

Church involvement in the transition to democracy in post-colonial Zimbabwe (1980–2008)

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Abstract

Democracy, “government by the people, for the people” in Zimbabwe, as in most post-colonial African countries, is an ideal, and the attainment of it is difficult, as we can see from the absence of and pretensions to it. In Zimbabwe itself, the road to democracy since independence from colonial oppression has been filled with blind alleys and impasses. Throughout history, the church has been a recognised key partner with the state in particular, and society in general, in the discourse facilitating the democratisation process. In this context, the church shares in the mission of Christ as a pacesetter in offering prophetic advocacy, and in education as a driver of social transformation. This article explores church engagement in the transition to democracy, using access points that include promoting liberation, reconciliation and reconstruction, and inculcating democratic values of respect for human dignity and the participation of all people in decisions that affect the quality and direction of their lives. The article explores the question of how the church has exercised its role in the transition from colonial rule to democracy in Zimbabwe by defining the term “transition to democracy”, examining the situation in Zimbabwe, and exposing the church’s engagement with it. Pertinent questions for the appraisal are: What has been done? What is being done? Do the interventions go deep enough? What needs to be done?

The transition to democracy for Zimbabwe

The classical definition of democracy is “government by all the people” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1978). The starting point for participatory democracy is the drawing up of a people-driven national constitution, which needs to be endorsed by the citizens in a referendum. Thus the national constitution enshrines the people’s dream and vision of a democratic society: in essence,

democratic values. The underpinnings of democratic values are the safeguarding of fundamental human rights and a climate that is conducive to free and fair elections. The United Nations Declaration for Human Rights stipulates that fundamental human rights safeguard freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of worship, as well as freedom from fear and want (UDHR 1948: Preamble).

According to Elsa Tamez (2001:57), a dream is a response to a state of affairs with which we are deeply dissatisfied, and which we want to change. A prophetic vision, in turn, encapsulates the life we desire, not the life we live. From independence from colonial rule in 1980 to today, Zimbabwe has been a country in transition to democracy. From its emergence from colonial rule, Zimbabwe has a chequered history of repeated civil strife emanating from bad governance and corruption. The period immediately following independence from colonial rule saw Zimbabweans emerging from a time of protracted guerrilla warfare. Zimbabwean blacks emerged victorious but also a people deeply affected physically, psychologically and morally; in the liberation struggle, people had experienced many atrocities in the battlefield that included their own villages. The dream of liberation then was from “racism”, “elitism” and “imperialism”, and the urge for democracy was expressed as “rule by the black majority”.

For the almost three decades since liberation from colonial rule, the outcry is still for liberation and democracy. The country is characterised by a dictatorship government, with a leadership very intolerant of opposition. All the leaders hold onto is the cliché of a “democratically elected government” amid accusations of electoral rigging. It appears that there has been reverse racism, in that the formerly oppressed are now the oppressors. The emergent black ruling elite have replaced the white colonialists. Thus the country witnesses “a feeble and battered democracy” (Magari Mandebvu 2008:13) in a de facto one-party state.

The political environment has also been characterised by lack of respect for the rule of law, and political violence. Most notably, in the 1987 Midlands and Matabeleland atrocities (called in Shona **Gukurahundi** – pointing to the indiscriminate attacks on defenceless people), the violence was spearheaded by the so-called war veterans who erupted in the aftermath of the government’s failure to win the Constitutional Referendum (2000), while recently the violence in the aftermath of the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections was also spearheaded by the so-called war veterans and party youths (“green bombers”), which have now earned the name of **Second Gukurahundi**. Underlying organised violence was and is the government acting with impunity.

The ZANU PF government’s so-called socio-economic and political reforms have plunged the nation into record levels of abject poverty characterised by hyperinflation. Indiscriminate land grabs have divested Zimbabwe

of its much-envied status of being the bread basket of southern Africa; it is now a completely run-down economy characterised by a brain drain into affluent countries and the reduction of Zimbabweans to the status of economic refugees. The indiscriminate chopping down of trees has resulted in rivers silting up and climatic changes, which in turn expose the country to droughts, floods, hunger and disease. Ironically, people are now nostalgic for the fleshpots of the colonial regime. People experiencing unprecedented socio-economic and political suffering amid draconic media laws are compelled to ask whether their situation was any worse in the colonial era (and when Ian Smith led Rhodesia).

