STRUGGLES AND STRIDES: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE EVOLUTION OF CHURCH RELATED UNIVERSITIES IN ZIMBABWE – THE CASE OF AFRICA UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

This paper examines the emergence of church-related university institutions in Zimbabwe, with specific reference to Africa University of the United Methodist Church, as a significant development which testifies to the innovativeness of churches in response to social and political trends. That, historically, education was an essential part of Christian missions, inasmuch as it was considered indispensable by colonial authorities, is axiomatic. Taking this background into account, this paper attempts to tease out the dynamics of the interaction between churches and the state. As churches sought to expand their mission priorities by establishing universities, they had to contend with a plethora of interested entities. The political factor was crucial in the new developments because of the government's perceived need to maintain its hegemony, and so consideration of the new phenomenon went beyond the enactment of appropriate legal instruments. The emergence of church-related universities in Zimbabwe facilitates extension of the discourse on church and state which has largely been confined to politics, and exposes new dimensions in the relationship.

1   INTRODUCTION

On 18 April 2005 Zimbabwe held Silver Jubilee Celebrations commemorating twenty-five years of independence. On the same

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day *The Herald* published a Silver Jubilee edition which carried a commemorative article that lauded significant expansion in higher education since independence from one state university in 1980 to 13 universities by 2005. Of the 13, five are private and four of these are church-related. The founding of new universities was enabled by the passing of the National Council for Higher Education Act in 1990. This new development coincided with centenary celebrations of the mainline Christian denominations which took place at different times in the 1990s. President Mugabe was invited to most of the celebrations, where he acknowledged the contribution of churches in education among other areas and appealed for the same trend of development to continue so as to revitalise the moral fibre of the nation (Maxwell 1995:119).[2]

This article focuses on the dynamic interaction between religion and the state in the origins and development of religious universities in Zimbabwe, with special reference to Africa University (AU) of the United Methodist Church (UMC). It explores efforts by religious bodies to establish universities, and the attendant social and political conflicts. Also critical in the study is the link between the initiatives of churches in Africa and the impact of their international connections. A number of factors can be attributed to the emergence of church related universities, but Beverley Thaver's four characterisations are instructive.

2 LOCATING ZIMBABWE IN THAVER'S TYPOLOGIES

Beverley Thaver's study of private higher education in six countries in sub-Saharan Africa may appear generalised and lacking in detailed insight but it provides valuable indications. She identifies four factors which have contributed to the emergence and growth of private universities (Thaver 2004:70-1). The first one is the obvious failure by public universities to meet the increased demand for higher education which, in the case of Zimbabwe, is a corollary of the massive expansion in primary and secondary education.

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[2] Maxwell argues that as a result of the economic and political difficulties which the government was experiencing, the church found itself in a stronger position in its relations with the government and so Mugabe had to take a conciliatory approach to court the cooperation of churches in national development.

The second factor is what Thaver calls the "discourse of access". Because of financial constraints, state sponsorship for higher education has decreased. The failure by the governments to meet the increased demand meant that some vulnerable groups would be denied access. According to the aims of church-related universities, access is an integral part of their mission and is derived from the general theology of accommodation. However, in some cases, access to university education does not necessarily mean providing opportunities for the disadvantaged groups in society, as church-related universities may not necessarily charge lower fees, although this may be partly catered for through scholarship awards.

Thirdly, concomitant with the failure by many African governments to adequately fund public universities has been the influence of the World Bank's new "market instrumentalist logic", which argues for the self-sustenance of state universities. The main push factor is the difficult economic conditions (Nafukho 2004:126). Under the influence of the market ideology in university education, even public universities have been under pressure to adopt business strategies for the sake of their survival.

The void created by governments' failure to match increasing demand for university education saw the rise in privately sponsored university education driven by the profit motive. In some parts of the continent there have been new institutions, especially in East Africa, whose establishment is based on principles of the market ideology (Altbach 1999:1-15). The use of business approaches in university education under the management of "educational entrepreneurs" presents education as a commodity and this has significance for the nature of higher education (Useem 1999:a65-6).

