the death of her husband she started to face

problems of money to pay rent, to pay school fees for her children and to buy food for the children. She said she was left with no option but to get into prostitution. This, however, did not solve her problems. Although she got some little money sometimes, she also often contracted sexually transmitted diseases. It is only when she was invited to church by a neighbour that her life started to change. Once she accepted Jesus, he started providing her with ideas to raise money. Learning from scriptures like 1 Thessalonians 4:11, “ That you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you”, she said she started working with her own hands and in a short time she could now make enough money to look after her family. When we talked to her she was now a proud owner of a house. Many from main line churches also saw Jesus as a material provider. They mentioned how Jesus has provided them with jobs and with education and employment for their children despite the high rates of unemployment in Zimbabwe. Most of the main line churches have programmes that cater for the material needs of their members. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe and the Roman Catholic Church run programmes that cater for the old and the orphaned. Women have interpreted these as Jesus’ intervention in their material needs.

Most women in business have seen Jesus as a business partner and marketing manager. A cross border trader told us of how Jesus helps her in smuggling goods through customs officials. She said often when she runs out of money to pay duty for her goods at the boarder she prays to God who allows her to miraculously pass without



being detected by the customs officials. The woman did not consider this to be a crime. Instead she took this as the miraculous working of God. That Jesus is a business partner is emphasised by Pentecostal women. The gospel of prosperity preached in these churches has led women to form an image of a Jesus active in members' business ventures. Mrs Kondowe said she decided to join the Hear the Word Ministries church when she started running her hair salon. She believed that if her business was to be successful it was to be blessed by Jesus whom she believed can be invited as a partner. She confessed that after her acceptance of Jesus in her life, her business boosted as many people started coming to her salon. Some women even told of how, through Jesus, their small businesses survived Operation Murambatsvina, a clean up programme implemented by government in May to June 2005 to stop business operations in undesignated areas.

Despite living in a modern city, traditional world-views still cling in the minds of many Harare women. Against Rudolf Bultmann (Baker, 1964) who thought it impossible for those living in an age of electricity to continue believing in the power of spirits, many still believe in supernatural forces like ancestral spirits, *zvikwambo/ tokoloshis* (goblets), avenging spirits and the power of witches. Mrs Mutasa, a nurse by profession and a member of the Johane Masowe church attributed her five miscarriages to the power of evil spirits. She said despite seeking help from doctors, she continued losing her children through miscarriages. It was only through the power of God that the evil spirits were cast away by prophets from the Johane Masowe church. For her and others who shared

similar stories, Jesus is a soldier and watchman who protects his followers from evil spirits.

Harare women have many other images of Jesus, but because of limitations of space we shall discuss last, the image of Jesus as a physician/healer. This is by far the most common image of Jesus among Harare Christian women. Almost 90% of all the women we interviewed saw Jesus as healer apart from the other images they have of him. This is not surprising considering the fact that in the gospels Jesus attached great significance to healing and exorcism. As C. Kolie (1997:128) correctly observes, "Were we to remove from the Gospels the passages dealing with cures of all kinds, little would remain-----." Healing as a principal activity of Jesus, indeed, must have influenced Harare women's understanding of Jesus as healer. But, for sure, their existential circumstances have also contributed much in shaping this Christology. Harare women are reeling under several diseases both physically and spiritually. There are no medicines in hospitals. Pharmacies are beyond the reach of many. Many of the women are infected by the HIV by their promiscuous husbands and their children are not spared by the virus too. They have been left with no option but to see Jesus as their healer. A Mrs Moyo of the Seventh Day Adventist said, she once fell ill and was told by the doctors that to recover she was to undergo an operation of the intestines in South Africa. She could not raise the required money and so, in her words, she started waiting for her final day. Fellow Christians, however, asked her to put her faith in Jesus who can heal every ailment. She started praying and when she went to the doctor after a month she was told that she was

totally cured and that there was no longer any need for an operation. Mrs Paradza of the Anglican Church even believes that Jesus cured her of her HIV positive status. She said before she became a Christian she was a prostitute and had suffered from so many sexually transmitted diseases that she was convinced that she was HIV positive. She said she even developed all the symptoms associated with HIV infection. It was during this time that the Mothers' Union of the Anglican church came to share with her the word of God. She accepted the word and was baptised. Through counseling she decided to find out her HIV status and so decided to go to a testing centre. But before she went she asked the congregation to pray for her. She was tested on three different occasions and found to be negative. She was convinced that Jesus had healed her. There were many other healing stories told by the women, which space does not allow to exhaust.

## **Conclusion**

“The understanding of who Jesus is mirrors in many ways the challenges that Africa faces today.” (Schreiter, 1997, ix). Schreiter's observation is not only true of Africa in general but also of Harare in particular. The understanding of who Jesus is by Harare Christian women, mirrors in several ways the challenges that the women face in this city. Although the current problems the country is facing are affecting every citizen, women are worst affected. Whether the father brings in food or not, at dinner children sit around the table waiting for the mother to present something. When a child fails to come to the newly wed

couple, the husband together with his relatives put the blame squarely on the wife. When a child suffers from HIV/AIDS and is abandoned by his/her partner, the mother is expected to take care. With little education and training, when the husband dies, the wife is left with no option to raise children but prostitution. It is in the face of these challenges that Harare Christian women have developed christologies that cater for their existential needs. For them Jesus is therefore the husband provider, child provider, protector, business partner, healer and so on.

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## Interviews

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- Mrs Gava (38), Dzivarasekwa, 10/09/05
- Mrs Kamunda (40), Warren Park, 9/09/05
- Mrs Kondowe (age not known), Sunningdale, 14/09/05
- Mrs Luvinda (58), Mount Pleasant, 12/09/05
- Mrs Moyo (43), Harare, 05/10/05
- Mrs Mugove (52), Warren Park, 13/09/05
- Mrs Mutasa (about 45), Harare, 19/09/05
- Mrs Nyoni (32), Mufakose, 28/09/05
- Mrs Paradza (57), Braeside, 18/09/05

## **SECTION 3: PAUL IN CONTEXT**

## ***Chapter 4: Being a Church in World of Disunity: Reflections from first Corinthians 1-4***

### **Introduction**

Oftentimes when I read 1 Corinthians, I always wonder what kind of Christian community the Corinthian community was. Sometimes I even ask myself whether the community was worthy to be called a church. This is because here one would find, in the church, almost all the 'sins' that are found in non-Christian communities: factionalism, complacency, adultery, incest, disorderly behaviour in church, homosexuality, you name it. C.K. Robertson (2001:117) also observed the same when he commented, "Though the Corinthian Christians were neither apostates nor outsiders, their behaviour was that of *sarkikoi* (flesh), making them no different than anyone else outside the boundaries of the church." However, when I look around and see many parallels between the church in Corinth and the church today, I fear to continue criticising the Corinthians. Although the above observations about the Corinthians are true of almost all the theological problems Paul addressed in this letter, our discussion shall be limited to the problem of factionalism (1-4). This paper is therefore a reflection on being a church in general and being a church in light of the divisional nature of the church and the world as reflected in different denominations in particular. The paper will open with a discussion of the world of the Corinthians

focusing on the city of Corinth itself. This is followed by an attempt to explain how the Corinthian context itself gave rise to the problem of factions that Paul had to address. The last section of the paper will reflect on the similar theological problem of factions the church is facing today suggesting what could be Paul's response to this problem on the basis of his response to the Corinthians. A conclusion will tie the reflections together.

## **The Church in Corinth**

Most of the problems that bedevilled the church of Corinth were a result of the cosmopolitan nature of the community. The city of Corinth can be compared to modern cities in many ways. The Corinth, in which Paul arrived perhaps in the winter of the years 49/50 CE, had been reconstructed by Julius Caesar in 44BCE after the old Greek city was destroyed in 146BCE. After its reconstruction, it then served as the capital of the Roman province of Achaia. The city was located on a plateau on an isthmus between the Aegean and the Adriatic Seas. The city connected the eastern to the western world. From the eastern port of Cenchrea to the western port of Lechaem, was a short distance of some few kilometres. A paved road through the country of Corinth facilitated trade between the eastern and the western worlds. Grooves cut into the road also allowed light ships to be hauled from one side of the world to the other. This way, travellers and traders avoided a dangerous journey of about 200miles around the treacherous end of the peninsula. Apart from the travellers there were also many visitors who came to the fa-



mous healing shrine of Aesculapius and others who came to attend the Isthmian games. Consequently, the city was home to people from various backgrounds. There is a sense therefore in which the city can be compared to modern cities today. The high presence of travellers and general cosmopolitanism are some characteristics of modern cities.

The cosmopolitan nature of the city, however, presented many challenges to the church in the same way that cosmopolitanism, globalization and modernity have challenged the church today. The common character of globalization is the fast movement of goods and services throughout the world. It is also characterized by the migration of people across the width and breadth of the world. This appears to have been the character of the city of Corinth. Brownrigg (2002:40) summarised this perfectly as he described the city of Corinth, "It was a city of great commerce, wealth and squalor, renowned for its culture and notorious for its immorality." The many people who passed through and who visited the city contributed to its economic development. However, the cosmopolitan and heterogeneous nature of the city, like all other cities including modern ones, led to religious syncretism and general immorality. Apart from the Greek deities and the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris attested by archaeological evidence, there was also emperor worship and Judaism. The chief religion, however, was that of the god and goddess of love, Apollo and Aphrodite respectively. Young men went to the temple of Apollo where statues of Apollo in various positions of virility were erected. The most famed temple was that of Aphrodite (Venus) where

according to Strabo (cited in Hayes 1978:402) more than one thousand sacred prostitutes offered their services. Corinth, as a result, acquired a reputation for sexual immorality such that to be called a 'Corinthian' was a slang expression of a whoremonger, a prostitute or a fornicator.

In such a city Paul, Timothy and Silvanus arrived ready to preach the gospel of Christ. Although Luke devoted 18 verses of Acts 18 to describe the activities that led to the foundation of the church of Corinth, the description still remains fragmentary. But by combining information from the two letters and Acts of the Apostles, we get the picture that first, combining his efforts with Priscilla and Aquilla and then later joined by Timothy and Silvanus, Paul managed to raise a Christian community which he left in the hands of Apollos when he left the city. Soon after leaving Paul would, however, hear of problems in Corinth which he had to address through the letter we now call first Corinthians (although this was not his first letter to the community (1 Cor. 5:9)). One of these problems which this paper has decided to focus on was that of factionalism.

## **The problem of factionalism in the church at Corinth**

As already suggested above, most of the problems that Paul addressed in the Corinthian Christian community were caused largely by the cosmopolitan nature of the city. Space does not allow me to look at every problem that Paul addressed. This is the reason why I have decided to zero in on factionalism. I will look at how the factions

were caused by the nature of the city then present Paul's response. This will help us to reflect on denominationalism in the church today and then suggest what could have been Paul's response if he were to write a letter to the church today.

The first problem Paul addressed in this letter was that of divisions (factions). Apparently four parties emerged in Corinth, Chloe's people informed Paul (1 Cor. 1:11). One party even embarrassed Paul by a partisan appeal to him as their leader. Others appealed to Apollos, Peter and Christ. Indeed groupings are a common feature of cosmopolitan cities. Cosmopolitanism breeds ground for formation of identities on the basis of ethnicity, occupations, economic status, level of education, religion and so on. In fact by their nature cities are terrifying in that they break traditional ties of belonging and identity. They destroy kinship relations which normally bring a sense of security. In cities people feel a bit insecure until they discover some new forms of belonging and identity. This should have been much more so in Corinth where people from various parts of the world met. Considering these diversities among members of the Corinthian Christian community, C.J. Den Heyer (2000:135) asks, "How could people with such different social and religious backgrounds ever form a community?" As we mentioned above the community included, on one extreme, Jews who had visited the synagogue regularly from their youth. Guided by the Torah these regarded temple prostitution as an abominable consequence of the worship of idols. But on the other extreme were some members of the same Christian community who had recently thought it

normal to visit a fertility temple and have sexual intercourse with one of the many cultic prostitutes. Apart from these two extreme groups there were also disparities among members in terms of wealth, education and culture. Paul must have been thinking about these different backgrounds of the Corinthians when he wrote, "For consider your call brethren, not all of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; (1 Cor. 1:26). He knew that among the Corinthians some were wise and others were not, some were powerful and others were not and that whereas some had noble birth, others had not. All these could have been the causes of the schisms in Corinth.

Apart from their different backgrounds, it appears each of the groups had personal preferences to the leader of their choice. Paul had founded the church and had baptised some of them (1:14-16). It was probably on such basis that some appealed to him as their leader. Apollos, as a learned Alexandrian, was probably preferred because of his eloquence and wisdom (Acts 18:24). The group was therefore probably a product of claim to intellectualism. Paul had preached to the Corinthians, "--- in much fear and trembling----" and it appears Apollos came as the opposite of Paul, eloquent and confident. I am persuaded to agree with N. Elliott (1995:205) that Paul established a small congregation of modest means in Corinth (1:26) while Apollos made a much stronger impact among the ranks of the privileged. Consequently, "---- the divisions Paul attributes to the slogans 'of Paul' and 'of Apollos' actually centre on the emerging tensions between the social perceptions and strategies of two groups: the relatively

lower status ‘charter members’ of the congregation and the more recent converts of Apollos whose wealth, power and status have subtly introduced new standards and expectations for the new community” (Elliott, 1995:205). It is therefore probably the learned and wealthy Apollos group that was responsible for the problem of meat offered to idols that affected the community. The rich, who were often invited to banquets in temples and were regular customers for meat in the market places, could have looked at meat offered to idols with indifference (Elliott, 1995:205). Attending such banquets gave one a higher social status in a cosmopolitan city like Corinth. G. Theissen (1982:139) therefore thinks that upper-class Christians like Erastos, the city treasurer (Romans 16:23) could have jeopardized their social status by rejecting invitations to occasions where ‘meat offered to idols’ was served. It is also such cultural codes of social status that could have caused problems at the Lord’s Supper (11).

We do not know whether Peter (Cephas) ever went to Corinth for some to appeal to him. Such a visit was possible, but even if not, Peter was a better apostle to Paul to many and in many respects, particularly to the Jewish Christians. He was called before Paul, he travelled with Jesus throughout his ministry, he was one of the inner-circle disciples of Jesus and was the one given the keys of heaven by Jesus (Matthew 16:18ff). It is possible that earlier in his gospel to the Corinthians Paul had made reference to the post-resurrection appearances he mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:1-7. If so then some Corinthian Christians could have used this to argue for the superiority of Peter over Paul as an apostle. Be that as it may, the

Petrine group could also have been formed on the basis of ethnicity. I am aware, however, that this view is contested by scholars. On one hand are scholars like N. Taylor (1992:186-7) who see no ethnic influence in the Petrine group. On the other are other scholars like C.K. Robertson (2001) and C.K. Barret (1968) who I agree with in seeing ethnic influence in the Petrine group. Discussing identity crisis as one of the problems that dogged the Corinthian Christian community, C.K. Robertson (2001:119) sees ethnicity as having contributed a great deal to this problem. He argues, “---- the combination of Roman names (such as Paul and Justus) and Greek names (such as Sosthenes) among Corinthian Christians brings to mind the differences between things Roman and Hellenistic, another particularly delicate issue in Corinth.” C.K. Barret (1968:44) also finds the Petrine group as having represented Jewish Christianity and agrees with T.W. Manson that their influence in Corinth is seen in pressure for the observance of food laws(8), the judicial rights of the community and in the questioning of Paul’s apostolic status(9).