Zimbabweans suffered an orgy of political violence leading up to the 27 June 2008 runoff elections in which Mugabe was the sole contestant. This was exacerbated by the cholera epidemic in August 2008 that affected over 80 000 people, and saw more than 4 000 dead. The Global Political Agreement of 15 September 2008 ushered in a transitional Government of National Unity (GNU), which was sworn in on 13 March 2009. But still there are reports of fresh farm invasions and characteristic violence. Topping the agenda of this GNU is the need to implement a process of national healing and to revise the constitution to create a political environment of tolerance where divergent voices can be heard.

For Zimbabwe, then, after transition from colonial rule followed by almost 30 years of dictatorship government, this is a *kairos* or opportune time (cf. the Kairos document of the churches of South Africa, 1985), since a transition creates new opportunities to heal wounds and build bridges. The big challenge for the church is to seize the opportunity and its burden of responsibility, since when opportunities are missed we simply have one oppressive government replacing another.

In the much-needed democratisation process that entails the healing of wounds, the abolition of injustices and the formation of a liberating social environment, we can identify three main roles of the church: facilitating liberation, reconciliation and reconstruction. Thus, as the church engages the past, present and future, it acts as custodian of ethical values, as pacesetter and as one of the main stakeholders in education for democracy. To this end the church has tremendous potential for capacity building. This is because the church by its nature is non partisan (it accommodates all believers regardless of their political affiliation).

This exposition will explore activities and documents from church leadership, that is, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Ecumenical Support Service (ESS). These leadership structures have committees and sub-committees; of prime importance to the discourse is the contribution of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP). The spotlight is on the CCJP and Legal Resource Foundation

(LRF) document following investigations into the Matabeleland and Midlands atrocities of 1980–1987, *Breaking the silence: building true peace* (1987); the ZCBC pastoral letters: *Tolerance and hope* (2001), *God hears the cry of the oppressed* (2007) and *Zimbabwe elections* (2008), the ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ draft document *The Zimbabwe we want* (2006), and the ESS publication, *Critical voices*. In addition there are interviews with leaders of the various church structures and commissions mentioned above and also press releases of the CCJP regarding the delayed release of results of Zimbabwe's 29 March 2008 harmonised elections.

Church engagement in liberation, reconciliation and reconstruction in post-colonial Zimbabwe

The big question in post-colonial Zimbabwe, and one which the GNU faces now, is what to do with perpetrators of war crimes. The situation is very fluid and the risk of the country erupting into violence from the victims' urge to revenge is high. The church that shares in Christ's redemptive healing ministry is in its turn being strongly challenged to mediate in the process of national healing. The big temptation facing the nation and the church is to go for hasty reconciliation. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, an example of spurious reconciliation exists, in that at independence the new government was commended for taking up a policy of reconciliation. But the retrogression that took place a couple of decades after independence points to the superficiality of this act.

Another practical example of spurious reconciliation concerns the Midlands-Matabeleland *Gukurahundi* atrocities in the period 1980–1987 following the liberation struggle from colonial oppression. This was organised violence, in which the state tried to squash the dissident menace and hostilities between ZIPRA (the group led by Joshua Nkomo) and ZANLA (the group led by Robert Mugabe) liberation forces (CCJP/LRF Report, 1999:3). The church established a commission to investigate the effects of the Midlands-Matabeleland atrocities and the findings were published in the CCJP/LRF document, *Breaking the silence: building true peace* (1997; 2001). The document contains shocking revelations of mass graves, particularly in mine shafts. It also explains that this civil war strife left the victims with a legacy of problems which include physical, psychological, moral and practical difficulties.

The church's attempts to bring the government to account for the abovementioned atrocities were frustrated. Instead, the signing of the unity accord on 22 December 1987 ended the violence. The then Prime Minister Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo offered each other the hand of peace and agreed that they and their parties should work together from that day. But people criticised this on the grounds that true national unity was not achieved, since

only a few leaders have reaped the benefits, and not ordinary people who suffered through these years of turmoil. Furthermore, it is observed that true unity cannot take place until the government is prepared to admit what happened and to discuss it openly, since truth is a prelude to reconciliation (CCJP/LRF 1997; 2001:5–6).

It appears that the TRC in post-apartheid South Africa, headed by the Nobel Peace laureate (1984), Archbishop Desmond Tutu, though it had both strengths and weaknesses, could serve as a paradigm appropriate to Zimbabwe for dealing with situations where violence, turmoil and sectional strife are rife, and in other conflicts that take place not between warring nations, but within the same nation. The church in Zimbabwe was in the best position to spearhead such a commission.