Some government officials argue that church universities should be cheaper because of the traditional reputation of the church for providing access and opportunities for the disadvantaged. The same perception is shared by many university students. This attitude mainly stems from understanding the church as a charitable organisation capable of even subsidising its clientele.

Although Thaver does not treat the fourth characterisation in detail, she notes that religious groups have viewed the university as a necessary component of their agenda in the light of modern challenges. Religion-sponsored universities have mainly come from Christian and Muslim organisations. As Thaver notes, the demand for university education is linked to the need to promote religious interests in the university system. While from a government viewpoint churches are addressing a need by coming to the rescue through establishing more universities, there is an acknowledgement that the church's agenda is more than merely the filling of this void. The religious factor offers its own unique case which embraces Thaver's three factors and excludes the profit motive. Beyond the discourse of access is the religious factor which provides diversification and alternatives to the public university paradigm which had been in existence for almost four decades. The question of what these religious interests are can best be answered by an examination of the evolution of the UMC related AU.

3   BETTER LATE THAN NEVER – THE ORIGINS OF AFRICA UNIVERSITY

The official version links the birth of AU to pioneer missionary Bishop Joseph Crane Hartzell, who had a vision soon after arriving in Zimbabwe in 1897 (Plenary Session Proceedings). According to the local tradition, which has been adopted even in official circles, as Bishop Joseph Crane Hartzell stood on top of Chiremba Mountain overlooking Old Mutare, he had a vision of hundreds of young African people in the plain below going to school carrying books in their hands (*United Methodist News Service,* (*UMNS*) March 2004; see also, Pond [n.d.]). Hartzell shared his vision with Cecil Rhodes and he was granted the piece of land which had originally been the settler town of Mutare.

Hartzell's vision and its subsequent realisation were deemed consistent with the widely celebrated tone of the Christmas Conference in 1784 which was the genesis of a tradition that saw the birth of many UMC related institutions of higher learning (Elliott et al 1976:13) established to "celebrate the intellectual love of God and provide the gifts of learning access, hope, self-esteem, dignity, self-

realization and love to sub-Saharan Africa … to give the key of knowledge" (Cook 2002:251).

F Thomas Trotter, a renowned UMC theologian and philosopher on higher education (Cook 2002:251), writing in 1987, elaborates on the theological justification for the church's involvement in higher education:

> For Methodist people, loving God requires *knowing* God. This epistemological basis for Wesleyan thought grounds Methodist practice in a passionate concern for learning. To love God is to want to know God. To want to know God is to understand the world. To understand the world, one needs schools of learning. The theological circle for Methodists is the circle of faith and learning (Trotter 1987:104).

The above picture portrays a church with a rich tradition in education and a well articulated theological basis. Yet on further scrutiny there turns out to have been an uneven implementation of the ideals and values which span almost two hundred years.

According to Bishop Emilio de Carvalho (1994) of Angola:

> For over 170 years of missionary work in Africa, the United Methodist Church never built an enduring institution of higher learning on the African continent. It built universities in China, Japan, the USA, India, Latin-America and Korea, but as I have said, none in Africa.

That it took so long to consider the continent of Africa is evidence of the low priority given to university education in Africa as a strategy for mission. This phenomenon is common to other denominations as well and implies a carry-over of colonial attitudes to higher education for Africans. The low status given to university education does not mean lack of interest in mission in Africa, but it points to the selective nature of projects to be undertaken. The failure by Africans in strategic leadership positions within the ecclesiastical structures to convince their Western partners that university education was an important function of the church, and to consistently articulate this

position accordingly, is a contributory dynamic. A lot, however, depended on the extent to which they could influence their partner churches overseas. This factor may have weakened the resolve of those, not necessarily Africans, who may have attempted to advocate for a church-related university in Africa. Church leaders were then content with sending their own ministers and members abroad, along the lines of Bishop Ralph Dodge's African Safari of Learning and Tom Mboya's airlifts, for university education or to support university chaplaincy (Zwana 2006:66-7).