The fourth group was the most puzzling. This was the Christ group. But did not all the Christians belong to Christ? Filson (1965:250) suggests that these were followers of James the brother of Jesus or a spiritualistic group that claimed special revelations and knowledge from Christ. The problem, however, is that in his subsequent arguments Paul pointed out that all belong to Christ since they were all baptized in his name. This therefore means that of the four groups the Christ group was correct in identifying itself after Christ. So why did Paul mention

the Christ group in the context of divisions? Various explanations have been given including the one by Filson above. I, however, want to think that this was a group which understood that the point of anchorage in Christianity is Christ not human leaders. This is what Paul had to say in his response.

In his response Paul unequivocally appealed for unity, “I appeal to you brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgement” (1:10). Still arguing for unity he went further to ask a series of rhetorical questions, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptised in the name of Paul?” (3:13). He stressed that all preachers are only servants of Christ (3:5) so all belong to Christ (3:22-23). For Paul the church of Christ is therefore one and this one church has no place for divisive pride in human leaders or personal gifts. He, however, did not despise the work of Christian leaders but argued that they are only servants and stewards of God and so should not take the central place which belongs to Christ alone. Comparing the church to the field and a building, Paul shows that the work of the ministers should be complementary rather than rival. Paul planted while Apollos watered and Paul laid the foundation while Apollos built on it.

## **Reflections on the modern church**

The factions in the Corinthian church were possibly early signs of the divisive nature of the church today. This divi-

sive nature is probably not amazing to modern Christians who have become accustomed to it. The church has become so divided as it responds affirmatively to the human characteristic of factions and rivalries. The church has been divided along the lines of race, ethnicity, education, culture, economic status, nationality and so on. We are now accustomed to the 'Church of England', the 'Greek Orthodox Church', the 'Dutch Reformed Church', the 'African Apostolic Church' and such other nationalist/racist/linguistic labels that the message of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-4 never strikes us. What with some churches even named after the names of their founders like the Johane Masowe WeChishanu Church, Jimmy Swaggart Ministries, and so on! We have become so used to human patronage that may be we think God is too far to be the patron of the church. We have become accustomed to having churches for the rich and churches for the poor. Today we have become used to people defending their own churches and attacking rival ones. We have become used to listening to or reading news of church divisions. In fact churches get divided at a higher rate than any other social institutions. I actually am of the opinion that football clubs are more united than churches. It would be interesting if one were to count how many churches she passes by on her way to her church and why. We have become used to formation of new churches. Like political parties, church people have learnt the language of smear campaign, the language of attacking 'rivals' and defending their own churches. Surprisingly most of the causes of these divisions have nothing to do with theology but with human power struggle. In most



African cities there exist many churches formed on the basis of ethnicity. People belong to one church not the other because the founder of their church is their tribesman or tribeswoman. The church has therefore, in some way, promoted divisive practices like tribalism. It is a truism that in a number of cases African Independent/Instituted/Initiated Churches (AICs) were formed on racial and ethnic grounds. One of the reasons often cited for the rise of the first batch of AICs (also called Ethiopian churches) is that Africans were reacting to what they perceived to be racial tendencies in the white/missionary churches (Sundkler, 1963; Daneel, 1987).

This divisive nature of the church has not been without its problems in the public arena. Politicians in particular have not taken the church seriously. In Zimbabwe, the political leadership has not taken the advice of the church often citing the division within the church as a sign that the church is not different from political parties. Often they have pointed out that if the church wants to be taken seriously, it has to speak with one voice. This, the church has failed to do as it has, in some way, been divided along political lines. It is possible in the case of the church in Zimbabwe to categorize Christian churches along either the ruling party or opposition parties. There are churches which are known to patronize the ruling party, always speaking in its support and filling the different venues where the party holds its functions. Instead of the church playing a prophetic voice in society by 'checking and balancing' the powers of those in authority, in Zimbabwe those in power have used the disunity of the church for their own good. This is seen in that soon after

independence, the state worked closely with the Roman Catholic Church and other main line churches (Linden, 1980 and Hallencreutz and Moyo, 1988). As these began criticizing it, the state abandoned them and began working with some AICs.

Like the church of Corinth, the modern church remains divided at grassroots level. It has also remained divided at higher levels as seen in three groupings of churches in Zimbabwe for instance. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference is a grouping of Catholic churches, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, a grouping of Protestant/Main line churches and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, a grouping of Pentecostal/Evangelical churches. Rarely do the three groupings come together and address national issues with a single voice. Instead they are sometimes involved in war of words as happened recently when some bishops mainly from the Pentecostal/Evangelical and main line churches went to see the President, Robert Mugabe (The Herald, 15 June 2006). Whereas the spokesperson of the Bishops, Bishop Trevor Manhanga said the meeting afforded the church an opportunity to be part of building bridges, nationally, regionally and internationally, the Roman Catholic Archbishop for Bulawayo, Bishop Pius Ncube, was quoted as saying these clergymen had been given farms and monetary gifts to campaign for the Government. This is the magnitude of the division of the church in a yet divided country. AICs on the other hand remain unattached to any of the three groupings with very little participation in social issues but concentrating on healing and exorcism. This surely reminds one of the Corinthian church

as we have reconstructed it above. The Apollos group, which was probably more powerful and more influential in society, can be compared to those churches which have remained aligned to those in political power. Just as this group enjoyed food offered to idols at banquets, these churches also dine and wine with those in power. Obviously when other Christians point out the ills of these powers-to-be, it is difficult for those who dine and wine with them to join them. Many churches remain ethnic like the Petrine group in the Corinthian Christian community. Many of the AICs, for example, have either by design or by their nature remained churches for Africans. It is very rare to find Europeans or Asians or people of other races in these churches. There is therefore a sense in which some modern churches may be accused of racism. The same is also true of economic status as alluded to above. Churches for the rich and for the poor have remained divided and not theologizing from the same perspective. In short the modern church has remained divided like the church of Corinth of Paul's time. This has been aggravated by globalization. From the definition of globalization given by M. Guibernau (2001: 244), "—the intensification of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life," one would expect that globalization would bring unity in the world. But to the contrary it has brought further disunity. As E. Conradie (2004:256) correctly observed, globalization has brought radical pluralism, conflicting diversity and cultural fragmentation. What lessons then can the modern church living in this world of disunity learn from Paul's response to factionalism in Corinth? What would be Paul's mes-

sage to a divided church were he to write a letter to the modern church today?

The modern church can learn a number of lessons on unity from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. As we have seen the divisions in the Corinthian church and in the church today have nothing to do with theology. They were and are a result of people's quest for knowledge, power and prestige. In his letter Paul, however, shows that such measurings do not apply in the church of God. Rather, the call in the church, as L.T. Johnson (1986:276) derives from Paul's argument, "--- is not an invitation to a club or a cult association which would demand ---- allegiance to their patron or mystagogue. It is a call that reverses all human norms---." Paul fights patronage, which is one of the sources of division both in and outside the church today. D.G. Horrell (1996:113) should be right when he says the slogans Paul quotes in 1 Corinthians 1-4, "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos," reveal that in some way the various teachers were the rallying points for the divisions. This is the case today. Instead of Christ being the point of anchorage, Christians anchor their beliefs and practices on human beings and human institutions. Thus Horrell goes further, quoting L.L. Welborn in comparing the slogans Paul quotes in 1:12 with declarations of personal allegiance in the realm of politics. Paul's message, however, is that human leaders are just stewards, planterers, waterers and builders in service to God. They should act in partnership not in competition. In terms of belonging, Paul shows that all Christians belong to Christ. Thus there should be in church no room for division on the basis of nationality, colour, creed, social status, race or any

other forms of division. If this message was necessary in the Corinthian church, I think it is more so today with the rise of terrorism and other ills affecting the world. The church needs to be more united for it to unite a divided world.

## **Conclusion**

Disunity characterizes the present world. With the rise of terrorism, secularism, consumerism and globalization it has become even worse. It is time the church needs to get united in order to be able to unite the world. It is only a united church, which can help people answer the following questions asked in contexts of cultural diversity, “Who am I? To which community do I belong? How can I cope with “walking in two worlds”? How am I different from people of other cultures? How do I cope with changing circumstances, with a culture in flux? Is it appropriate for me to derive my identity from mass media, from a culture of consumerism?”(Conradie 2004:255). This paper has argued for the need for this unity through a reflection on Paul’s message in 1 Corinthians 1-4. It has been observed that in a number of ways, the cosmopolitan nature of the city of Corinth which corresponds to today’s cosmopolitan societies, contributed to the factionalism and disunity that Paul learnt was disturbing the church. The paper suggested how these factions could have been formed. It concluded that the factions were not really a result of theological differences but had to do with the human tendency to divide along patronage, race, social status and so on. Paul’s response was then noted particularly his call for

unity. It is this response that has been used to argue for church unity in a world of disunity today. Now is the time for church ecumenism, not only at world level as in the World Council of Churches, but beginning at grassroots levels.

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## ***Chapter 5: The Conversion Of Paul As A Proto-Type Of Conversion In African Christianity***

### **Introduction**

In his discussion of conversion to Christianity among the Igbo of Nigeria, C.C. Okorochoa quotes one Michael Onu who had this to say:

It was a matter of turning to the God who proved Himself to be God indeed through his actions in the face of the contingency. The Teachers (Missionaries) told us that they (Christians) were the children of God, and that we have been serving powerless and wicked Ekwensu (evil spirits or the devil). ---.<sup>1</sup>

J. N. Amanze also notes this missionary attitude to African tradition and culture in Botswana and all over Africa. He writes, "It is interesting to note that quite often when Christianity came to Africa it was like a military expedition. The early missionaries looked upon themselves as engaged in a mortal battle against Satan. This Satan was disguised and active through the network of false African religious values, traditions and practices."<sup>2</sup> But despite the missionaries' lambasting of the African tradition, culture and religion, African Christians have generally remained

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<sup>1</sup> C.C. Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa: the case of Igbo in Nigeria*, (Singapore: Avebury, 1987), 225.

<sup>2</sup> J.N. Amanze, *African Christianity in Botswana*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1998), 51-52.



rooted in these. This does not, however, mean that Africans have not embraced Christianity. Rather, from the point of view of the missionaries, what has happened with the majority of people is to walk with one leg in the African religion and the other in the Christian religion. In fact one Zimbabwean traditionalist, Professor Gordon Chavhunduka had this to say at a conference on Inter-faith Dialogue, “Many Africans are Christians by the day but traditionalists by the night.”<sup>3</sup> Should such Christians then be described as unconverted? In other words does conversion mean the abandonment of one’s previous religion and culture? Was Paul then not converted? These are some of the issues this paper deals with as it tries to understand African conversion to Christianity in the light of Paul’s conversion experience.

## **The Problem of conversion in Africa**

We have noted in the introduction that missionaries considered conversion to be the abandonment of everything African. Today, apart from these missionaries, there are the church clergy and some western-oriented theologians, particularly in mainline and Pentecostal-Evangelical churches, who still believe that African culture stands in the way of Christianity. For these people many African Christians have not converted to Christianity in the true sense of the word. This is because, generally, conversion is understood to be a transition from a ‘false’ religion to a

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<sup>3</sup> G.L. Chavhunduka, Oral statement at Inter-Religious Dialogue conference, Harare, April 2001

'true' religion.<sup>4</sup> However, despite claiming to be Christians many Africans remain practicing African tradition and religion. Among some African Independent Churches (AICs), like the Apostolic Head Mountain Church in Zion in Botswana, there is revival of some traditional practices like veneration of ancestors in their worship. Reading the Old Testament, many AICs see nothing wrong in integrating Christianity and traditional practices like polygamy and consultation of fortune tellers. They find out that heroes of faith like Abraham, David and Solomon were polygamists. They also find out from the same Old Testament that when Saul lost his father's asses he went to consult a fortune teller (1 Samuel 9:6). At least the AICs do it in day light. Those who belong to mainline churches and Pentecostal-Evangelical churches, however, revert to traditional religion clandestinely. As C.C. Okorochoa correctly observed among the Igbo, such reversion usually takes place during moments of crises and after the initial enthusiasm that precipitated their conversion has died down.<sup>5</sup> Crises like lack of children in a marriage, unemployment, persistent deaths in a family, failure to marry, poor harvests and general misfortunes often are interpreted by African Christians as being too insurmountable to be dealt with in a Christian way.

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<sup>4</sup> I am thinking here of definitions given by people like A.D. Nock quoted by E. Ikenga-Metuh, 'The Shattered Microcosm: a Critical Survey of Explanations of Conversion in Africa,' in Petersen, K.H. Religion, *Development and African Identity*, (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987), 20.

<sup>5</sup> C.C. Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 269.

Those experiencing them are often advised even by their fellow Christians to seek African spiritual advice on them. It is quiet often to hear such advisors saying, “*Izvi zvodawo chi vanhu, chiKristu hachi ngazvigoni*” (These things can only be dealt with through traditional spirituality not through Christianity). This is because Africans believe in the existence of a spiritual world not separated from the physical world and as K.A. Dickson puts it, “--- all that brings suffering and deprivation is ultimately traceable to other than the physical causes.”<sup>6</sup> Thus when African Christians experience crises in their lives, they often revert back to this understanding of the cosmos. Is this then an indication of non-conversion? Before I address this question let me first discuss the conversion of Paul and see how he dealt with his own former religion and tradition. From this we can then see how a Christian should deal with his/her former religion and tradition.

## **The conversion of Paul**

The conversion of Paul is significant for Christianity in a number of ways. Indeed for F.F. Bruce, the conversion of Paul is the second most important event in Christian history after the Christ event.<sup>7</sup> Not only did it mark the beginning of Paul’s Christian life, it also marked the beginning of Gentile Christianity which has seen the participation of Asians, Africans, Europeans and all in

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<sup>6</sup> K. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1984), 192.

<sup>7</sup> F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, (Grand Rapids: W.M. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 75.