Supporting the TRC, Tutu recognises that forgiveness and reconciliation is a process. He is emphatic that forgiveness is not cheap. In the process of forgiveness, and for the victims of war atrocities, the main thrust is anamnesis (recollection) of the painful memories in order to bring about authentic healing. In this process the culprits are given an opportunity to acknowledge their wrongdoing and if possible, to ask for pardon. Consequently, there is real healing resulting from having dealt with the real situation (Tutu 1999:218).

Taking note that the past spurs us into the future, remembering is necessary for authentic reconciliation so that we will not let such atrocities happen again. Tutu (1999:219, 121, 123) highlights key aspects in the process of forgiveness: that an important part of psychological healing for any victim is to be given the opportunity to retell the harrowing stories of suffering to a supportive and non-judgmental audience; that not forgetting past events means re-examining them with a new attitude and learning, precisely from the experience of suffering, that only love can build up, whereas hatred produces devastation and ruin; that in the process of reconciliation, the deadly cycle of revenge should be replaced by the newly discovered liberty of forgiveness, and that it is common observation that whereas in situations of war people have a dreadful capacity for evil, in the process of reconciliation, they have an amazing capacity for forgiveness once the truth has been established.

Church as guardian of morals

Concerning the land issue in Zimbabwe, and the God-humanity-cosmos interconnectedness, the church as guardian of the moral values needed to inculcate the concept of good stewardship. This perspective questions the legitimacy of, for example, the fast-track land acquisition in which black multi-farm owners have replaced white farm owners. And in the Gospel, the litmus test for good stewardship or governance is that people “receive their

portion of food at the proper time” (Lk. 12:42-43) and are found *trustworthy* as stewards of God’s grace (1 Cor. 4:1-2). Such an orientation challenges the situation in present-day Zimbabwe in which the whole nation, with the exception of the small emergent black elite, has been reduced to destitution. Furthermore, the acquisition of highly productive white farms by blacks has led to a situation that has destroyed the high agricultural productivity that previously gave Zimbabwe its enviable status as the bread basket of southern Africa. In this context, individualistic materialistic concerns have overridden altruistic concerns for the broader society’s good.

A case in point is a highly productive poultry farm that had provided Kwekwe town and beyond with eggs and poultry meat; when a black farmer acquired it, this service died a natural death. A similar example is of an orange farm between Chegutu and Kadoma in which a white farmer had invested a lot of money and labour for long-term returns. A government minister ousted this rightful owner of a farm which served most of the nation with citrus fruit. And now the citrus farm is already showing signs of neglect and poor productivity.

The democratisation process is a call to cultural renaissance. In advocating theologies of inculturation for an inclusive humanity, the Church can help to unpack loaded slogans like “Land to the People!” and “Zimbabwe will never be a colony again!” Pertinent questions are – Whose land? – Who are the people?

The cliché “land to the people”, meaning returning ancestral land to the people, is highly questionable. One can argue that after 90 years and more of colonial Zimbabwe, white Zimbabweans born in the country, whose ancestors are buried in Zimbabwean soil and who are bound to the country by their umbilical cord, have a rightful claim to a piece of land. Furthermore, the question of resettling landless people should have taken seriously the situation of former farm workers. Furthermore, in a multi-racial, multicultural and globalising society, we need to redefine the concepts of citizenship and property ownership to achieve a universal and inclusive approach to the democratisation process that does not result in reverse racism. Clearly, there needs to be a creative dialectic of the Gospel and culture in the democratisation process. It is important to note that in Harold Barry’s *Zimbabwe: the past is the future* (2004), the church in Zimbabwe has reflected significantly on the issue of land and democracy.

Prophetic witness

To be a prophet is to speak the truth in the face of opposition. In situations of crisis, the church shares in the prophetic mission of Christ by being on the side of the oppressed (Lk. 4:18ff.). In this role, the church is mandated to promote democracy as a vision whose basic elements are freedom, equality,

justice and fullness of life. The church is thus a community of critical discernment and critical participation in social and political processes. The ESS book, *Zimbabwe: critical voices emerging in times of crisis* (2003), shows the church at work in providing moral conscience to Zimbabwe in the transition to democracy.