According to one version (Fact Sheet 1992), pragmatic steps towards the establishment of a university in Africa by the UMC date back to 1984. In 1984 Bishop Arthur Kulah of Liberia made a speech entitled, "The case for international education" on the need for a UMC related university in Africa, at the annual meeting of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM). At the same meeting when Bishop Emilio de Carvalho of Angola gave the Wilson Lecture, he "highlighted the deleterious effects of the legacies of colonialism and illiteracy on African communities" (Fact Sheet 1992). Bishop Carvalho further encouraged the UMC "to move beyond the borders and do more today than ever before to provide support for university education in Africa". Bishop Kulah's address appears to have been part of a wider initiative by the West African section of the United Methodists. Some regional representatives had already begun to lobby the Americans for a university before Kulah's official presentation to the GBHEM. Kulah, who had been elected Bishop of Liberia in 1980, placed considerable emphasis on leadership development with the aim of equipping the church's membership with various skills (*New World Outlook (NWO)*, April 1982; See also: Liberia-Mission Profile 2005). One of the main arguments by the two Bishops was that "increased access to higher education was key … to peace, stability and development in Africa" (*UMNS,* March 2004). The link between higher education and development was further supported by the argument noting the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Africa, and projections that by the year 2000, 20% of the world's population would be in Africa (Africa University Progress Report 1989-1992, and Plan of Development 1993-1996).

Bishop Kulah's (1994) version, which he describes as "my portion of the story", suggests that the idea of the university was conceived in

April 1981. During the proceedings of a committee members were asked to reflect on higher education around the world, thinking especially about their own regions. This in a way sowed the seeds for what was later to be called the Africa Initiative. Having exposed the fact that the UMC had built universities elsewhere but not in Africa, Kulah (1994) then argued:

> I said to the group, "Never mind that it took so long; never mind that Africa has been neglected; never mind that the idea of building a college or university was never brought to your attention. You can now do something about it. You can be the medium, the bridge through which a university can be built in Africa." I went on to say, "It is better to be late than never."

The 1981 brainstorming and subsequent discussions paved the way for consultations which were initially confined to the West African region. The West African Conference, influenced by Kulah, made an early start which provided the basis for preparations for official presentations.

Following the presentations of Kulah and Carvalho at the GBHEM on the need for a UMC university, a West African committee on education under the auspices of the West Africa Central Conference drafted a proposal entitled "Proposal for a United Methodist university in West Africa" which it presented to the GBHEM in early October 1984. In the proposal it was argued that "Africa's underdevelopment emanated from its lack of provision for higher education" (Carvalho 1994). The GBHEM adopted the proposal, which came to be known as the "Africa Initiative", for further consultation in both Africa and the United States.

A series of consultative meetings was held in West, East and Southern Africa. Initially, the primary focus was the need to establish a UMC pan-African theological seminary which would be able to confer degrees (Zwana 2006:127). The Nairobi meeting signalled the beginning of more focused discussions as it drafted a resolution which was sent to the GBHEM, "asking it to formally move towards the development of a proposal for the 1988 General Conference to establish a University in Africa under the United Methodist Church sponsorship".

After the Nairobi conference, the GBHEM, having received the Nairobi proposal, appointed a Site Selection Committee whose criteria as developed in the Monrovia consultation included: accessibility by the international community, political and economic stability, environment conducive to academic freedom, availability of land, existence of a UMC related institution, and whether the country had "the least language barrier" (Minutes of the Preliminary Meeting of Educational Leaders).

Ironically, Liberia, which had been the subject of intensive lobbying in the very early stages and was in the forefront of promoting the West African initiative, had been tainted by uncertainty emanating from the takeover of government by the armed forces. Of particular concern was the Liberian government's heavy handed treatment of students at the state university. In 1982 a group of students breached a military decree which prohibited political activities and they were arrested and sentenced to death by firing squad (Tokpa 1996:165). They were granted clemency at the eleventh hour. As Kulah and his regional colleagues were trying to promote the initiative, the Armed Forces of Liberia invaded the University of Liberia on 22 August 1984 (Tokpa 1996:165). The soldiers committed many acts of brutality which included rape and murder. The relationship between the government and the church was an uneasy one. The violent coup which took place in 1980 had deposed the Vice President, Bennie D Warner, who was also the Bishop of the United Methodist Church in Liberia (*NWO*, April 1982). Werner was attending a General Conference in the US when the coup took place. When Kulah took over, the tension between church and state remained high (Early, *NWO*, January 1986).