Christianity. The conversion of Paul also has provided the church with a model of conversion. On his way to persecute Christians in Damascus, Paul was suddenly turned into a Christian himself. The experience, as C.J. den Heyer puts it, “---(was) like a thunderbolt from a clear sky---.”<sup>8</sup> Thus there was an about turn in the way Paul viewed Christianity. As R.V. Peace puts it, in Paul’s conversion there were three elements, “---a seeing and a turning which together result in a transformation.”<sup>9</sup> Thus on his way to Damascus Paul saw the truth in Jesus Christ. This led him to turn from the way he viewed Christians (as enemies to be destroyed) resulting in a total transformation in himself. Hear, for example, what he had to say about his transformation, “Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as a loss because of Christ----. For this sake I have suffered loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish---” (Philippians 3:8). Questions have, however, been raised as to whether Paul’s experience around Damascus was a conversion or a call. Although Acts explains it in three passages (9:1-30, 22:3-31, 26:9-23) as a typical conversion which was then followed by a call, Paul prefers to call it a call (Romans 1:1,5). For some<sup>10</sup>, who believe that conversion means moving from one religion to the other, Paul understood

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<sup>8</sup> C.J. den Heyer, *Paul: A Man of Two Worlds*, (London: SCM Press, 1998), 50.

<sup>9</sup> R.V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1999), 25.

<sup>10</sup> For example. K. Stendhal cited by R.V. Peace, *Conversion in the New Testament*, 27-28.

his experience to be a call because he did not see any difference between Christianity and Judaism. I, however, want to differ with these and stress that Paul had a conversion although he does not explicitly accept it himself. I argue that he had a conversion because the experience changed the direction of his life. From an ardent persecutor of the church he was turned into a passionate proclaimer of the same faith. As I have already mentioned, the experience was an about turn, a turn to a completely new direction. Instead of persecuting Christians he was now to call people into Christianity. This, to me, is indeed conversion. Even if one were to accept that conversion means changing religions, Paul, at any rate remains a 'convert'<sup>11</sup> for in his preaching and writing it can be concluded that he understood Christianity to be a religion distinct from Judaism

Having been converted to Christianity, how did Paul now view his former religion and tradition? This is where the heart of this paper lies. Considering that Paul's influence in Christianity cannot be underestimated, his attitude to his former religion and tradition should actually inform modern Christians on how they should treat their former religions and traditions.

### **Paul's attitude to his former religion and tradition**

The conversion of Paul changed the way Christianity was understood. Up to the time of his conversion Christianity

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<sup>11</sup> I am taking from Segal here who has even entitled his book, *Paul the convert*, ( New Haven: Yale University, 1990).

was understood as a Jewish sect. Paul, however, understood Christianity to be a distinct religion. As a result, he called even the Jews into this new religion. But despite this, continuity existed between Paul the Pharisee and Paul the Christian apostle. His understanding of the new religion was informed by his knowledge of the former religion. He understood himself to be worshipping the same God, even proud of his traditional roots (2 Corinthians 11:22; Philippians 3:5-6). He continued to hold Jewish scriptures in high esteem and developed his Christian theology on the basis of his Jewish background understanding, for example, the new covenant as a fulfillment of the promises of the Old Testament (1 Corinthians 11:25). Indeed scholars have observed how Paul used Jewish methods of interpreting scripture in his explication of the Christian doctrine. The use of *halakah*, *hagaddah*, typology and even allegory has been identified in his letters.<sup>12</sup> In explaining the behaviour of women in church, Paul continued to be influenced by his Jewish background. His call for women to veil their heads in church and the ontological chain of authority he gave to support this argument, were all informed by the Jewish tradition (1 Corinthians 11:2-5). Even his understanding that salvation is first to the Jew and then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16-17) was also influenced by his Jewish background. In fact there is a sense in which Paul's mind re-

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<sup>12</sup> R.M Grant, with D.Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible*, (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1984), 17-27; S.E. Porter, and C.A. Evans, (eds) *The Pauline Writings*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 75-152.

mained tilted in favour of the Jews in the whole picture of salvation. His argument on the grafted olive tree in Romans 11:17-32 is one example among many.

Despite using the Jewish religion and tradition, Paul also made use of the Hellenistic tradition in which he had been brought up and in which he preached the gospel. Born in Tarsus of Cilicia, Paul must have had knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy. In fact H. Maccoby, though some of his views can be contested, sees Hellenistic influence, even gnosticism, in Paul's understanding of the cosmic role of Satan (2 Corinthians 4:4), his use of a contrasted pair in the Biblical narrative (Gal.4:21-31), his understanding of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 11:23-30) and his general thought pattern close to that of mystery religions.<sup>13</sup> It should be borne in mind that Tarsus was known for its good Greek education which rivalled that of Athens and Rome and so Paul must have been influenced by this education. It is not surprising then that Paul made use of this knowledge to explicate the Christian gospel. He adopted the Greek letter writing style in his letters and even used Greek rhetorics in his arguments.<sup>14</sup> In fact, as a result, some people even accuse Paul of "taking the Jewish message of Jesus and corrupting it into a Greek (Hellenistic) type of religion which Jesus would hardly have

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<sup>13</sup> H. Maccoby, *Paul and Hellenism*, (London: SCM Press, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> Many New Testament scholars think Paul used rhetorics in his letter to the Galatians and so interpret the letter using rhetorical analysis (See H.D. Betz, *Galatians*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1979); Hall, R.G. 'Rhetorical Analysis of Galatians', *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 106/2, 1987, 277-287.

recognized, let alone approved.”<sup>15</sup> Thus it appears outside these two thought worlds (Judaism and Hellenism) Paul could not explain the Christian faith. Now if Paul used his religion and culture to interpret Christianity, what are the implications for African Christianity?

### **The conversion of Paul as a proto-type for conversion in Africa**

We have seen how Paul dealt with his past when he became a Christian. It is clear that Paul continued using his tradition and traditional religion to understand Christianity and explain it to others. It is then surprising that when Africans do the same today they are accused by others of not having been converted. They are accused of acting like ‘old wine in new containers.’<sup>16</sup> I have problems with this view, which I consider to have been propounded by those influenced by a Western view of Christianity. Christianity has existed in the West for close to two millennia now resulting in Westerners seeing no difference between Christianity and their culture. The conversion of Paul, however, shows that Christianity should be understood in the culture in which it is preached. Any attempt to uproot people from their culture and religion in order for them to become Christians results in a lot of hypocrisy. It leads to what Chavhunduka observed among Zimbabwean Christians, ‘Christians by day and traditionalists by night.’ It

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<sup>15</sup> D. Horrell, *An Introduction to the study of Paul*, (London: Continuum, 2000), 2.

<sup>16</sup> E. Ikenga-Metuh, “The Shattered Microcosm---, 25



also results in lack of comprehension of the Christian religion. It should be noted that there is a difference between Christians in the West and those in Africa. Nearly all Africans are brought up within the traditional religion whether they were brought up in the city or in the village. Although some never adhere to it or practice it as a religion, they are brought up in contexts where African traditional religion is still active. As C.S. Banana writes, "To almost every African, the whole life journey is religious drama. Human kind lives in a religious universe, practically every aspect in the cosmos, every activity, space and time is expressed and experienced religiously."<sup>17</sup> As a result of this, most Africans, whether Christian or non-Christian, are afraid of witches, of the power of ancestral spirits and of the power of traditional medium spirits. They are aware of the consequences of murder or of not paying *lobola* (bride price). No wonder even in cities traditional doctors and fortune tellers have a lot of clients who come for protection against witches, avenging spirits and other malevolent spirits. Thus when such people convert to Christianity the traditional worldview is not completely wiped out of their minds. Like Paul they understand Christianity on the basis of the traditional religion. In fact no new learning can take place if the learner does not proceed from the known to the unknown. Conversion usually involves comparing and contrasting the old and the new religion. In the case of Paul, the period of persecution of Christians must have availed him the opportu-

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<sup>17</sup> C.S. Banana, *Come and Share: an introduction to Christian Theology*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1991), 23.

nity to compare and contrast Judaism and Christianity. As I argue elsewhere, Paul's conversion was not as sudden as Acts put it or was it isolated from human influence as he makes it in Galatians.<sup>18</sup> It must have been thoroughly prepared as he interacted and persecuted Christians. Okorocho would not have been more correct when he observed, "No people will change from one religion to the other unless they can see in the new vestiges of the old and a possibility of realizing within the new, goals and ideals desired but not gained in the old."<sup>19</sup> It is very likely that as he forced Christians to observe the Mosaic law during his time of persecuting Christians, Paul was debating deeply on which religion taught the truth, Judaism or Christianity. No wonder may be, when he became a Christian he did all he could to show the inferiority of the law in the presence of faith. The conversion was a result of him, to quote the words of Okorocho cited above, "---realising within the new (Christianity), goals and ideals desired but not gained in the old (Judaism)." This is exactly what Africans experience when they get converted to Christianity. They find Christianity providing certain goals and ideals that they will not have found in African traditional religion. I use the word 'certain' here very deliberately because it is fallacious that African traditional religion becomes evil and irrelevant once one becomes a Christian. It does only in the mind of the missionary not of the convert. In

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<sup>18</sup> L. Togarasei, *Cognitive Dissonance in Christian origins with special Reference to the Conversion of Paul*, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Zimbabwe 1997, 60.

<sup>19</sup> C.C. Okorocho, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 217.

fact as a result of the demonisation of African culture and religion by the missionary, African Christians often suffer identity crisis. T. Mucherera describes this identity crisis thus:

Along with personal identity confusion comes confusion about religious identity. One of the main causes of religious identity conflict occurs when people feel caught between traditional Shona (one African tribe) religious practices (condemned as paganistic by the missionaries) and Western Christian religious values.<sup>20</sup>

This crisis is almost obvious in anyone who is aware of the reality of two systems of interpreting life. In order to avoid this crisis there is therefore need to harmonise the two systems into one. This is exactly what Paul did with Christianity, Hellenism and Judaism. He saw Judaism as the *preparatio* for Christianity seeing in Christianity the fulfillment of his old religion. Unfortunately when African Christians do the same they are described as syncretic and unconverted by Western missionaries. This, to me, is very unfortunate and should be revised as African Christian theology continues to grow. If this is described as syncretism, then Paul himself was the founder of religious syncretism as he adapted Christianity to all in order to win all (1 Corinthians 9:20-21). In fact what is dismissed as syncretism is a display of the conflict that rages in the mind of an African who tries to anchor two faiths

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<sup>20</sup> T.N. Mucherera, *Pastoral care from a Third World Perspective: a pastoral Theology of Care for the Urban Contemporary Shona in Zimbabwe*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 15.

in one mind.<sup>21</sup> For this to happen there should be a continuity from the was (former religion) to the is (new religion).

## Way forward

My argument in this paper, therefore, is that Christianity is to be contextualized in its various aspects in order to meet realities in Africa. If not then Western missionaries would continue to see African Christians as unconverted, syncretic and so on. Many African theologians have already made such arguments<sup>22</sup> and here I have added my voice by arguing that in doing so, we will not even be unbiblical as we will be following the example of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles. By contextualizing the Gospel I, however, do not mean that we should go back to the veneration of ancestors. Like Banana, I am thinking of why we should not use *sadza* and *maheu* (common food and drink, respectively, for Zimbabweans) as symbolisms of the flesh and the blood of Jesus in the same way the early church used bread and wine.<sup>23</sup> Bread and wine were the most available food items of the time and surely bread and wine are scarce commodities among many ordinary Africans. I am also thinking of why a holy marriage needs

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<sup>21</sup> C.C. Okorochoa, *The Meaning of Religious Conversion in Africa*, 271.

<sup>22</sup> For example K.A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, G.H. Muzorewa, *The Origin and Development of African Theology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985), J.S. Pobee and G. Ositelu II *African Initiatives in Christianity*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998) and others.

<sup>23</sup> C.S. Banana, *Come and Share*, 79

to follow the western style marriages when we have respectable marriage procedures in our African societies. Why should it be wrong for me as an African Christian to believe that through prayer eggs, salt and cooking oil can cure illnesses?

What I am saying therefore is that there should be a way through which Christian theology in Africa has to make use of African traditional culture and religion. It has to respect it and explain how it fits within the universal salvation preached by Christians. Without this African Christians will continue walking on two thoughts (1 Kings 18:21). There is need to develop a holistic Christian theology which can explain the lack of a child in family, failure to marry, the death of children in a family, the contraction of HIV/AIDS by members of the same family and all other misfortunes. Although AICs have made some significant progress in this area, mainline and Pentecostal-Evangelical churches have a long way to go.

There is also need to develop a Christian theology that clearly explains the place of ancestor spirits in salvation. This is because ancestor veneration and spirituality are deep seated in the hearts of many Africans. It is because of this same observation that G.H. Muzorewa says that when African theology can address the African people's spirituality, then it will become effective to the believer.<sup>24</sup> To just dismiss ancestor spirits as unchristian does not change the worldview of an African. Little wonder then some AICs have incorporated ancestor veneration as part

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<sup>24</sup> G.H. Muzorewa, *The Origin and Development of African Theology*, 44

of Christian ritual and emphasize the spirit that some of the churches have been designated 'spirit-type churches'. I do not advocate for this form of contextualization. My argument is that in the process of contextualization there is need to keep the pillars of Christian faith. Two of these for me are the centrality of Jesus and the Bible. Africans believe that ancestors are the mediators between God and humanity. This belief cannot be incorporated into Christianity since the ancestors will usurp the role of Christ or compete with him (1Timothy 2:5). It is this belief which the convert to Christianity should leave. But for her/him to leave it there must be a Christian theology that explains the place of ancestor spirits in human salvation. The Bible should also not be relegated to one form of revelation among many as Banana suggests in his quest for contextualization of Christianity in Africa.<sup>25</sup> For many the Bible plays a central role in Christianity. It should maintain this status as it actually can be used to justify contextualization as we have seen with the conversion of Paul.

## **Conclusion**

Christian conversion in Africa needs to be understood from the stand point that there are no converts who have never held any religious beliefs. Most of the converts were once practitioners and followers of the African traditional religion. This paper has argued that that this was also the case with the conversion of Paul. He was a zealous Pharisee before he converted to Christianity. After his conver-

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<sup>25</sup> C.S. Banana, *Come and Share*, 42

sion he continued to use some of the views of the old religion to understand and explain Christianity. Not only did he do that, he also made use of the people's and his Hellenistic culture to explain Christianity to them. In fact were it not for Paul, Christianity would probably have remained a Jewish sect. Using Paul as a proto-type, this paper has argued that Christian conversion in Africa should be understood from this perspective. It should be known that African Christians continue to be influenced by African traditional religion and culture when they become Christians. Instead of preaching a Europeanised gospel, an Africanised gospel is better placed to make Christianity intelligible to African Christians. Thus when African Christians continue to borrow from African religion and culture when practicing Christianity they should not be accused of being unconverted. Rather they will be following on the heels of Paul who understood Christianity from his traditional and cultural perspective. It is the task of African Christian theologians to discuss the extent of the borrowing but the fact that they borrow is given and therefore should not be demonized.