In prophetic witness, the Church is to offer a voice for the voiceless. Theologically, there is the appropriation of the Old Testament motif of the *anawim*, the poor of Yahweh, who in this context are a trilogy of widow, stranger and orphan. Liberation theologians call this the “preferential option for the poor”. Here the church’s theology of inculturation can revamp the biblical motif of the *anawim* in the Shona understanding of *vanhu vaMwari* – particularly in the practice of *Zunde raMambo* (“Here people work the chief’s field and its produce is directed towards the needs of the poor and strangers”).

Prophetic witness by the church in Zimbabwe was clearly experienced in the liberation struggle against colonial oppression and also in at least two incidents of political crisis in post-independence Zimbabwe – interventions in respect of the Midlands-Matabeleland atrocities of the period 1980–1988 and the *Murambatsvina* – Operation Clean-up crisis of 25 May 2005. The CCJP/LRF document, *Breaking the silence: building true peace* and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (ZCBC) pastoral letter, *God hears the cry of the oppressed* (Holy Thursday, 3 April 2007) are highly commended as prophetic documents. The latter document holds the state to account for the demolition of people’s houses and shacks that left thousands of people homeless in what the Government called *Murambatsvina*, Operation Clean-up! People were reduced to the status of dirt or junk.

In the *Murambatsvina* (Operation Clean-up), people were deeply wounded and in fact dehumanised by being treated as synonymous with dirt or chaff. This touched the raw nerve of a people disenchanted by the powers that be. Some people, particularly in Hartcliffe and Whitecliffe areas, felt anger at being cheated by government ministers who in previous election campaigns, as an electoral gimmick, had allocated them stands. The people consequently put their resources together and developed their properties according to their means. Now it was these very minister(s) who, with a different political agenda, were now demolishing their houses and evicting them into the streets! One picture that remains fresh in one’s mind is of a child returning from school, only to find the bulldozer breaking down the family home. Certainly this was a traumatic experience that will haunt the child for the rest of his life.

The document, *God hears the cry of the oppressed* was prophetic because it was a thorough analysis of the crisis. It highlighted the anger and despair of people faced with the situation of bad governance and corruption in which the gap between the rich minority and the poor majority was

widening drastically. It acknowledged a *kairos* – a moment of grace calling those responsible for the crisis to repent and listen to the cry of the people for change and authentic transformation in nation building. The church called on every Christian to honour their baptismal vocation to promote human dignity and the saving will of God for both the victim and the perpetrator of oppression. The document elaborated on the crisis of governance and spiritual and moral leadership and on the roots of the crisis. The church also clearly asserted its prophetic role.

Concerning the roots of the crisis, the document pointed out that the new government had not changed colonial repressive structures and laws but in actual fact continued to reinforce them by even more repressive legislation, such as the Public Order Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), which robbed people of their rights and freedoms as clearly spelt out in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948.

In addition, the ecumenical church responded prophetically by requesting dialogue with some government ministers in order to stop the operation. Because the crisis cut across the boundaries of denomination, race, gender, ethnic grouping and social class, the church allied with civic groups in calling the government to account for such behaviour. Church leaders and some members of civic groups (human rights lawyers, housing corporations etc) had dialogue with veteran Minister N Shamhuyarira at his residence (6 June 2005). A similar and even larger congregation held a meeting with some ministers, including I Chombo, and I Made, at Silveira House on 16 June 2005.

The church also intervened with food, shelter and efforts to relocate people to rural homes. When the UN envoy (Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka) came to assess the effects of Operation Murambatsvina (26 June–8 July 2005), church leaders made sure that she was not completely hijacked by the government and rendered incapable of making an honest assessment. They tried by every means to facilitate meetings with some of the victims so that she could listen to their stories. As a result of this, the UN envoy's report (18 July 2005) was thorough and honest. The UN Security Council then ordered an immediate stop to Operation Murambatsvina.

Church as pacesetter

The Church in the modern world, according to the Vatican II decree, *Christus Dominus* (28 October 1965; cf. Austin Flannery 1981:564–576), has to place a high value on human dignity through promoting quality of life and bringing peace, justice and freedom. A church conscious of the signs of the times strives to be relevant in ever-changing circumstances with new needs and new challenges. Thus the church has to initiate dialogue for the promotion of

mutual interdependence of people. The church as pacesetter for the democratisation process needs to be a proactive agent of transformation, and not just wait to intervene in situations of crisis.