Mutare in Zimbabwe was judged the most suitable site in terms of the criteria set (Daily Christian Advocate 1988:F-59). Despite the dissident problems experienced in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe was viewed as showing "more signs of stability, prosperity and hope than other African nations" (Lacy, *NWO,* October 1988). One needs to look at several factors in addition to those which answered to the criteria set by the search committee. Firstly, at independence the government of Zimbabwe proclaimed a policy of reconciliation which saw attitudes towards Mugabe as a hard line Marxist changing.

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Secondly, there was the successful demobilisation of the two main guerrilla groups and Rhodesian armed forces and their integration into a single army. Thirdly, the most encouraging factor was the unity negotiations between ZANU (PF) and (PF) ZAPU which resulted in the signing of the Unity Accord on 22 December 1987 leading to cessation of hostilities between army factions of the two parties. Even leading UMC figures in the West regarded Zimbabwe in a positive light:

> No transition from colonial or white power in African nations has been easy. But in Zimbabwe, despite the poor press coverage we get in this country, there has been a remarkable degree of reconciliation and healing … (integrating) the two main insurgent armies into a new army with the old Rhodesia militia. This was an extraordinary thing and it seems to have worked … Zimbabweans are proud of the fact that the settlement of their war for independence brought reconciliation instead of retribution. The result is a stable government with a substantial proportion of the former white colonial people still living and working in the country (Trotter :107f).

On another front, the UMC in Zimbabwe was viewed as a promising church, the "… membership increase from under 20 000 in 1982 to over 61 000 in 1988" reflects a church that "has grown strong and is providing not only vital spiritual leadership but also outstanding leadership in education, medical services, and in the political arena" (Adkins, *NWO*, March – April 1991).

The GBHEM meeting in October 1987 accepted the Site Selection Committee's recommendations and prepared a formal resolution for the establishment of Africa University for approval by the General Conference of 1988. The Zimbabwe Annual Conference meeting in December 1987 donated about 1 500 acres which were part of the Old Mutare mission land north of Mutare town for the university.

While the Site Selection Committee was carrying out its assessments the Zimbabwe Annual Conference, in anticipation of a decision in its favour, started negotiations with government. Intense lobbying also targeted insiders at various levels who questioned the wisdom of

establishing a university at this stage in the history of the church. As a result, the General Conference meeting in St Louis, Missouri on 30 April 1988 endorsed the proposal (Official Journal of the Zimbabwe Annual Conference (OJZAC) 1988: 172). The decision of the General Conference sealed the policy of the UMC on university education in Africa, which included its willingness to fund the project from international sources. The nature of the university was international from the onset, that is, in the rupture, the financing, and the ecclesiastical structures which adjudicated the process.

4   THE DELAY: ASPIRATIONS WITHOUT POLICY

In a number of cases, and not only in Africa, the emergence of private universities caught governments by surprise (Levy 2002:9). Consequently the governments were in some cases unable to immediately respond positively to the challenge, resulting in delayed policy making processes. In the case of Zimbabwe, the government had probably underestimated the church's seriousness about the project and as well had not foreseen the political implications which demanded careful consideration. The government then found itself unable to give a ready response because there was no appropriate legislation, which meant that a long process of drafting and tabling the appropriate bill had to be followed (*Manica Post*, 6 April 1990). The fact that the church was proposing to enter the new area of university education was in itself a challenge that the government needed to consider carefully. This aspect slowed down the process of coming up with a relevant piece of legislation. The government was struggling with three questions which had legislative implications, namely the nature, need for and role of a private university (Murapa 2000:82). Beyond the legislative aspect these questions had to be located within the real challenge before government, which, as Mugabe himself acknowledged, was the political implications of the new phenomenon (Mugabe 1994).

Inspired by the international nature of their project, UMC representatives applied pressure on the government. Protracted negotiations between the UMC and government continued for five years, raising fears in UMC circles that their membership and potential donors would lose interest as they grew tired of waiting. Some of the pressure also came from sceptics within the church.