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## ***Chapter 6: Paul and the Environment: an investigation of his Christology and Eschatology***

### **Introduction**

Of the twenty seven books of the New Testament, almost half claim Pauline authorship. Over and above these, about half of Acts of the Apostles tells the life and teaching of Paul. New Testament scholarship, has for long debated the extent to which each of these writings inform us about the historical Paul. Today the majority of the scholars take seriously only seven letters as authentically Pauline (Gorman 2004:41).<sup>1</sup> Acts' accounts of Paul are taken with a pinch of salt as the author is accused of being tendentious and of colouring his accounts with legendary hue (Conzelmann and Lindemann 1988:356).<sup>2</sup> Thus in reconstructing the life and teaching of Paul, the *modus operandi* has been to give the seven genuine Pauline letters (Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Philippians and Philemon) precedence over the other sources. I use the same approach here. From these many sources, what then is Paul's teaching concerning the environment?

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<sup>1</sup> Gorman, M.J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Conzelmann, H. and Lindemann, A. *Interpreting the New Testament*, Massachusetts: Hendrikson Publishers, 1988.

Paul's teaching on the environment cannot be easily discerned. There appears to be two main reasons for this. First, is the fact that the Pauline writings and indeed all other New Testament books are not works of systematic theology. They rose out of the practical needs of the New Testament communities. The second reason is that early Christians just like Christians today considered the Old Testament canonical and so were likely to turn to it for its rich guidelines on environmental issues whenever they had need. Be that as it may, one can still read in between the lines Paul's attitude to and teaching on the environment. To do so it is, however, necessary to first define one's use of the word 'environment.' When we talk of the environment we talk about our surroundings. We do not talk only about the land, the trees and grasses that grow upon it. Rather we include the resources that we draw from and from underneath the land, the air that we breathe, the creatures that traverse the land, the seas and other water bodies around us, the deserts and ice lands, the birds that fly and so on. Environmental issues are about humanity's relations with all these.

From the preceding discussion of the word 'environment,' it is then possible to discuss Paul's attitude to the environment. I will do this first, by showing Paul's assumption of the Old Testament about creation. I will follow this with a discussion of Paul's eschatology analyzing what he thought about the world to come. My assumption here is that what Paul thought of the destiny of this world influenced his and his followers' attitude to the environment. I will follow this with a discussion of Paul's Christology looking at what Paul taught about creation in Ro-

mans 8:18-23. I will then consider the implications of Paul's attitude to the environment for Christians today before concluding the paper.

## **Paul's assumption of the Old Testament about creation**

Paul was a Jew proud of his Jewish heritage (Philippians 3:5, 2 Corinthians 11:22). His attitude towards the environment should therefore have been heavily influenced by the Old Testament, particularly the teaching about creation (Genesis 1-3). In a number of passages, Paul takes for granted the Old Testament view that the earth and everything in it is the proud handiwork of God. In Romans 1:20, for example, he asserts that the created world reflects the character of God himself who created it. In Acts (14:17, 17:24), Paul says the creation and indeed the cycles of nature are accredited witnesses of God, the primary testimony he gives to himself (Rayan 1994:132).<sup>3</sup> Being influenced by the Old Testament view of creation, there is little doubt then that Paul assumed the role that the same Old Testament assigns humanity over the created world. He therefore should have viewed human beings as having been entrusted with the care of the created world as trustees, stewards and managers (Berry 2005:1).<sup>4</sup> Created in

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<sup>3</sup> Rayan, S. 'The Earth is the Lord's,' in Hallmann, D.G. (Ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, pp.130-148.

<sup>4</sup> Berry, S. 'A Christian approach to the environment,' in The John Ray Initiative, *A Christian Approach to the Environment*, London: John Ray Initiative, 2005, pp. 1-4.

the image of God, they share the 'godly' responsibility over the created world.

## **The Environment in Pauline Eschatology**

Pauline eschatology is elaborately stated in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3 and 1 Corinthians 15. In these passages Paul reminds the Thessalonians and the Corinthians of the resurrection of the dead. His underlining message was that at the *parousia*, both the living and the dead will be transformed into imperishable bodies to live with Christ forever. An environmental or ecological question that one may ask is where the resurrected will spend their eternal life. This of course would have had an impact on Paul and his followers' attitude to the present world. As E. Lucas (2005:85) admits, Pauline literature does not have a clear answer to this question.<sup>5</sup> Although 1 Corinthians gives details of the nature of the resurrected body, it says nothing about where the resurrected will live. It is rather 1 Thessalonians 4 (especially verse 16) that gives some idea of where the resurrected will spend their lives. The popular Christian view is that the eternal world is in heaven and that in this world Christians are sojourners. Unfortunately this appears unPauline. The word *parousia* that Paul uses of the coming of Christ is helpful in answering the question of where the eternal world will be. *Parousia* is a word which referred to the coming of a king or a very

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<sup>5</sup> Lucas, E. 'The New Testament teaching on the environment,' in The John Ray Initiative, *A Christian Approach to the Environment*, London: John Ray Initiative, 2005, pp.73-96.

important person to a city. Often some residents of the city met him/her along the way and then escorted him/her into the city amid fun and pomp (Paul mentions the blowing of trumpet in both 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and 1 Corinthians 15:52 showing he had this in mind). E. Lucas (2005:85) should therefore be right when he says in 1 Thessalonians 4:16, Paul was thinking of believers going to ‘meet the Lord in the air’ in order to escort him to the earth.<sup>6</sup> Understood this way, Paul therefore believed eternal life will be here in this world.

In his eschatology Paul also mentions his understanding of what will happen to the body at the *parousia*. He says, “—but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye-----, and the dead will be raised imperishable---. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). Thus according to Paul, at the *parousia*, God is not to create new beings altogether. Rather God is to renew the same old beings. In other words they will be a continuation of the *was* to the *is*. J. Pilkinghorne (1984:167) puts it succinctly, “The new creation is not a second attempt by God at what he had first tried to do in the old creation. It is a different kind of divine action altogether, and the difference may be summarized by saying that the first creation was *ex nihilo* while the second creation will be *ex vetere*. In other words, it is God’s bringing into being a universe which is free to exist

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<sup>6</sup> Lucas, E. ‘The New Testament teaching on the environment,’ in The John Ray Initiative, *A Christian Approach to the Environment*, London: John Ray Initiative, 2005, pp.73-96.

“on its own”, in the ontological space made available by the divine kenotic act of allowing the existence of something wholly other; the new creation is the divine redemption of the old.”<sup>7</sup> In 1 Corinthians 3:14 and 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul even argues that what humans do in this present world contribute to the new creation. As we shall see below, this includes humanity’s contribution to the environment.

## The Environment in Pauline Christology

The Pauline passage often cited in ecological discussions is Romans 8:18-23 (Kassmann 1994:47, Bryne 2000:193, Lucas 2005:85).<sup>8</sup> Bryne, for example, notes that in light of the human capacity to act irresponsibly towards the earth, Pauline scholars can hardly help relating this irresponsibility to a reading of this passage.<sup>9</sup> Kassmann (1994:48) finds thousands of examples of how the creation is suffering: ozone depletion, climate change, land degradation,

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<sup>7</sup> Pilkinghorne, J. *Science in Christian Belief*, London: SPCK, 1994

<sup>8</sup> Bryne, B. ‘Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8:18-22,’ in Habel, N.C. *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 2000, pp.193-203. Kassmann, M. ‘Covenant, Praise and Justice in Creation: Five Bible Studies,’ in Hallmann, D.G. (Ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, pp.28-51. Lucas, E. ‘The New Testament teaching on the environment,’ in The John Ray Initiative, *A Christian Approach to the Environment*, London: John Ray Initiative, 2005, pp.73-96.

<sup>9</sup> Bryne, B. ‘Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8:18-22,’ in Habel, N.C. *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 2000, pp.193-203.

water pollution, deforestation, habitat destruction, species extinction, use and misuse of biotechnology. Pessimistically she decries, “Every day seems to bring news of some environmental deterioration” (Kassmann 1994:85).<sup>10</sup>

Ecologists have found in Romans 8, a christological connection with creation. It is one New Testament text in which creation is the subject not the object. As a result those interpreters who think Paul had nothing to do with the environment as he was mainly interested in the human soul, have sought ways of explaining away the ecological tones of the passage. R. Bultmann (1952:230), for example, sees in this text a cosmological mythology of Gnosticism which Paul then appropriates to enable him to express the fact that the perishable creation becomes a destructive power when humanity chooses it instead of God.<sup>11</sup> Other Romans commentators like M. Gorman (2004) even decide not to comment on the ecological aspects of the text.<sup>12</sup> Byrne (2000:194) attributes this to scholars’ great focus on the theme of justification by faith, “that Paul’s notions that the relationships with the non-

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<sup>10</sup> Kassmann, M. ‘Covenant, Praise and Justice in Creation: Five Bible Studies,’ in Hallmann, D.G. (Ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, pp.28-51.

<sup>11</sup> Bultmann, R. *Theology of the New Testament*, New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1952.

<sup>12</sup> Gorman, M.J. *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters*, Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004

human created world should be an intrinsic element of human relationships with God has fallen from view.”<sup>13</sup>

The text, rather, is full of ecological notions. It reads:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God, for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul sees suffering as a characteristic of this world. So great is the suffering that Paul compares it to labour pains. This suffering for him is being experienced by the whole of creation. Although some readers have tried to limit the meaning of ‘creation’ to humanity, the general context of the passage and particularly verse 20 has led the majority of scholars to conclude that Paul is referring to

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<sup>13</sup> Byrne, B. ‘Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8:18-22,’ in Habel, N.C. *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 2000, pp.193-203.



the sub-human creation (Lucas 2005:86).<sup>14</sup> In fact, in the passage, Paul differentiates ‘creation’ (sub-human) (8:18) from ‘we ourselves’ (humans) (8:23). Byrne’s interpretation is much more enlightening (2000:197). He says, although Paul does not cite the creation stories of Genesis explicitly, his argument is premised on the stories. Byrne (2000:197) proceeds, “In particular the argument hinges around the principle that, because human beings were created along with the non-human created world and given responsibility for that world, they share a common fate with that world. When the situation of human beings deteriorates, so does the rest of creation and, vice versa, when it goes well, the creation shares in the blessing.”<sup>15</sup> As pointed out in the first section, Paul’s view of the environment must have been influenced heavily by the Old Testament. This is true of the view expressed in this text, that is, that the destiny of the creation (the environment) is determined by the actions of humanity. The Old Testament is full of evidence to this effect. For example, because Adam and Eve sinned, the land became difficult to till (Genesis 3:17-19) and when human beings please God and are blessed, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb----- and the weaned child shall put his hand on the udder’s den” (Isaiah 11:6-9). Paul therefore thinks of creation’s

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<sup>14</sup> Lucas, E. ‘The New Testament teaching on the environment,’ in The John Ray Initiative, *A Christian Approach to the Environment*, London: John Ray Initiative, 2005, pp.73-96.

<sup>15</sup> Bryne, B. ‘Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8:18-22,’ in Habel, N.C. *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 2000, pp.193-203.

suffering as a consequence of human behavior, n entirely correct view if one looks at the damage that human action cause on the environment. He therefore envisages the creation awaiting with eager longing “the arrival of human beings at the fullness of the graced humanity intended for them by God” (Byrne 2000:197).<sup>16</sup>

Working with Paul’s comparison of creation’s suffering to labour pains, one cannot but notice that Paul remained hopeful. Although labour pains are unbearable, I am told, the pain is soon overcome by the joy that comes with the birth of the child. Thus as creation suffers it still remains hopeful, hopeful that the suffering it experiences will bring about new life. But this, for Paul is dependent on the revelation of the children of God. At this point, the Pauline Christology comes out loud and clear. Pauline soteriology is Christocentric. The salvation of humanity is dependent on Christ. In the same way the salvation of the creation is also, therefore, dependent on Christ. Humans are thus co-creators with God.

Romans 8:18-23 is therefore of great value to ecological issues as it shows Paul’s concern for the non-human created world. Probably noticing that human life is meaningless outside the whole of the created world order, Paul incorporates the theme of creation in his grand theme of justification in Christ. He therefore shows the intricate relationship between God, human beings and the non-human world. From the above analysis of Paul’s ecologi-

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<sup>16</sup> Byrne, B. ‘Creation Groaning: An Earth Bible Reading of Romans 8:18-22,’ in Habel, N.C. *Reading from the Perspective of Earth*, Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 2000, pp.193-203.

cal views as contained in his eschatological, soteriological and Christological views, what then can we conclude about Christians and the environment?

## **Paul, Christians and the environment**

That our planet is facing an environmental crisis has long been observed. Evidence still abounds in the form of loss of species, land degradation, depletion of energy resources, climatic change to mention but a few. As we are gathered here, our southern African region is reeling from some of the effects of the ecological crisis. Floods have affected farming and led to loss of human life in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and parts of Botswana. Depletion of energy resources have seen us preparing lectures and conference papers under candle light. As the call for papers for this conference explicitly states, various world bodies have noted this crisis with some of them responding in one way or the other. Christianity, however, has been accused of contributing to this crisis. Some environmentalists have found problems in the Christian view that humanity was given dominion over the earth by God. They argue that instead of caring for the environment as servants and stewards of God and with love, respect, justice, creativity and interest of other creatures (Gnanakan 1999:51-56), humanity has dominated creation in a malign way.<sup>17</sup> The need for 'development' has seen humanity plundering the creation for its selfish needs. L.

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<sup>17</sup> Gnanakan, K. *God's World: A Theology of the Environment*, London: SPCK, 1999.

White, for example, accused the Christian doctrine of creation as the ‘most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen’ and that as a result of this anthropocentrism, Christianity bears the major responsibility for the ecological disaster. This is particularly true in Africa and other former colonized states where Christianity, colonialism and ‘development’ came bundled together in one package. In the name of development and civilization local beliefs and traditions, which for centuries had helped conserve the environment, were demonized. For many different reasons Christians have supported industrialization without considering its effects on the environment.<sup>18</sup> It is for this reason that White accused the religion of bearing the burden of the present ecological crisis. But as those who wrote after the publication of White’s work correctly noted, it is not the Christian sacred books that promote wanton destruction of nature by humanity. Rather it is the interpretation of the Scriptures in the Western world that led to the ecological crisis. The Scriptures are full of messages that promote humanity’s respect for the created world. The Pauline writings are some of these Scriptures that do promote right attitude to the environment.

I have pointed out above that Paul assumed the Old Testament view of the environment. This should be the starting point for Christian interests in environmental issues.

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<sup>18</sup> J.B. Cobb Jr (2000:497-511) gives three reasons why Christians have rallied behind industrialization: Christian support of need for the world to meet human needs, the need to create employment for all and the need for population growth.