Jesse Mugambi (1999:4: 94–96) maintains that the ecumenical church as pacesetter holds great promise for social transformation and cohesion by providing forums for mutual consultation and co-operation in service to society. The ecumenical church, then, should provide the meeting place where principles of democracy can be analysed and shared without prejudice and incrimination. Jonah Gokova (director of ESS, in an interview on 13 May 2008) accentuates this point, saying that since the church is not a partisan structure, it has the capacity to promote a culture of tolerance, and to dissipate conflict. He explains that where we have no structures or mechanisms, we create some to engage civil society.

Gokova points out that there is a need to create a concept of church from the grassroots, that is, a church in society that provides an ideal environment for the day-to-day living of the Christian faith within a context. The church as a stakeholder in education should aim for education for living. Gokova elaborates that it is of the utmost importance that education for living should equip believers to engage in prophetic ministry. For example, in a situation where the government has grabbed land and consequently failed in production, education should equip people to understand the dynamics of a political economy. Such a church can be an important tool for promoting Christian responsibility, as distinct from activism.

Inclusiveness and holistic participation are essential factors in the quality of prophetic witness (Kobia 2004:47). The church needs to be in constant creative dialogue so as to offer both internal and external critical analysis of the democratisation process. In this role, according to Desmond van der Water (2001:39), the church needs to engage in what Albert Nolan described as conjunctural analysis. This is an analysis that goes beyond a social analysis of the general situation. It discerns the particular crisis in terms of the conjunction or meeting of opposing forces. This is particularly true in the transition from post-colonial to independent status and the political and economic oppression experienced in Zimbabwe, where dichotomies of race, ethnicity, gender, class, wealth, poverty and age deepen identity crises and threaten to tear the nation apart. In a multisectoral approach, the meeting of opposing forces is experienced in the process of truth and reconciliation, exemplarity on the part of the church itself, the search for a common identity, and in the process of participatory democracy in general.

The church as pacesetter in the transition to democracy is challenged with the task of establishing new values and spirituality that will help in promoting a common identity. Since powerful, non-violent action is part of the prophetic mandate of the church, this approach demands dialogue. In the inclusive dialogue of education for democratic engagement, the church is

challenged to initiate multisectoral engagement of all stakeholders in dreaming dreams of a new social order. In reconstructing a morally just society, there is need for a moral vision setting in place a political culture that will guard against the recurrence of the type of atrocities committed in the past. Consequently, the church needs to be in dialogue with the state, institutions of the civic society and opposition political parties in the light of gospel values. The moral vision or dream of democracy has to be articulated in many forums, debates, media, art and music. In addition to this, the church needs to set up structures that openly denounce political polarisation and violence. Practical examples of such structures include the CCJP, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Christian Alliance.

Concerning the church's attempt to initiate a nationwide debate to articulate the dream and vision for transition to a new democratic Zimbabwe, the spotlight is on the document, *The Zimbabwe we want* (2006). The aim was to draft a new national constitution in which all people participated. This in turn would guarantee people's fundamental freedoms (of expression, association and assembly). The document identifies core values which include love of God and neighbour as oneself, unity in diversity, respect for human life and democratic freedoms, good governance that affirms participation of all persons, gender equity, stewardship of creation, justice and the maintenance of the rule of law and preferential option for the poor and marginalised (2006:15–21).

In facilitating dialogue in the democratic dream and vision, the church has to be familiar with conditions for authentic dialogue. This is particularly important if the church is to jealously guard against compromising its prophetic mission, since as pacesetter it experiences many dilemmas. Even in situations of crisis such as Zimbabweans are still experiencing in the aftermath of the 29 March 2008 elections, churches are seen to be phlegmatic or slow to react, mainly because of a failure to discern the signs of the times. According to Desmond van der Water (2001:34), it is a common observation that churches display inertia – an incapacity or unwillingness to respond creatively and positively to the challenges of the historical moment of intervention to which the churches in their prophetic mission are called.

Concerning the concept of dialoguing in good faith, the church is faced with many challenges. These include how to advocate for democratic change when the church itself is not democratic, how to confront the abuse of power without appearing to be disloyal to state authority, and how to engage in political change while avoiding political cooptation.