Zimbabwe had been recommended by the Site Selection Committee from a list of other interested African countries and the 87% vote at the General Conference in favour of the project, though overwhelming, meant that there were some within the UMC family who were wary of the idea of a university at all, or at least were unhappy with the selection of Mutare.

There was also a historical antecedent of opposition to the church's continued involvement in higher education. At the General Conference of 1972 pressure had been brought to bear on the church to "abandon the mission of higher education and turn it over to the public universities" (Trotter 2003:76). The proposition was put in abeyance by the appointment of a National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education, which published a five volume report arguing for the church's continued involvement in higher education (Trotter 2003:76). The work of the national commission not only saved higher education from being left in the public sphere but also created fertile ground for future projects such as AU.

This did not however mean that those who were not for the idea were silenced, as Trotter remarked with reference to his own experience as General Secretary of the GBHEM from 1973 to 1987:

> A great enterprise in those years was the development of the vision for a university in Africa. The task was judged by many to be too far out of the box. Were not other boards responsible for missionary areas? Did not the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry have enough on its plate with domestic colleges and professional ministry? And wouldn't the project take resources away from already agreed-on initiatives? (Trotter 2003:72).

Among the negative suggestions was that church-related institutions were becoming irrelevant and unable to "provide morally safe environments for students" and so the solution would be "to encourage students to attend public universities, because, there moral pretensions are not claimed" (Trotter 1984:3). Furthermore, the project was viewed by some to be a waste of resources: James H Salley quoted a detractor as saying: "It is just like pouring money down a rat hole" (*The Herald,* 25 February 2005).

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While opposition had to do mainly with the question of resources, lack of interest, prejudice and negative attitudes in some circles stemmed from the chosen site. It was argued that by establishing a university in Zimbabwe the United Methodist Church was collaborating with Mugabe's Marxist government, thereby raising fears "of exposing students from other African nations to a socialist nation" (Lacy, *NWO,* October 1988).

Officials in the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM), General Commission for Finance and Administration (GCFA) and GBHEM expressed caution and the need to be aware of the "long range involvement for higher education in Africa, and flexibility of location". According to one official, "strong feeling was expressed that something must be said on possible location of a new institution. It will read as 'an appropriate site *maybe* (sic) Zimbabwe'". (Hess to Billings, Tilghman and Germany, 8 March 1988). As a result it was agreed that the resolution to the General Conference should be amended and not make the site too specific: "That action would make it possible to consider other sites if something should go awry with the Zimbabwe plan" (Larum, *United Methodist Reporter (UMR),* 4 March 1988). However, the proposed amendment was not incorporated in the final petition to the General Conference (Daily Christian Advocate, F58-60). The most likely reason was that the Minister of Higher Education had agreed to write a letter of assurance, to be presented to the General Conference, confirming that he, together with President Mugabe, was in support of the project (*UMR*).

The church lobbied politicians and members of parliament in Manicaland and won the sympathy of senior ruling party officials in the province (*UMR;* see also Tekere 2007:45). Addressing an election campaign rally in Manicaland, President Mugabe pledged government support to the AU project (Ireson 1990). The city of Mutare expressed its support for the project by pledging not to bid for a state sponsored university or campus so that it would not "weaken or jeopardise the case for the UMC to establish their university in this area" (Matamisa to Mphisa, 5 August 1988).

5 TOWARDS A POLICY: THE WILLIAMS COMMISSION

The signing of Zimbabwe's National Unity Agreement by the two main political parties, ZANU (PF) and (PF) ZAPU on 22 December 1987 seems to have inspired Mugabe's government and given them confidence to break new ground in various sectors, including tackling the challenge of higher education. As the seeds of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme aimed at economic liberalisation were about to be sown; when the one party state idea was being vigorously contested both within ZANU (PF) and outside; as new political parties were being conceived and as tremors of student activism spiced by antigovernment demonstrations at UZ and polytechnics were increasing, a Presidential Commission of Inquiry (CI) was set up to look into the establishment of a second state university or campus. The Commission was appointed in April 1988 under a government Statutory Instrument (SI 59A of 1988).