Believing Paul that the created world reflects the character of God (Romans 1:20) should lead Christians to respect the environment. This is because in the passage Paul argues for natural revelation. God can be seen in nature as well as he can be seen in Scripture (special revelation). In a way Paul therefore equated the created world to Scripture: they both reveal God. Thus going by this interpretation, it can be argued that Christians must treat the environment in the same way they revere Scripture. They should manage it as caretakers and stewards of God, not in an exploitative manner as Lynn White (1967) accused Christianity of doing, but in a benign way (Deane-Drummond 1996:65).<sup>19</sup>

Pauline eschatology also has a number of ecotheological lessons for Christians. As we have seen in our analysis of his eschatology, Paul situates eternal life here on earth. Understood this way, the earth is therefore our home, whether from the perspective of realized or of thoroughgoing (futurist) eschatology. This eschatological understanding is important for ecotheology. It means Christians must not wantonly destroy the environment in anticipation of a new creation, but should rather take care of this earth as it is their home forever. In a book on Ecology and Christian anthropology, the South African theologian, E.M. Conradie (2005:299), says taking care of this earth is more urgent for Christians as they must prepare for the

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<sup>19</sup> Dean-Drummond, C. *A Handbook in Theology and Ecology*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1996.

coming of God.<sup>20</sup> As we have seen above, Paul does not anticipate a ‘death’ of this world and a recreation of a new one. Rather he anticipates a transformation of this same creation. His use of the word *parousia* (1 Thessalonians 4) and the analogy of the sown seed in relation to the resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15) drive this point home. Thus G. Zerf (cited by McAffe 1996:40), commenting on the whole of the New Testament eschatology (but using the phrase kingdom of God), underlines that eschatology is an ecological concept because the New Testament vision of salvation includes the restorative re-creation of the entire universe to its intended ecological balance, “the restoration of the entire universe to its original state.”<sup>21</sup> As we have seen this too is the Pauline view of eschatology.

Although Paul’s use of the Old Testament and his eschatology have ecological overtones, as we have seen above, it is his Christology as reflected in Romans 8:18-23 which is much more evident. Paul does not separate the suffering of the environment (creation) from the suffering of humanity. In the same way he argues also that Christians, as children of God have the duty to see their salvation in conjunction with the salvation of all creation. In fact by reading between the lines, one cannot dispute that Paul sees humanity as part and parcel of creation. With the

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<sup>20</sup> Conradie, E.M. *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?*, Haunts: Ashgate Publishing, 2005

<sup>21</sup> McAfe, G. ‘Ecology and Biblical Studies,’ in Hessel, D.T. (Ed), *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996.

same origin, they all have the same destiny. Addressing Christians using the text, Kassmann (1994:50) has it that when humans destroy the creation, they therefore should know that they are destroying themselves. She goes further, “So we have to recognize the connection of the human beings and nature as a whole because there is common salvation or common condemnation” (Kassmann 1994:50).<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper was based on two assumptions. First, is the reality of the ecological crisis we are facing not only in our southern African region but indeed worldwide. Second, is the influence that the Bible has in our different world communities. I therefore set out to find out whether Paul, an influential figure in Christian doctrine, has any teaching which is relevant to our environmental crisis. Although Paul wrote his letters about two centuries ago, these letters, because of their canonical status in church, still have influence in the teaching and practice of the church. I specially looked at the Pauline doctrines of eschatology and Christology. In the Pauline eschatology I have underlined the fact that Paul believed that eternal life will be on this earth. Without forcing the text to answer modern ecological questions in a literal way, I have noted that this teaching of Paul can be used to promote human-

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<sup>22</sup> Kassmann, M. ‘Covenant, Praise and Justice in Creation: Five Bible Studies,’ in Hallmann, D.G. (Ed), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, pp.28-51.

ity's care of the environment. I have also looked at his Christology especially as contained in Romans 8:18-23. Again without forcing the text to answer modern questions, I have stressed that the Pauline Christology of equating humanity with the non-human world is important for ecological solutions.

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## **SECTION 4: POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

## **Chapter 7:**

# ***'Let Everyone be Subject to Governing Authorities': The Interpretation of New Testament Political Ethics towards and after Zimbabwe's 2002 Presidential Elections.***

## **Introduction**

Beginning early in the history of Christianity, the New Testament came to be used, "... as a reservoir of texts for the illumination and resolution of ethical problems and the provision of moral guidelines" (Houlden 1996:206). The Bible in general and the New Testament in particular, continue to be treated by Christians as a source book of legal instructions. West and Dube (2000) have looked at the continued influence of the Bible in African Christianity. In Zimbabwe, those taking oaths swear by the Bible showing that even the state regards it as a source for morality. It is not even surprising that many politicians quote biblical passages when commenting on political matters. For example, ZANU PF supporters liken Robert Mugabe to the biblical Moses (Chitando 2002:10). No wonder, towards and after Zimbabwe's 2002 presidential elections, when the political landscape was so polarized, Christians interpreted NT political ethics very differently depending on their political persuasions. This paper is therefore aimed at analyzing the way NT political ethics were interpreted by Christians in this specific period. It is based on the debates, by Christians, I listened to and sometimes

participated in. These were not formal debates, so this explains why I quote no one's name.

I approach this subject informed by the reader-response method of interpreting texts. This method sees texts as open to more than one meaning and argues that the reader is constrained by social, psychological, religious, gender, racial, cultural and other needs in his/her reading of the text (Davies 1990:577). The text is therefore forced to meet these needs of the reader. In Zimbabwe, towards the 2002 presidential elections, two types of NT political ethics interpretations emerged because of people's ideological needs. I call the first interpretation 'pro-ruling party' type of interpretation and the second, I call 'anti-ruling party' type of interpretation.

To achieve my objective I follow the following scheme. In the first section I give a brief background of the political situation in Zimbabwe before and after the 2002 presidential elections. This section is followed by a historical-critical interpretation of NT passages on political ethics. The third section looks at the pro-ruling party interpretation of political ethics followed by the anti-ruling party interpretation. The last section is a theological reflection on these ethics in the context they were used in Zimbabwe.

## **The Political situation in Zimbabwe Towards and After the 2002 Presidential Elections**

Before looking at the political situation around the 2002 presidential elections, let me make a few steps back to the time of the birth of the nation of Zimbabwe in 1980. This

enables me to put the discussion of this paper in the proper context. Zimbabwe was born in 1980 from the British colonialists who colonized the country and named it Rhodesia in 1890. R. G. Mugabe's ZANU PF and J. Nkomo's PF ZAPU brought the independence after a protracted war that lasted from the late 1960s to early 1979. In the elections following the end of the war, Mugabe's party won the majority of the votes and he was appointed the first Prime Minister and subsequently President of the country.

From 1980 to 1990, Mugabe was the beacon of the Zimbabwean and even African politics. Though there were and there appeared a number of opposition political parties, these were generally insignificant in the eyes of the majority of the Zimbabweans. In fact Zimbabwe was actually a quasi one party state. Growing up in the rural areas of Zimbabwe myself, I did not know the difference between ZANU PF as a party and as a government. The two were synonymous in the minds of many of us. The only party which posed some challenge to ZANU PF was Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) in the 1990 parliamentary and presidential elections. But still ZANU PF had a landslide victory except for the two constituencies of Chipinge which remained in the hands of ZANU NDONGA. Thus Mugabe's grip to power was only tested with the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. In the 2000 parliamentary elections this party won a significant number of seats in parliament. With the challenge posed by this party, the political situation in the country became tumultuous. Coincidentally prices of basic commodities began escalating.

The education system, the health delivery system and all other government systems deteriorated amazingly. No doubt, a number of people started loosing hope and confidence in the party and many of them abandoned the liberation party for the new party. The MDC drew a lot of support especially from the working class particularly the urbanites. This was seen in the 2000 parliamentary elections where the new party managed to snatch 57 seats from the ruling party.

Against the above background started the invasions of white owned farms at the blessing of the ruling party. Taking advantage of being the majority in parliament, ZANU PF started making changes to the Lancaster House constitution (the national constitution drawn at Lancaster House in London paving way for the first general elections) to enable it to compulsorily acquire land for the resettlement of indigenous Zimbabweans. The MDC interpreted this as a political gimmick meant to win voters. During this period, the MDC was gaining ground in the political field. These saw clashes between members of the two parties. A lot of people died because of political violence with the two parties accusing each other of the murderous activities. During the farm invasions a lot of white commercial farmers were murdered in cold blood. There is no doubt that some criminals took advantage of this situation to perpetrate crimes. These violent activities continued until the 2002 presidential elections. When the results were announced, the two parties were separated by about 400 000 votes with the ruling party emerging the victor. The opposition party rejected the results accusing the ruling party of using violence before and during the

elections. They also complained that the ruling party had rigged the elections and had frustrated the urban voters (whom it considered to be its supporters), by reducing the number of polling centers. The opposition party even challenged the results by filing opposition papers in court calling for the rerun of the elections. The ruling party, however, dismissed all these accusations describing these as responses of losers.

In this situation the church surely could not be left out. A number of church boards and individuals made public statements both before and after the elections condemning violence. However, within the church, two different types of interpreting NT political ethics emerged. Before I look at these interpretations, let me first look at which passages these are, what they say and how they have been interpreted in the history of NT studies. This will help us to see how biblical interpretation is influenced by the interpreter's context.

## **NT political ethics and how they have been interpreted in history**

Romans 13:1-7 is our guiding flame in this article. The title of the article is in fact from this passage. The passage has exerted the greatest influence on the topic of the Christian and the state. In it Paul says the state is an institution appointed by God and that he recommends for the Christian unqualified subservience to it. Paul's attitude, however, has raised and continues to raise, a lot of questions. Considering that the Pauline writings are regarded as the most influential source of Christian morality (Toga-

rasi 1995:1), scholars question what Paul meant by governing authorities and why he was so optimistic about them. So through the history of Christianity, various interpretations have been given to this passage since it has been the source of much church-state reflection.

For J.L. Houlden (1973:81), Paul's optimism can only be understood against the context in which he wrote. He said two aspects of the context in which Paul wrote bear upon his judgment. The first aspect is that by this time the church was small in size that it could not make any political influence. Subservience therefore was the only thing the church could do. N. Perrin and D. Duling (1971:203) also support this view saying that a minute Christian movement that had as yet had no major conflict with mighty Rome would naturally pick up the Hellenistic Jewish position of submission in relation to the empire. The second aspect was Paul's expectation of an imminent end. He believed there was a short time before the end and so Christians were to bear with the authorities. There was no need to call for any social or political change since the time was up.

The other interpretation that has been given to this passage is that Paul could have been content with the benefits of life he had enjoyed in the Roman Empire. He was therefore a man of his own time. G. H. C. Macgregor (1954:599-600) says:

We cannot doubt that Paul, the traveler, found himself often thanking God for the unification of the world which Rome had brought about and for



the comparative safety of the seas and the roads for which Roman action against pirates and robbers had been responsible. He would also be grateful often for the protection which the Roman magistrates gave him when he was threatened by mob violence.

Macgregor therefore believes that by governing authorities, Paul was referring to the Roman Empire, that is, human authorities and that today the governing authorities would be our reigning governments.

There are, however, other scholars who offer other interpretations. O. Cullmann (1955:41) thinks that apart from human authorities, Paul also had in mind the invisible angelic powers at stand behind the state. Be that as it may, Paul must have been thinking about the Roman government. He could have been influenced by the Old Testament conviction that God is ruler of all nations and all history and that in order to protect his creatures from sin; he provides them with civil rulers, just as he provides them with the sun and rain (Barret 1962:245). W. Lillie (1961:87) is, however, of the opinion that Paul could not have been hundred percent optimistic of governing authorities but probably, in an apologetic way, thought they were actually checking wrongdoing, and in some measure, encouraging morality. He gives the example of bad and tyrannical governments like Nazi Germany and says that thieves and murderers in a none-political way found themselves in prison, while people who did real public service were commended so long as they did not deviate openly from the party line. He concludes, "A bad gov-

ernment may appear to the Christian a lesser evil than no government at all” (Lillie 1961:87). If Paul thought this way then his views were similar to those later expressed by Rabbi Hanina in about 66 CE, “Were it not for the fear of the government, a man would swallow up his neighbor alive” (Furnish 1979:129).

Other NT passages on political ethics are 1 Peter 2:13-17, 1 Timothy 2:1-2, Titus 3:1-2 and others which are not directly political. 1 Peter and Titus express the same view of the Christian’s proper attitude toward the government as Paul had expressed a generation or two earlier. On the other hand, 1 Timothy is an exhortation to give thanks and to pray for the Roman authorities. Lillie’s says that this was in accordance with the Jewish custom and the Christians had reasons to be thankful for the law and order established by Rome.

The NT passages analysed so far show that the early church teaching was that Christians should be obedient to the governing authorities. However, in the book of Revelation, the writer shows a different church attitude towards the state. In Revelation 13, for example, the state is portrayed as a slave of Satan (Sweet 1979:206). The Roman state which Paul had regarded as the servant of God is now an enemy of God. Lillie says the state had now exceeded the God-appointed limits of its power by claiming authority over the souls of people as well as their property. He suggests that the Roman power had perhaps reached its lowest ebb as the provider of bread for a greedy proletariat going beyond its sphere. In such a state, the writer of Revelation shows that a Christian may then refuse to

obey the commands of a government over-reaching its authority. Earlier in the history of Christianity the apostles had actually taken such a stance saying, “whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge...” (Acts 4:19).

In the light of the passages discussed above, it can be seen that Christians are part and parcel of their political environment, and as we have noted in the introduction, the Christian’s contact is almost always based on his/her interpretation of scripture. In the next section we therefore analyse how Zimbabwean Christians who were ‘pro-ruling party’ interpreted these passages in the political environment towards and after the 2002 presidential elections.

### **Pro-ruling party interpretation**

Though we have analysed other NT passages above, Christian reflections on the relationship between Christians and the state are no doubt mainly based on Rom 13:1-7. No wonder towards and after Zimbabwe’s 2002 presidential elections, this was the passage mainly used to discuss Christian political ethics.