A case in point of dialoguing in bad faith concerns the production of the vision document, *The Zimbabwe we want* (2006), by the church and the state. The ecumenical church in Zimbabwe drafted the document and engaged the state in producing the published document. According to Fr Wermter (see also Ray Matikinye, 2006:7), the state did not act in good faith,

because there are clear and disappointing indications that, presumably, government agents doctored the original document when producing the printed document. Consequently, some important elements that existed in the draft document concerning the vision for an all-inclusive constitution were either suppressed or omitted. Wermter adds that, whereas the document remained biblically and theologically sound, political ideas and some practical recommendations by churches were rendered harmless or omitted. This is particularly true concerning the two significant areas of contention: working toward a constitution initiated by the people and the question of freedom of expression, association and assembly. For example, concerning the move for the “separation of powers and checks and balances” (4.3.3) as being “fundamental to our constitution”, the doctored document fails to apply theory to the situation on the ground, and consequently, fails to state openly that the excessive powers of the executive president are the root cause of the political and economic crisis.

The new constitution would guarantee a balance of power between the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. In a situation where the Zimbabwean state has hijacked the judiciary, Zimbabweans have an executive President and, from their experience in the aftermath of the March 2008 elections in which the electorate has been totally disenfranchised and the electoral commission and the judiciary have been compromised, they are urged to conclude that never again should the nation allow one man to have executive powers (Oskar Wermter SJ, in interview, 8 April 2008).

In the present de facto one-party state where Parliament makes the laws, the totalitarian government seems determined to stay in power. A new (people-driven) constitution would ensure that there is a credible election management body and process, an independent, impartial and competent judiciary, and a multi-party system of democratic government with the devolution of government authority to provinces and local government level (Zimbabwe People’s Charter, cf. Dube 2008:6).

Another example is that while the doctored document sings the praises of democracy, it fails to spell out that the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) must be a body independent of the government and the ruling party. The document explains the meaning of Zimbabwe as “unity in diversity” (3.2.2) but there is no mention of Zimbabwe functioning as a de facto one-party state. The doctored document goes along with the government in calling the land question “the single most emotive subject in our nation” (6.1) and devotes a large section to the impulse to “restore land to its rightful owners” (black Africans). This implies that whites are not rightful owners and thus this attitude buys into reverse racism.

Concerning safeguarding of human freedoms in the new people-driven constitution, the doctored vision document mentions the media in one sentence only (7.2.5): “our media is polarized and is not always helping our

national unity". The government's laws infringing on free media, POSA and AIPPA, are called "contested legislation". The fact is that there is unprecedented control of the media by the state – all electronic media (radio and TV) are government controlled. There is only one Zimbabwean television channel, on which the government indoctrinates the poor people in particular, who have no satellite dishes to access international TV media. Consequently, both the church and the civic groups see the need for a new constitution for Zimbabwe as an overdue means to guarantee democratic free and fair elections.

The government fictitiously co-opted the church into praising it for the Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* (subsequent to Operation Murambasvina) efforts to build decent houses for those who had been displaced (7.2.4). There was nothing praiseworthy about Operation *Garikai*. To demonstrate that it is much quicker and easier to destroy than to build, the overcrowded matchbox blocks that were built are nowhere near in standard to some houses that had been wantonly destroyed. Most displaced people are still living in shacks.

Clearly the state has no good faith concerning the implementation of the dream and vision for the democratisation process. It tried to co-opt the church into its own agenda of holding on tenaciously to power. Consequently, one of the sharpest critics of the government, the then bishop Pius Ncube of Bulawayo, showed prophetic witness by flatly refusing to sign the official document, claiming that the document did not match the original document he had previously signed.

The church in her teaching office is, together with the state, a major stakeholder in education. Many political leaders pride themselves on having attended church schools. In tertiary education, places like Silveira House have included leadership training in their skills training programme: (The author attended three modules of leadership training for religious leaders (2004–2006)). Another practical example is that in preparing for the 29 March harmonised elections, the church engaged in a thorough voter education programme.

An education-based dialogue in the transition to democracy is vital, particularly for voter education, and in particular for disseminating human and democratic values. Amid thick layers of ideological fog and political propaganda, Oskar Wermter stresses that people need truth as badly as they need air to breathe. If people have facts and see them in their true context, they are able to arrive at independent judgements (2008:21). Realising the need for people to make a responsible choice of a leader who would stand up for their needs, the bishops issued a pastoral letter on *Zimbabwe elections 2008: Only when power stands under God's blessing can it be trusted* (16 December 2007). In this, the church, governed by values of love, truth, justice, freedom and peace, urged the government and all contesting parties to create a social, political and economic climate that enhances moral

integrity and allows the establishment of a credible electoral process whose outcome would be free and fair. Likewise, Christians were urged to make their decisions and choices guided by the Christian ethos. Voters were to use Christian social teaching to examine the views of the election candidates on pertinent issues and rate the candidates' integrity against their past or potential performance. Voters were also encouraged to show tolerance of the individual's choice of a political party while also showing a commitment to justice and solidarity with each member of the people of God. There was also emphasis on a correct disposition in accepting the election outcome (2007:7–8). The pastoral letter ends by calling all citizens and various organisations to adopt a spirit of solidarity with government and opposition parties in making contributions to national reconciliation and restoration.