According to the Commission's terms of reference, the government's concern was the expansion of public university education and the need to reconsider the role of the university in relation to science and technology as part of national development objectives. The Commission noted that the government's quest for a new social order could be achieved mainly through socioeconomic development strategies which were in line with the ruling party's ideology (CI 1989:1-2). A significant portion of responses submitted to the Commission in writing was limited to the terms of reference and therefore did not focus on issues such as the provision of university education by private organisations.

Curiously, although the government was officially aware of the intentions of the UMC and other churches on university education and had responded by stating that there was no policy to deal with the proposals, the thirteen terms of reference excluded the question of nongovernment provision of university education. The government seemed not prepared for the challenge of liberalising higher education by allowing new players to come in. Nevertheless, the government only asked the Commission to consider this issue as well after the Statutory Instrument outlining the terms of reference had been gazetted (CI:xi). The oversight suggests a lack of government interest in the private provision of university education. However, in

the course of the Commission's work the subject of private universities became a major issue as a result of pressure from those Christian denominations aspiring to have universities.

Surprisingly, only a handful of church organisations responded to the Commission's general call to make submissions. The interest of churches in presenting evidence was not so much on the original terms of reference as outlined in the statutory instrument but on presenting their cases. The UMC describes the meeting of its representatives with the Commission on 17 August 1988 as an opportunity for them "to prove that they are not newcomers in the task of establishing universities" (OJZAC:180).

It is significant that only three churches out of a long list of Christian denominations in the country and only one Anglican diocese out of four submitted evidence. Only four out of the total of 176 of the Commission's oral interviews were held with churches. Seven church organisations out of a total of 156 submitted written evidence. Evidence by the three church-related teacher training colleges was submitted in response to a direct invitation by the Commission. The colleges were among the educational institutions recognised by the government which were to be visited by the Commission as it gathered evidence. Churches were not put in the mandatory category of organisations which the commission *had to meet*. It was up to them to voluntarily respond to the Commission's general invitations to the public advertised in the print and electronic media. This raises two important questions: firstly, concerning the role of churches as important stakeholders that needed to be consulted on national issues, and secondly, concerning the extent to which the churches themselves understood their right to participate in an important policy-making process such as this one. The poor response by the churches may be attributed to their low level of interest and awareness of the significance of the process.

For its part the government appeared not to regard churches as a special constituency to be consulted. Kapfunde's study of factors influencing the formulation of education policy in Zimbabwe suggests that:

> In spite of the fact that church bodies played a significant role in the provision of education in Zimbabwe … [they] … were rarely consulted on matters of policy but [that] these groups acted to implement government programmes, block or slow down policies to which they did not subscribe (Kapfunde 1997:168).

Although Kapfunde's study makes no specific reference to the 1989 Commission of Inquiry or to university education, the results of his survey are significant as they expose state attitudes to religious bodies in policymaking. By implication, the question of nongovernment provision of university education was not initially ranked as one of the critical issues. The main contributory factor which led the government to request the Commission to include nongovernment organisations was the pressure through lobbying and the proposals coming from the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), the UMC and the Theological College of Zimbabwe. It is these three organisations, apart from the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Anglican Diocese of Harare, who engaged the Commission in various ways including submission of written and oral evidence in which they argued for the need to establish their own universities.

In spite of the Commission's strong emphasis on science and technology in the terms of reference, proposals submitted by the three church groups after the Commission had visited their sites, did not concern themselves with this thrust but with what they considered their religious mandate.

6 CONFLICT AND COMPLEMENTARITY: THE POLITICAL FACTOR

The real fears, while including the international nature of the proposed universities, were that the churches were proposing to enter an area of service which was completely new. These fears were expressed not only before and during but even after the passing of legislation. Questions were bound to be asked concerning the nature of the relationship between church and state in this sphere. On the other hand those who supported the involvement of churches in university education argued that churches had a good reputation

for providing education to the nation and their complementary role should not be curtailed. As a result, the report of the Commission received overwhelming support in Parliament (Parliamentary Debates, 16(38), 9 September 1989).