For those who supported the ruling party, verse 1 lays down the general thesis of Christian submission to the supreme authorities. In their opinion only officials from and representing the ruling party qualified as the governing authorities Paul was referring to. Whereas for interpreters like M. Black (1973:18) the ruling authorities are, “..clearly the governing or civil authorities wherever the Christian congregation or Christian believer is located,” the pro-ruling party interpretation was that such authori-

ties should be from the ruling party. It is interesting that even in areas where civil authorities like city councilors and members of parliament were from the opposition party, the pro-ruling party interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 did not regard these as the ruling authorities Paul was referring to. For them there was no distinction between the state and the ruling party. Submission to the governing authorities was explained as doing what the ruling party requires. This included attending the ruling party rallies (even if it called for the cancelation of church services). Most of all, submission for them was seen in voting for the ruling party at district council, city council, parliamentary and presidential elections. This is because they believed the ruling party to be divinely instituted and that whoever resisted it resisted God. The statement, “he who resists authorities resists what God has appointed and will thus incur judgment,” was also interpreted literally. Violence which led to the arrest, beating up and even death of supporters of the opposition party was considered to be God’s judgment expressing itself through human punishment. Whoever punished in any way those who supported the opposition party was considered an instrument of God. Supporting and even being sympathetic to the opposition party was considered a sinful act and so whoever did so was supposed to be afraid of the governing authorities, “...for he does not bear the sword in vain...” (v. 4) According to this interpretation, denying the ruling party one’s vote was comparable to refusing to pay taxes, revenue and honour to the governing authorities.

The pro-ruling party interpretation of Christians’ attitude to the state, however, did not make any reference to the

book of Revelation where the church resisted the state. Emphasis was therefore on submission shown particularly in supporting and voting for the ruling party.

### **The anti-ruling party interpretation**

In the same political climate, those opposed to the ruling party interpreted the NT passages on political ethics differently. The anti-ruling party interpretation saw in Rom. 13:1-7 not the ZANU PF government. According to this interpretation, the passage must be interpreted at two levels. First, the interpreters said, by the governing authorities Paul did not refer to the party but to a state guided by the constitution of the country. The ruling party, according to them, can remain a divinely instituted governing authority only as long as it upholds the constitution of the country. In this case they regarded the governing authorities to be the civil magistrates who were there to make sure that every citizen including the head of the state, remain under the laws of the country as stated in the constitution. Those who followed this interpretation said they did not believe that a divinely appointed government could be corrupt and abuse its subjects. They said God appoints governments through democratic systems of free and fair elections. They said surely God cannot come down to appoint to appoint governing authorities but rather God is present in people and so when people go to the ballot boxes, God will be appointing for them governing authorities. Thus, for them, a government which gets into power through undemocratic and corrupt means, is not a divinely instituted government and Christians have

the right to resist. They said in such cases Christians could even withdraw their taxes, revenues and honour since these would not be put to right use.

At the second level of interpretation they said Paul was optimistic because of his context. He was under a government which had promoted the Christian faith. It was because of the peace created by the Roman Empire that Christianity was able to penetrate the Roman world unhindered. Thus Paul, as a man of his own time, saw reality and established ethical principles on the basis of what he saw and experienced. They said if Paul had lived up to the time of the Domitian persecution when Revelation is believed to have been written, he could not have taken a different stance from that taken by the author of this book. The author spoke against such a power but using only a cryptic language such as referring to Rome as Babylon (17:5, as a beast (13:11) and such other apocalyptic terms. The Christians were forced to worship the Emperor and those who refused faced death. Surely, they said, if Paul was alive he could not have maintained the view that such a government was divinely appointed. Thus they concluded that there comes a point at which Christians are justified to resist governing authorities. In fact, for them, over-reaching their authorities are not the governing authorities that Paul was referring to in Rom 13:1-7.

On the issue of God punishing wrongdoers using governing authorities (v.4), they interpreted this pointing out that in the Zimbabwean context wrongdoers like robbers, corrupt government officials, murderers and rapists who

belonged to the ruling party were not being punished. They even argued that since the duty of divinely appointed governing authorities is to punish such people, it was clear that the ruling party was not the kind of governing authority Paul had in mind.

In short therefore, the anti-ruling party interpretation of Rom 13:1-7 was that the governing authorities Paul was referring to are the state structures like the constitution and civil magistrates that call for the equal treatment of all citizens not an autocratic government that ruins people's lives. Paul was a man of his own time as can be seen in his attitude to slavery in the letter to Philemon. He could not have reacted differently from the author of the book of Revelation had he lived to see the Roman government of that time.

## **Theological reflections on the NT political ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

I have looked at how people interpreted NT passages in a politically polarized context, but how should we, as scholars of the NT look at these passages from an academic and missiological perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This last section of this article addresses this question.

The two different interpretations of NT political ethics prove that there are many approaches used to 'apply' the NT to present day situations. J. Botha (1994:40) pointed out four approaches to the relation of the Bible to ethics. The first one is the prescriptive approach which sees Rom. 13:1 and other ethical passages as law and com-

mand of God that has objective status and to which believers have only to refer and to follow always and in all circumstances. The second approach is an ethics of principles or ideals which sees the appeal in Rom 13:1 to submit to governing authorities as having a general and universally valid principle behind it. The notion here is that Christians should have respect for authority, whether it be authority of governments, parents, schools heads or security guards. The third approach is 'revealed reality' rather than 'revealed morality', which interprets Rom 13 in the context of what it supposedly says about God. Lastly is the approach of 'relationality and responsibility' which focuses attention on the Christian's response to the God who has given the gift of faith to believers. Here the Bible has to be used in a way which helps the Christian community to interpret God in its existential faith and not as providing a revealed morality that is to be 'translated' and 'applied' wholesale.

It would appear the pro-ruling party interpretation follows the first two approaches. These approaches, however, are very problematic since the contexts in which the NT books were written and the problems they were meant to address are now completely different from ours. As pointed out in the anti-ruling party interpretation, by the time of Revelation, the Pauline teaching was found inapplicable. Thus the early church approached the problem of the state inevitably influenced by its own background or experience. As Macgregor (1954:598) says, "(by the time of Paul) the state appeared to be a beneficent power, a bulwark of order and, on the whole, a minister of justice..... explaining why there is a different attitude in Revelation."



I therefore here support Botha's fourth approach and see the words of Paul in Rom 13:5, "not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience", as supportive of this approach. The call for conscience here means the Christian has to interpret events in his/her life basing on moral judgement with faith in God. This agrees with the stoic thoughts of conscience as the 'individual's sense of right and wrong, his moral judgement, his recognition of inherent claims of good, and the grounds for rejecting what is wrong' (Black 1973:160). It is also the approach found in Jesus' moral teaching, for example in his great sermon (Matthew 5-7), where he teaches against the letter but the spirit of the law. In fact most of our evidence point to the conclusion that the early church decided that in those situations where rights of conscience were invaded then the state must be resisted, but in other matters, the Christian must accept the obligations of his/her citizenship. Lillie (1961:91) reminds us, "No one who enjoys the security and conveniences which an organized government provides has the right to refuse to pay his share of the cost of these things, however, much he may disagree with the government's general policy." Christians can therefore not be recognized in the political system but they are called to participate constructively. In the electoral systems, as the anti-ruling party interpretation shows, the only way that God can appoint governing authorities must surely be the way of democratic, free and fair elections. Human beings are all creatures of God from a Christian perspective, and as for Christians, they are the representatives of God on earth. Therefore as

Christians vote in a democratic system, God uses them as instruments for his appointment of governing authorities. I therefore conclude that Christians must participate in the political systems of their respective countries, particularly in the election process, by voting. However, they must guard against being involved to the extent of being partisan publicly and dividing the people of God. They must publicly remain aloof from the political set up of the time just as Jesus, in spite of the attraction of the Zealotic policy did. Yes he made comments about the rulers of the time, for example, when he referred to Herod Antipas as, "That fox" (Luke 13:32) just as Revelation refers to Rome as 'the mother of harlots' (17:1,5). However, in most cases he was concerned with the Pharisees' honest and readiness to make restitution than with their relations to the Roman authorities (Luke 19:8,9). I am not against individual political activism by Christians but against the church as an institution engaging in partisan politics. The church must remain a prophetic one ready to build the kingdom of God on earth through constructive criticism and praise of those in all political divides.

## **Conclusion**

It can be seen from the analysis made in this article that written texts are open to more than one interpretation. True to the observation of reader-response critics, people's interpretation of texts is influenced largely by their psychological, ideological and such other needs. This was how Rom. 13:1-7 and other NT passages on political ethics were interpreted in the history of the church and to-

wards and after Zimbabwe's 2002 presidential elections. These interpretations were influenced by the interpreters' political ideologies. Thus the two types of interpretations, the pro-ruling party interpretation and the anti-ruling party interpretation emerged in Zimbabwe. As a conclusion, I have suggested that Christians, guided by conscience, should participate in the political systems of their governments, not in a divisive manner, but in a way that builds the kingdom of God on earth in line with the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

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***Chapter 8:  
Reading and Interpreting the Bible during  
Zimbabwe's 2000 Fast track Land Reform  
Programme: the experience of the Church of  
Christ Zimbabwe.***

**Introduction**

Throughout the history of the Church, the Bible has been read and interpreted to address the existential needs of the Christian community. It has been used to justify slavery, to stop slavery, to justify colonialism, to fight for liberation and even to justify apartheid, as memories of apartheid South Africa tell. The Bible can therefore be described as an 'all-weather book'. No wonder during the Zimbabwe 2000 fast track land reform programme, a programme that attracted international attention, the Bible was once again visited by Christians who wanted to seek its guidance on the matter. The Church of Christ Zimbabwe (CCZ) is one such Christian community where the Bible was re-read. This Church places the Bible at the centre of its teaching and practice, disregarding issues like Church tradition, It thus provides an interesting case study of how the Bible is read and interpreted for church identity in times of political and/or other social crises. The paper discusses briefly the background to the land reform programme, the manner of the reform and Biblical interpretation in this Church. It then analyses how the same Bible was read and interpreted by this Church dur-

ing the land reform programme. Although the CCZ did not make any public statements about the land reform programme, debates were taking place among members of the church as they met at different fora. I was privileged to be one among them with an academic interest in church-state relations. However, although I belong to the CCZ, being the overseer of the Harare congregation and current Secretary-General of the Church, my views and those of other young and educated members are often suspected of being informed by the 'book', that is, by education, rather than by the 'spirit'. What is presented here are the views of those whose opinions are generally regarded to be informed by the 'spirit'. The views are, however, expressed in academic language. I gathered views from those who were for and against the land reform programme as I listened to their debates.

## **Background to the land reform programme**

Land has been at the centre of all liberation struggles in Zimbabwe. No wonder the fast track land reform programme of 2000 was called a *chimurenga* (war of liberation), the third of such wars,<sup>62</sup> even though there was no military conflict. It was considered the third *chimurenga* because, like the first and second wars of liberation, the local people 'fought' to get back their land from those they regarded had taken it by less than honest means. Thus the fast track land reform programme has to be understood in

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<sup>62</sup> R.G. MUGABE. *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, (Harare, Department of Information and Publicity, Office of the President, 2001).

the context of the indigenous people's dispossession of land from the time of the colonisation of the country. The British settlers, through various legislations, dispossessed the local people of the most productive land pushing them to the most arid regions of the country. It was because of this dispossession that the people waged war against the British settler government in the 1970s. So when the Zimbabwe government was elected into office in 1980 it had to take steps to address this colonial injustice, an injustice that had been condemned even by the church bodies including the World Council of Churches.

Between 1980 and 1990 government resettled not more than 70 000 families acquiring land through the 'willing buyer willing seller basis'<sup>63</sup> as was dictated by the Lancaster House constitution by which the illegal regime was ended and independence achieved. In 1992, the government passed the Land Acquisition Act, which stipulated that all land that was on sale was to be offered to the government first. But despite passing this law, the land acquisition and resettlement programme slowed down due mainly to financial constraints. The government had insufficient money to buy enough land for resettlement. Also in some cases the government offered less than the market value of land resulting in sellers withdrawing their offer of sale. In an effort to raise money and speed up the

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<sup>63</sup> M. MASIIWA and L. CHIPUNGU, 'Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Disparity between Policy Design and Implementation' in: M. MASIIWA (Ed.), *Post Independence Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Controversies and Impact on the Economy*. (Harare, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Institute of Development Studies, 2004, 3-8), 3.

process of land redistribution the government organised a donors' conference in Harare in September 1998. However, this also did not raise enough money as donors were now suspicious of the government's moves after the passing of the Land Acquisition Act. Despite the lack of support from the international donor community, the government went on to launch the second phase of the resettlement programme in 1999. Coincidentally, in September of the same year, a formidable opposition political party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was formed. It was the strongest political party to have ever challenged the ruling party. On its agenda was a people-driven land reform programme. The party used the ruling party's failure to resolve the land issue as part of its propaganda. This piled a lot of pressure on the ruling party which had to move fast to address the land problem. A new constitution which, among other aims, was to make it easier for the government to acquire land for resettlement was quickly drafted and in February 2000 a constitutional referendum was held. The MDC, which by now had gained a lot of support from white commercial farmers and the working class, campaigned for a 'no' vote and the draft constitution was rejected by the majority of the voters. It was soon after the rejection of the draft constitution that land invasions, which were a precursor to the fast track land reform programme, began.



## **The manner of the fast track land reform programme**

The fast track land reform programme started with violent farm invasions which were led by the war veterans of the 1970s liberation war. These were joined by land hungry Zimbabweans mostly from communities around the white commercial farms. The following story depicts the manner of such invasions:

Screams pierced the air as invaders forced their way onto the farm just outside Gweru, Zimbabwe. The attackers forcibly marched frightened farm workers to the workers' living compound, where they beat the workers with axes, picks and heavy sticks. Others they forced to strip to their underclothes in the middle of the Zimbabwe winter and then sing and dance by the firelight. The owners of the farm (names removed) locked themselves in the main house and watched as the path of destruction headed their way. The couple had fully expected their farm to be forcefully invaded by the government-backed war veterans.<sup>64</sup>

The invaders are said to have been angered by the rejection of the draft constitution which they believed would pave the way for the land reform programme. As the writer of the above story shows, the invaders were blessed by the government. In fact, members of the army were also involved in coordinating and facilitating these occupations and the President recently thanked them for their work.<sup>65</sup> At this point Zimbabwe was now in a crisis, a cri-

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<sup>64</sup> S. SPRENKLE, <http://www.worthynews.com>

<sup>65</sup> Zimbabwe Television News At Eight, 25/09/05

sis which has continued up to this day. Unlike in the past where the government had dealt with land invaders with a heavy hand, this time it blessed the invasions. Probably as an attempt to legalise the invasions, the government then introduced the fast track land reform programme. Although calls for applications for land were made, the majority of those who benefited in this programme were those who had moved to the farms as invaders and those in the rank and file of the ruling party. Among the beneficiaries were members of the CCZ who had also moved to the farms as invaders. It is in this light that the Bible was revisited by members of the church to provide some light in this period of political crisis.