In line with its findings, the Commission had outlined the following points which had been articulated in favour of churches:

(a) Church organisations have continued to play a complementary role in educational provision at subuniversity level. They should be allowed to play a similar role at university level.

(b) The establishment of such institutions will help to relieve the pressure of demand for higher education by qualified applicants.

(c) The infrastructure for private universities will remain permanently *in situ*. This is an investment which will benefit the country even if the private organisation should opt out at a later stage.

(d) The international connections of the institutions will enrich the educational experience of the students and contribute to the generation of foreign exchange.

(e) Nongovernmental universities provide an opportunity for the mainstream churches to train their clergy to degree level in the context and environment of the Zimbabwean culture and ideology instead of abroad (58).

Commenting on the prospects of a university in his region a few years later, Josiah Hungwe, the Provincial Governor, argued that he preferred a church university to one run by the government or the private sector (*Chronicle* 2 August 1995). Hungwe's statement should be understood in the context of the euphoria of centenary celebrations which had intensified regional competition. In this regard politicians tended to align themselves with the churches they belonged to as well as lobbying for their regions.

The capacity of churches to mobilise resources and attract foreign funding, as had been expected to happen with AU, was overestimated. There was also the generally perceived assumption

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that churches could have a positive influence which would bring about a new culture in universities This perception appears far-fetched when one considers the numerous student strikes at mission schools, and also that every year such schools contributed significant numbers of students to the University of Zimbabwe (UZ).

Arguments against allowing church involvement expressed mainly by some government ministers and officials bore hallmarks of political fears more than anything else. As outlined by the Commission the arguments focused on fears that sectarian beliefs and religious discrimination might erode national unity and that church interests, both culturally and politically, could conflict with those of the government, creating subversive tendencies (CI:58). UZ was already creating a lot of problems for the government and several opposition politicians and leaders from civil society.

A report in the *Africa University Journal* quoted Fay Chung, the Acting Minister of Higher Education: "It is government policy to allow private universities provided that they provide the quality education we want and are subject to safeguards to protect Zimbabwe's interests" (Ireson 1989). As she addressed parliament in November, Chung acknowledged the role of churches in providing education, but argued that the government had to be wary of independent institutions that could be used for antigovernment activities (Parliamentary Debates, 16(41), 16 November 1989).

In the same speech, apparently referring to UZ students who had heckled her and the Vice President, Joshua Nkomo, Chung criticised "some confused elements in our society [bent on using] these precepts of [academic freedom] as an excuse for anarchy, hooliganism and *anti-patriotism* …" (emphasis added) (Parliamentary Debates, 16(41), 16 November 1989). In the Catholic affiliated *Moto* magazine of September 1989 Chung was quoted as describing the students as "anti-government, malcontents and subversive elements". The government's attacks hinted at a hidden hand influencing the students. The government was so nervous that as debate on the report of the Commission of Inquiry was beginning, two journalists from the national broadcaster who had interviewed a UZ law lecturer known for his critical attitude towards government policies were suspended from their jobs (Zwana 2006:153). Attempts

to stem the problem through the University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act of 1990 only created more problems with the students, lecturers and even nonacademic staff.

Government fears were that if the problem could reach high levels at the state institution, it would become even more serious in private universities where it did not have a direct influence except through legislation. The notion that church universities could become fertile grounds for antigovernment activities unsettled a significant number of ruling party politicians. It is in this context that one may consider suspicions, though these came much later, from the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe's interim Board of Trustees that the government was dragging its feet to grant them a Charter because some of its members had strong links with the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) (Zwana 2006:153). In general, churches appeared to be sympathetic to opposition parties or civic bodies and pressure groups which sometimes criticised government policies. During the student activism which started in the late eighties and spilled into the nineties some of the denominational chaplains at UZ were supportive of student actions and they criticised the way both the university authorities and the government were handling the students. When the state withdrew scholarships for student leaders, the ZCC offered to support them financially (Maxwell 1995:119).

Government concerns about "what political connection they [private universities] represented both locally and in terms of US foreign policy" (Ireson 1992) were based on the fear that if they fell into the wrong hands or influences, private universities could become purveyors of subversive activities. This line of thinking should also be considered along with the antigovernment political activities of Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the UMC and Rev Ndabaningi Sithole of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe. The two clerics were often accused of complicity with the settler regime during the liberation struggle. They remained active after independence as leaders of opposition parties and also commanded considerable respect and influence in their respective churches. They also, especially Muzorewa, commanded considerable influence within the ZCC and this was a cause for concern to the government (Rich Dorman 2001:134; See also Hallencreutz 1991:159-65). As observed by Thandeka Nkiwane (1998:99), the United Party which evolved from

the United African National Congress under Muzorewa drew a lot of its support from the UMC membership of which he was Bishop. There were some Christians who believed that the country would be better off led by a member of the clergy. Apart from the UMC membership there were those who subscribed to the Bishop's personal political agenda. Furthermore, both Muzorewa and Sithole came from the same province of Manicaland where the controversial Edgar Tekere was based. Since 1987, Manicaland province

> had become the hotbed of Zimbabwean politics, courtesy of Edgar Tekere, who used his home base to launch an anti-corruption campaign against senior members of the ruling party. Besides, Manicaland was a particularly sensitive province because, since independence, the ruling party … had to contend with supporters of the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole and Bishop Abel Muzorewa, both of whom ZANU (PF) had sought to humiliate because of their role in Zimbabwe-Rhodesia's 1979 "internal settlement" … these two politicians were internal to the ruling party's intra-unity problems … ZANU (PF) [also] had to contend with its Manicaland supporters who wanted to know what had really happened to Herbert Chitepo, who was assassinated in Zambia in March 1975 … (Moyo 1992:36-7).

Tekere was expelled from ZANU (PF) in 1988 for speaking out against corruption and the one party state, a stance which made him popular with students at UZ. He proceeded to form his own political party in1989 (Moyo 1992:32, 35), which contested the 1990 general elections and did fairly well (Tengende 1995:375. See also Moyo 1992:145, 156).

While the government may have considered Muzorewa a potential political danger, the UMC saw him as a potential risk because of his political involvement. His fellow bishops from Africa were against the involvement of bishops in what they called secular politics, often citing the experience of Bennie Warner of Liberia. Some church leaders in the US "said privately that the church in Zimbabwe has suffered from their Bishop's political role" (*NWO*, December 1984). As a result there were attempts to push him to the periphery of the

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project, as he himself noted when protesting about the exclusion of his brother from the Planning Committee for the academic programme:

> In order to eliminate Gwinyai (from participating in the process) the committee was ill advised and misled into believing that if any person with the "Muzorewa name" was seen to be part of the staff in any way, the Government would not approve the university. Trash! This is of course deliberate, unfortunately emanating from those with jealousy, fear and with the remotest experience of teaching at university. At present *a total of six Muzorewas are employed in either Government or Quasi-Government organisations (parastatals)* including one of them who even reports to the President's Office (Muzorewa to Carvalho 1990).

Muzorewa's attack was directed at the interim administration of AU and some ministers of the Zimbabwe Annual Conference, whom he accused of being jealous.

Against the backdrop of these political dynamics AU was finally granted its Charter on 21 January 1992 (SI 29 of 1992). Permission had also been given to start construction a year earlier on the strength of a guarantee from the government (*Manica Post*, 2 November 1990). The university opened with two faculties: Theology and, Agriculture and Natural Resources.

7   CONCLUSION

The liberalisation of the university sector in Zimbabwe brought with it diversification and was complementary to government efforts. At the same time, it meant that the government indirectly assented to the role of international networks undergirding religious aspirations in nation building. Even with state regulatory instruments in place, the notion of privatisation as an ingredient of globalisation undermines the state's hegemony. The emergence of AU posed a twofold challenge for the government of Zimbabwe. Firstly it had to deal with the United Methodist Church's links with the West, and secondly it had to contend with the pan-African nature of the institution. Both

levels presented ideological challenges. Yet internally there were also political forces which supported the initiative, mainly driven by regional affiliation. Beyond the political implications of its emergence, AU presented a new dimension to the idea of mission in postcolonial Zimbabwe which warrants further scrutiny.

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