## **The Bible in the CCZ**

The Church of Christ Zimbabwe is mainly concentrated in Masvingo province although due to migrant labour there is now a strong congregation in Harare. In Zimbabwe, churches are usually classified as belonging to the mainline, the evangelical/Pentecostal or African Independent. The CCZ is difficult to classify because it defies most of the criteria used for the classification of churches.<sup>66</sup> The Church was introduced in Zimbabwe by American missionaries in the 1940s. From this time up to the end of the 1960s missionaries were sent to take charge

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<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of typologies of churches in Zimbabwe and some of the criteria used, see L. TOGARASEI, 'One Bible many Christianities: Revisiting Christian typologies in Zimbabwe today', in forthcoming *Zambezia Vol. 32:2*, 2005.

of and to continue the work started by the pioneer missionaries. In the late 1970s it broke ties with the missionaries when the last missionaries went back to America and lost contact with the Church which apparently had a few followers. Reasons for the Americans' failure to send more missionaries range from the prevailing political conditions in the then Rhodesia to the indigenous members' need for a say in the running of the church. It is said that on one occasion there was an exchange of words between the white members and the black members of the Church when rain fell in the midst of an open air service. The white members were accommodated in the nearby house of the white missionary while the black members were left at the mercy of the rains.<sup>67</sup> When the Americans failed to send more missionaries, the small movement then remained under the leadership of Africans like L. Fashu, S. Hove, P. Chifaka, E. Manzungu and others. If one were to consider this history, then the Church would be classified as an Ethiopian Church. However, its acceptance of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues and its emphasis on evangelism would also qualify it to be either a Pentecostal or an evangelical Church.

From the beginning the Church has distinguished itself by its emphasis on the literal meaning of the Bible. In its early days, the missionaries were said to have been always engaged in heated debates with those churches that baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mr Davison Gwati, late member of the church, Masvingo, 29/06/2000.

Spirit, for an example. Instead, missionaries of the CCZ taught that baptism should only be in the name of Jesus as found in passages like Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48 and 19:5. The Church does not depend on church tradition in matters of belief and practice; every practice of a Christian should be informed by the Bible. Passages like 2 Timothy 3:16 are used to justify this position:

All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (Revised Standard Version)

There is such emphasis on the teaching of the Bible that a famous saying in the church is, "If the Bible says---, it has said it." In other words there is no other source of teaching or instruction which is considered more authoritative than the Bible. The Bible is thus considered normative in all matters of teaching and practice. Appointment of church elders is done on the basis of charisma not theological education with justification for this practice being found from passages like 1 Timothy 3:1-5. Women are not allowed to teach on the basis of Paul's teaching that they must be silent in church (1 Corinthians 14:34) and that they must not have authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12). Many other teachings and practices are guided by such a literal interpretation of scripture. Little wonder then that in times of political crises, like during the 2000 fast track land reform programme, church members had to reread the Bible to find its position on the issue and to provide each other a Christian identity during that crisis. As G. ter Haar noted in relation to The True Teachings of Christ's

Temple, an African church in the Bijlmer district of Amsterdam who use the Bible in the same way it is used in the CCZ, is that, “By reading the Bible, they believe they will get to know the will of God and receive clear directions concerning both society at large and their individual selves.”<sup>68</sup> The understanding is the same in the CCZ.

### **Reading and interpreting the Bible during the 2000 fast track land reform programme**

Considering the place of the Bible in the CCZ there is no doubt that so many questions which required answers from the Bible were raised by the fast track land reform programme. In fact two different groups of readers and interpreters emerged: those who were against the land invasions and those who were in support. Each group had its set of questions and arguments to be addressed by the Bible.

We have seen that the programme started with land invasions. Those who did not participate in these invasions asked how Christians could be involved in such a programme which was characterised by violence and even deaths (About 45 commercial farmers are said to have been killed during the time of land invasion). Although the participants found justification on the basis of restitution, those opposed to invasions found no justification for a restitution which was characterized by violence and which, for them, went against the basic moral law en-

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<sup>68</sup> G.TER HAAR, *Half Way to Paradise: African Christians in Europe* (Cardiff, Cardiff Academic Press, 1998), 49

shrined in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:13). They used Hebrews 10:34, “--- and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you know that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one”, to argue against Christian participation in the invasion of farms.

Those opposed to the manner of the land reform also noted how the invasion and acquisition of the land was characterized by racism. As we have seen above, the land which was targeted for resettlement was that owned by white farmers. Although the government argued that they were only acquiring land from multiple farm owners, it is true that black multiple farm owners were left untouched by the programme. These Christians then argued against this form of racism using Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus”. They often quoted President Mugabe’s words of reconciliation at independence and wondered why the government had turned away from what they considered to be a godly policy. Against those who were participating in the land reform programme, they argued that Christ had long dealt with racial bars and that issues of black or white were no longer to be considered in the land reform programme. They argued that they were not against land reform in Zimbabwe but thought there was need for a legislative position to correct the historical injustice in Zimbabwe’s land policies in a harmonious way.

Against those who argued that the white commercial farmers had taken the land through violent means and so

were to be dispossessed violently too, they argued that the land reform programme was punishing the wrong people since all the whites who took land from the blacks had long died. For them, then, even the Old Testament law of tooth for tooth, eye for eye (Exodus 21:23-25) was not applicable in this case. After all, they argued, God had done away with the law of punishing the children for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:4) and vengeance belongs to God (Hebrews 10:30).

They were also against the use of ZANU PF slogans at the farms, a thing they considered drew Christians into party politics. It is a truism that the land reform was carried out in the name of ZANU PF. Such slogans, as “*Pamberi neZANU/ naComrade Robert Mugabe*” (Forward with ZANU/ Comrade Robert Mugabe) and “*Pasi neMDC/ na Morgan Tsvangirai*” (Down with MDC/ Morgan Tsvangirai), opened speeches at the various meetings which were held at the farms. The ZANU PF politicians took the opportunity afforded by the programme to campaign for both the 2000 parliamentary and the 2002 presidential elections. Although the government denies this, the school of thought that says the beneficiaries of the land reform were ZANU PF members only, has many followers. Christians opposed to the manner of the land reform therefore cited the Bible as opposing this form of partiality. They also questioned the participation of a Christian at forums where there is call for the “downing” (death?) of other people (as in the slogan, ‘Down with MDC/ Morgan Tsvangirai’).

On the other hand those who moved onto the farms had their own ways of reading and interpreting the Bible. They were also against violence but said the acts of violence were a result of criminal activities perpetrated by those who took advantage of the nature of the programme. They explained the invasion of farms just as demonstrations meant to put pressure on the government to take legal measures to correct historical injustices on land ownership. They agreed that yes, there is no longer Jew or Gentile, but for them that meant that blacks and whites in Zimbabwe were to share the land equally. God is a God of equality and fairness, they argued. For them legislative measures to correct the historical injustices were taken when the government made constitutional amendments that led to the compulsory acquisition of land. After all, they argued, the act of invasion was sanctioned by the government and in moving to the farms they were obeying governing authorities as Paul directed (Romans 13:1).

Noting the poverty of those who were involved in the land reform programme, those who supported the programme also argued that the Bible shows that God has always been on the side of the poor. Reading the story of the year of Jubilee in Leviticus 25 they developed a theology of the land similar to that of the South African theologian Weli Mazamisa:

Because the biblical God is a God who demonstrates a 'preferential option for the poor and oppressed', a Year of Jubilee was promulgated. The year of Jubilee provides a model of land redistribution and reparation. Its distinctive features included the restoration of social and eco-



conomic justice and the return of property to the landless and non-propertied classes.<sup>69</sup>

They also cited passages like the story of Zacchaeus, who repaid four-fold those he had defrauded (Luke 19:8) and because of that was promised salvation by Jesus. They therefore argued that the return of that which has been wrongly taken is a Godly act. Like Sebastian Bakare,<sup>70</sup> the Zimbabwean theologian, they also quoted Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof”, and argued that no one should therefore claim permanent and sole ownership of the land.

## **Reading and interpreting the Bible: a critical appraisal**

What is clear from the above is that the Bible stands as a source of authoritative Christian teaching in the CCZ. However, the same Bible is read and interpreted in very different ways depending on the circumstances and persuasions of the readers. Noting how Christians and Jews read texts, John Riches makes an observation closely related to what we have seen here, “More often, it is a matter of emphasis, of selective reading: those elements in the biblical writings which resonate with a particular

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<sup>69</sup> W. MAZAMISA, “Reparation and Land”, in C. VILLAVICENCIO/J.W. DE GRUCHY (Eds.), *Doing Ethics in Context: South African Perspectives*. (Cape Town and Johannesburg, David Philip, 1994, 210-216), 121.

<sup>70</sup> S. BAKARE. *The Drumbeat of Life: Jubilee in an African Context*, (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1997), 27.

community over a particular period of time are the ones which will be stressed, to the exclusion or neglect of others.”<sup>71</sup> This is more so true when it comes to interpretation. Through interpretation, the Bible is made to justify war, hatred, dispossession and other traditionally conceived social ills like homosexuality.<sup>72</sup> Writing on how the indigenous South Africans were dispossessed of their land, T. Mofokeng noted, “As part of ideological falsification of the truth, the bible and theology were very widely used and proved usable.”<sup>73</sup>

In a church where interpretation is ‘free-for-all’, like in the case of the CCZ we have analyzed here, the Bible can be a source of serious contestations. Political, economic, leadership and other crises become sources of different readings and interpretations of the Bible. For example, two different ways of interpreting Romans 13:1-4 emerged during Zimbabwe’s 2002 presidential elections.<sup>74</sup> Robert Carroll has this to say about the Bible,

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<sup>71</sup> J. RICHES, *The Bible: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 68-69.

<sup>72</sup> D.L. CARMODY, and J.T. CARMODY. *Christian Ethics: An Introduction through History and Current Issues*, (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1993), 171-174.

<sup>73</sup> T. MOFOKENG. “Land is Our Mother: A Black Theology of Land” in M. GUMA/ L. MILTON (Eds.), *An African Challenge to the Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (Cape Town, South African Council of Churches, 1997, 42-56), 42.

<sup>74</sup> L.TOGARASEI, “‘Let everyone be subject to governing authorities’: The Interpretation of New Testament Political Ethics towards and after Zimbabwe’s 2002 Presidential Elections’ in *Scriptura: International Journal of Bible, Religion and Theology in Southern Africa* Volume 85, 2004, 73-80.

“The Bible is a profoundly problematical collection of books in many senses- religious, cultural, political, intellectual, moral, ethical and aesthetic.”<sup>75</sup> No wonder, after realizing the problems presented by the Bible, the late Zimbabwean theologian, Canaan Banana, suggested that the way out of these problems is rewriting the Bible.<sup>76</sup> It is not the task of this paper to suggest the way forward in the use of the Bible, but surely there is need for theologians to revisit the question of the use and ‘abuse’ of the Bible in times of political and other crises. It appears the way the Western missionaries used the Bible when they first introduced Christianity in Africa is no longer the same way the Bible is being used by African Christians today. There should, therefore, be continuous sharing of ideas in the use of the Bible between churches in Africa and those in the West if their relationship of the twentieth century is to continue.

## Conclusion

In times of political or other crises, Christians seek ‘Christian’ responses. Often times this ‘Christian’ response is sought in the Bible. As the classical document of the church, the Bible remains the source book for questions of Christian contact and practice. Unfortunately,

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<sup>75</sup> R. CARROLL, *Wolf in the Sheepfold: The Bible as a Problem for Christianity*, (London, SPCK, 1991), 5.

<sup>76</sup> C.S. BANANA, ‘The Case for a new Bible’ in I. MUKONYORA, J.L. COX and F.J. VERSTRAELEN (Eds.), *“Rewriting” the Bible: the real issues*, (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993, 17-32).

however, the Biblical texts are complicated because of their diverse origins. As a result, they are often read and interpreted in ways meant to justify the beliefs and experiences of the readers. This explains why two different readings and interpretations of Biblical passages arose during the 2000 fast track land reform programme in Zimbabwe. As we have seen, both interpretations used the Bible as the informant to their attitude to land reform. Thus, from the time the Bible was introduced to Africans by Western missionaries, African Christians have continued using it to address their Christian needs, sometimes coming up with conflicting interpretations as we have seen in this case study. There is therefore need for the universal church to continue seeking a common way of interpreting scripture for the unity of all Christians.

## **Chapter 9:**

***“Women, Adorn yourselves modestly!”***

### ***Interpretative Problems of 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1Peter 3:3-4 in Zimbabwe***

#### **Introduction**

The question of Christian women dress code is intriguing particularly in an African context where there appears to be a cultural crisis. Can Christian women put on mini-skirts, skinny clothes and trousers? How should Christian women do their hair? Can Christian women put on golden necklaces, rings and elaborate make-ups? These and many other questions on the women dress code are usually answered using 1Timothy 2:9-10 and 1Peter 3:3-4 in those churches (for example Evangelical/Pentecostal and African Initiated(AICs) churches) would like to support all of their teachings and practices with at least a Biblical verse. To make these texts answer the above questions, interpretation of the texts is inevitable. It is in this attempt to interpret that paradoxes arise. This paper discusses these interpretative paradoxes. It opens with a discussion of women and their love for beauty in the Bible and African traditional society. This is followed by African theological problems that arise from this love of beauty. After this is done, the paper then focuses on how 1Tim. 2:9-10 and 1Pet. 3:3-4 are interpreted to answer these theological questions and the interpretative problems that arise from this interpretation. Lastly the paper suggests the ‘way forward’.

## **Women's Love For Beauty**

That women mind their appearance cannot be overemphasised. The Old Testament has several passages where women are associated with gold and other ornamental items. Abraham's servant gave Rebecca, "a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels" (Genesis 24:22). On the day that she was killed, Jezebel, the wife of king Ahab, had, "—painted her eyes, and adorned her head" (2Kings 9:30). Isaiah says the daughters of Zion wore, "—the finery of the anklets, the headbands, and the crescents; the pendants, the bracelets and the scarves; the headdresses, the armlets, the sashes, the perfume boxes and the amulets; the signet rings and the nose rings, the festal robes, the mantles, the cloaks and the handbags, the garments of gauze, the linen garments, the turbans and the veils" (Isaiah 3:18-23). Isaiah goes on to say these ladies had well-set hair and were beautiful (3:24).

Even in pre-colonial Africa, women always strove for beauty. Rich women, especially wives of kings, wore imported golden necklaces, earrings and armlets. Those who could not afford the golden ones wore wooden and other locally produced beauty ornaments. In modern Africa, dress defines the social status of a woman. Rich women can afford the most expensive clothes, lotions and perfumes. In fact they are the people who can 'move with fashion'. It is some women's ability to 'move with fashion' that has created theological problems on the women dress code in Zimbabwe.

## Theological Problems Of Women Dress Code In Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe, like many other African countries, is facing a cultural crisis. It is very difficult today to talk of the Zimbabwean culture, except if one is referring to the traditional culture. This is a result of colonialism. Before colonialism, Africa had its own culture: its food, its own methods of hunting, its medicine, its own forms of relationships----- and its own **dress!** Though it cannot be denied that this culture was always changing with changing circumstances, colonialism brought rapid change. Colonialism brought with it, in most instances, western culture. Though colonialism has been fought and defeated, western culture still thrives. There are, therefore, two sources of culture in Africa today: traditional and western culture. Especially with globalisation, Africans have remained willing recipients of western culture. This duality of African culture has brought about the theological problems of women dress code in Zimbabwe. Christian teachings that tread on culture have to choose either to go with western culture or traditional culture. Though Christianity is usually perceived of as putting on western culture, this is not true about dress in some Zimbabwean churches. In these churches questions are asked concerning Christian women dress. These questions are asked as people are grappling with the question of the relationship between Christianity and indigenous culture. In the Zimbabwean society for example, traditionally women did not put on trousers. This practice has found its way into the churches, even the most liberal ones. It is almost rare to

find, in church, a woman with trousers, a mini-skirt or other skinny apparels. Thus culture and the gospel, as J. Mbiti says are seen as allies.<sup>77</sup> Showing that Biblical interpretation in Africa presents problems, Mbiti goes on in the same sentence to say, “---it is the responsibility of the Gospel to knock down the cultural idols and chains which may otherwise detain man from reaching the promised land of his faith in Christ----.”<sup>78</sup> The question then is: Which culture should work as an ally of the gospel and which should be knocked down by the gospel? It is this question that has raised interpretative problems of Christian women dress code in 1Tim. 2:9-10 and 1Pet 3:3-4. Let us now turn to the problems of interpreting these texts.

### **Women, Adorn Yourselves Modestly! Interpreting 1Tim. 2:9-10 And 1Pet. 3:3-4**

Faced with the problem of the Christian women dress code, many Christians find their answers in the following texts:

-----also that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion (RSV 1Timothy 3:9-10).

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<sup>77</sup> J. Mbiti cited by F. J. Verstraelen (1988), *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses*, Gweru: Mambo Press, 82.

<sup>78</sup> J. Mbiti cited by F.J. Verstraelen, 82.



---let not yours (women) be the outward adorning with braided hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious (RSV 1Peter 3:3-4).

Unfortunately the two texts are loaded with meaning and therefore require interpretation in order to be used in a specific context. It is this attempt to interpret them that has caused more problems than solutions. The first problem is whether the writers are talking of dress in church or general dressing. Reading from the context, F.D. Gealy suggests that the form of the dress advocated has reference primarily to that worn in church. Commenting on these texts he says, "In public worship women should dress with simplicity and reserve, not concerned to display their physical charms."<sup>79</sup> Many liberal churches in Zimbabwe would agree with this interpretation. Women in such churches can put on trousers and other fashionable clothes, do their hair elaborately and put on other ornaments on all other occasions but they should dress simply at church gatherings. They argue that even in the Old Testament world there were special dress arrangements for special occasions like weddings (Ezekiel 16:11-13). Thus for them, one's dress has to fit the occasion. However, some churches, especially African Inde-

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<sup>79</sup> F. D. Gealy (1957), 'The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle to Titus: Introduction and Exegesis' in Buttrick, G.A. (Gen Ed.) *The Interpreter's Bible vol.12*, New York: Abingdon Press, 122.

pendent ones, have problems with this interpretation. For them the writers of 1Timothy and 1Peter were not referring to dress at church gatherings only. For them Christianity is a culture and so the women dress code advocated for by the authors is for all occasions. Christian women generally have to put on simple clothing according to them. This is the position taken by H.D. Betz and M. Dibelius who use 1Tim. 2:13ff, which refers to the place of women in creation not to her behaviour during the service, as evidence that the regulations in 2:9-10 originally referred to the behaviour of women in general.<sup>80</sup>

The second problem in interpreting these passages comes from the words used by the authors. Both use the word adorn for dress. The Greek word used for adorn, *kosmein*, can be translated 'to decorate' or 'to beautify.' Were they then referring to just dressing up? The impression that one gets from the authors' use of the word, is that in their minds, dressing is not only geared for climate and necessities of movement but also to appearance and aesthetic appeal. To decorate or to beautify means to do that which enhances appearance and thus serve aesthetic appeal. Further the writer of 1Timothy says this adornment should be modest, sensible and seemly. Is he referring to clothing only as understood by many AICs and evangelical churches in Zimbabwe? Looked at closely the three terms are closely related in meaning. D.C. Arichea and

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<sup>80</sup> M. Dibelius and H. D. Betz (1972), *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 45.

H.A. Hatton show this relationship.<sup>81</sup> They note that ‘modest’ means well-ordered, moderate, not excessive, proper, suitable, becoming, simple or unassuming while ‘sensible’ also means moderate, reasonable, with the impression that the person is aware of what is best in a particular situation. ‘Seemly’ on the other hand, means being proper or suitable, contributing to one’s attractiveness and being respected by others.

From the definitions of these adjectives used by the author it is impossible to conclude that he was only thinking of dress. As Arichea and Hatton say, it is possible that only ‘seemly’ qualifies dress while ‘modestly’ and ‘sensibly’ are connected with behaviour.<sup>82</sup> But this interpretation also has its problems since ‘adorn’ cannot be linked to behaviour. Thus in Zimbabwe, in many churches ‘modest’, ‘sensible’ and ‘seemly’ are usually taken as words meant by the author to describe dressing. Taken this way, trousers, other skinny clothes and mini-skirts are said to be immodest, insensible and unseemly. But the problem is who decides what is sensible, modest and seemly? What I have seen in many churches in Zimbabwe is that tradition and popular opinion provide the definitions. For example traditionally in Zimbabwe trousers, skinny clothes, mini-skirts, elaborate make-ups and jewellery were associated with prostitutes. Just as found in some literature of the first and second centuries C.E., it was believed that the more a woman wore attractive

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<sup>81</sup> D.C. Arichea and H.A. Hatton (1995), *A Handbook on Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus*, New York: UBS, 55

<sup>82</sup> Arichea and Hatton (1995), 56

clothes and elaborate jewellery, the more she lived a loose sexual life and the less she submitted to her husband.<sup>83</sup> It can therefore be seen that church interpretation of the passages on the women dress code is influenced by this traditional view. But it seems as though this traditional view was popularised by those who could not afford the fashionable clothing. I even remember some people derogatively referring to a woman's handbag as *chibabanda-panduka*, Shona for 'father I am now a prostitute.' It was a way of deliberately and jealously demonising fashion. Should the church then continue to be influenced by such tradition in its interpretation of scripture?

The other interpretative problem comes from what the authors say concerning hair. Some people read from these passages total rejection of braiding of hair, '---not with braided hair---(1Tim.) and '---not---with braiding of hair---' (1Pet.). This reading has led some churches to teach against any kind of braiding of hair. Following the same reading and interpretation, they also find here, teaching against the putting on of golden materials. But some interpretations do not take this position. Such interpretations do not see teaching against the braiding of hair and use of gold and other ornaments in these passages. In fact as E. G. Homrighausen notes, these passages prove that, "braided hair, jewels and fine clothing have ever been the stock trade of women."<sup>84</sup> M. P. Noyes even says, "If these

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<sup>83</sup> Arichea and Hatton, (1995), 56

<sup>84</sup> E.G. Homrighausen, (1957) 'The First Epistle of Peter: An Exposition', in Buttrick, G.A. (Gen. Ed.), *The Interpreter's Bible vol.12*, New York: Abingdon Press, 122

details (concerning hair, gold and pearls) are not merely those of the traditional Greek or Latin moralists, if they reflect truly the situation in the church, they furnish evidence for the presence of some, perhaps considerably wealthy and nobility in the church of the time.”<sup>85</sup> These rich women were therefore much more concerned with their outlook than their spiritual purity. Ancient Greek and Roman literature shows that these rich women considered hair-do a work of art with the braided hair rising some inches above the head and often intertwined with chains of gold, strings or pearls.<sup>86</sup> This then means the authors were not against braiding of hair but against the extravagant way in which it was braided. I find this to be a better way of interpreting ‘not with braided hair’. This is how the Spanish Common Language version of the Bible puts it, “exaggerated hair-dos.”

The final interpretative problem comes from the phrases ‘not with costly attire’ (1Timothy) and ‘not wearing of fine clothing’ (1Peter). Should this be taken to mean that Christian women should not wear expensive clothes? This is how some churches interpret the phrases although it appears the authors were not against women wearing expensive clothes. Interpreting this passage as forbidding women from wearing expensive clothes even in itself presents problems. The first problem pertains to the subjectivity of the term ‘expensive/costly’. Costly or expensive according to whose standards? Surely for someone who

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<sup>85</sup> M. P. Noyes, (1957), ‘The First and Second Epistles to Timothy and the Epistle of Titus: Exposition’, in Buttrick, G.A. (Gen Ed.), 405.

<sup>86</sup> Arichea and Hatton,(1995),57

earns \$1000 a month, a dress that costs \$10 is not expensive for her but for another who earns \$20 a month that dress would be expensive. Thus the expensiveness of something for someone depends on the income of the person, or on the general cost of that same item elsewhere. For example, Pliny tells of a Roman bride, Lollia Paulina, whose bridal dress cost the equivalent of £432 000 when similar dresses could be found elsewhere at even 1000% less than this price.<sup>87</sup> This dress by comparison was therefore indeed expensive. An interpretation that does not make these considerations is thus problematic.

But what causes these problems of Biblical interpretation in Zimbabwe? Reading the same bible, why do people come up with different and sometimes contradictory interpretations? Let's turn to this.

## **Problems of Biblical Interpretation in Zimbabwe**

“The Bible is a recognisable message for African people,” writes F. J. Verstraelen.<sup>88</sup> This explains why Zimbabwean Christians offer Biblically based solutions to all theological problems. However, this use of the Bible has resulted in many varied answers to the problems sought to be solved. The issue of the women dress code we have discussed here prove this. This is because, as L.D. Hurst correctly puts it, “Any interpreter (of the Bible) faces a hydra-

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<sup>87</sup> W Barclay (1975), *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 67

<sup>88</sup> F. J. Verstraelen, *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses*, 79

headed set of problems.”<sup>89</sup> These are trained interpreters. Now in Zimbabwe some of the interpreters have not had even basic training in Biblical interpretation. Thus they do not have the necessary tools, for example, for reducing the cultural gap between them and the communities addressed by the New Testament books. Other interpreters cannot even read the Bible on their own because of illiteracy. However, these interpreters also claim an equal share in the interpretation, since they consider it a book for every person. Such interpreters always read their concerns blindly into the text sometimes resulting in weird interpretations. As we have seen in the interpretation of 1Timothy and 1Peter in this paper, culture and tradition heavily influence the interpretation of these passages. Thus though the Bible presents fundamental principles of Christianity, these remain abstract until they are applied to the existential situation of the readers. It is this existential situation that also influences how one hears and interprets the Biblical texts. The poor, the rich, women, the illiterate and the literate ‘hear’ and interpret the Bible differently. It is therefore these differences that bring interpretative problems of 1Tim.2:9-10 and 1Pet. 3:3-4. What then is the way forward?

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<sup>89</sup> L. D. Hurst (1989), ‘New Testament theological Analysis,’ in MacKnight, S (Ed.) *Introducing New Testament Interpretation*, Michigan: Baker Book House Company, 135

## The Way Forward: The Christian Women Dress Code In Zimbabwe

The use of the Bible by Zimbabwean Christians to solve today's theological problems should be applauded. This is because the words of the New Testament writers are the Word of God for the Christians and to them that word is always living and active (Hebrews 4:12). However, there are three considerations which I think every interpreter should keep in mind when attempting to interpret a text. First, it should be accepted that the writers of the New Testament were human beings who had, "—special interests, loves, hates, anxieties, biases, pressures, personal problems and areas of uncertainty which were not apparently eliminated by an overruling divine control."<sup>90</sup> This appreciation makes the writers human beings and to deny it, to me, makes the writers non-human. Second and related to the first, is that the interpreter must accept that there is a cultural gap running for many centuries between herself and New Testament writers. The Bible is therefore relative, it does not necessarily communicate the same message in the contemporary world that it communicated in its ancient one.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, it first has to be understood in its own context before someone applies it to today. Thirdly, the interpreter should accept that she uses hermeneutics (her own frame of reference) to understand a text. This therefore means her interpretation is

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<sup>90</sup> Hurst, *New Testament Theological Analysis*, 137

<sup>91</sup> This position is discussed at length by W. J. Larkin (1988), *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics*, USA: Baker Book house Company, 19



not absolute. Thus our understanding of the passages on the women dress code, is influenced by our present cultural circumstances.

If we make the three considerations above, we can come up with the following interpretation of the Christian women dress code advocated for in 1Tim.2:9-10 and 1Pet. 3:3-4: It appears the two authors were advocating for a general Christian women dress code not necessarily a dress code for the church. This is supported by the call for good deeds for the religious women. Surely Christian women in Timothy and in Peter were to show good deeds everywhere not only at congregations. The authors must have been responding to specific situations (most of the New Testament writers addressed concrete situations). As W. Barclay says, “In Greek society there were some women whose whole life consisted in elaborate dressing and braiding of hair.”<sup>92</sup> As we have learnt from Arichea and Hatton these women’s braided hair rose some inches above the head and was often intertwined with chains of gold or strings of pearls.<sup>93</sup> It appears Greeks and Romans were shocked by this love of dress and adornment that even in their mystery religions there was a strict teaching on women dress. One inscription from the mystery religions reads, “ A consecrated woman shall not have gold ornaments, nor rouge, nor face-whitening, nor a headband, nor braided hair, nor shoes except those made of

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<sup>92</sup> W. Barclay (1975), *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 67

<sup>93</sup> See note 10

felt or of the skins of sacrificed animals.”<sup>94</sup> Our authors of 1Timothy and 1Peter did not teach such regulations but emphasised inner beauty over and above the outer appearance. This is the position that the modern interpreter can take. As J.H. Neyrey says, that 1Timothy and 1Peter urge Christian women to be different from pagan women in not being fashion-crazy, but that they should shun extravagant ornamentation, clothing and hairstyling.<sup>95</sup> It is not necessary to spell out what women should or should not put on since this will result in reading more than what the texts themselves say.

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<sup>94</sup> W. Barclay (1975), *The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 68

<sup>95</sup> J.H. Neyrey (1983), *First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, James, 1Peter, Second Peter, Jude*, Collegville: The Order of St Benedict, 78.

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3. The Images of Jesus among Christian women in Harare (Studies in World Christianity, Vol. 13.2, 2007, pp. 160-169)
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This volume opens the series BiAS. Bible in Context is a collection of 9 essays discussing how biblical texts are read and interpreted in different contexts. The book discusses such contexts as Bible translation, HIV and AIDS, urban feminist Christology, denominationalism, conversion in African Christianity, environmental crisis, political conflict, land reform and women dress code. It analyses the ways in which context determines the reading processes and interpretations given to specific biblical texts. The book basically demonstrates that biblical interpretation is influenced by the contexts of the readers and the interpreters.



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