The church under the SADC regional faith-based initiatives, recognising its challenge as partner and stakeholder in achieving good governance, accountability, transparency, human rights and respect for the rule of law, was proactive in training election-monitoring officers for the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections. Furthermore, the church witnessed the recount for parliamentary seats and concluded that the disparities were minor, and this made the recount process unnecessary.

CCJP, taking up the church's challenge to search for genuine and sustainable peace that is anchored in justice, was on guard both before and after the elections to see that the Zimbabwe electoral process adhered to the SADC principles, to which Zimbabwe is a signatory. CCJP issued two pre-election press statements highlighting some deficiencies in the electoral preparations. Thereafter it released press statements (28 March 2008 Press Statement No.1/08 *Harmonized joint elections*; 31 March 2008 Press Statement No.2/08 *Interim Report on the March 29 Harmonized Elections*; 7 April-2008 Press Statement No.3/08 *Deep concern over inordinate delays in releasing results of Presidential election*) covering proceedings on the day of elections, and showing concern over the inordinate delay in the release of results for the presidential election (interview with Alouis Munyaradzi Chaumba, National Director of CCJP on 8 April 2008). Consequently, CCJP expressed serious doubts about the impartiality of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC).

Evaluation

From the foregoing discussion we can pose the question of whether church interventions in the transition to democracy go deep enough. The church in Zimbabwe is to be commended for the significant interventions in this regard. We have seen that the church does provide a voice for the voiceless, it gives critical guidance in the restoration of the country's moral fibre, and it is proactive in urging for participatory democracy. However, in times of crises

such as those mentioned above, the church seems to display inertia and slowness to respond. Thus the often asked question is “where is the church in all this?” The church, for example needed to set in place a TRC commission in 1980 at Zimbabwe’s independence from colonial rule. This would have shown the then new government (starting with a clean slate) that violence and discrimination of any people are not tolerated. This too would have been an early warning to the new government that it had to set its governance high, since it would be held to account for bad governance and any atrocities inflicted on the people. But now the present government, with its record of corruption and violation of human rights, does not take well to the suggestion of a TRC for Zimbabwe. The substantiation of this observation is the negative response of the government to the report of the Commission investigating the Matabeleland and Midlands atrocities.

It is significant that as guardian of the moral order, the point of departure of the church in partnership in the movement to a new democratic order is a review of its own integrity and identity. The church as guardian of society’s moral values must take the lead in addressing inequalities in its own structures. There are several dilemmas that seem to compromise the church’s prophetic mission. As a pacesetter, the church must be exemplary. The great dilemma experienced, especially by the Roman Catholic Church, is that of hierarchology. This is the challenge: how can the church, which is ostensibly undemocratic itself, morally advocate democratic change? For example, the head of the Catholic Church, the Pope, is bishop for life and it is difficult for such a church to advocate more frequent changes of political leadership through democratic elections. Another practical example concerns the church’s reservation of priesthood to males only (John Paul II, in *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, 1994) and the consequent absence of women in the papal magisterium – the supreme body for decision making, formulation of doctrines and teaching. Thus women, who are a demographic majority in the church, serve on its margins. The church is challenged to remove the log in its own eye before it can remove the speck in the opponent’s eye! In a twist of irony, the present Zimbabwean government is making significant strides in taking women on board to leadership positions and consequently giving them access to land and other means of livelihood. Joyce Mujuru is the first and current woman vice president of Zimbabwe and other women are making their mark on public space.

In Zimbabwe, there are stories of women being abused in men-led churches. A case in point is that of Obadiah Musindo, who was prosecuted for sexually abusing women during faith healing. There are also cases of sexual abuse of women, including nuns, by priests and bishops, and church leadership is often cloaked in a conspiracy of silence.

There are churches that seemingly exist as organs of the state, and these collude with the state in subtle or overt ways. A practical example is

that of the Reverend Obadiah Musindo (African Independent Church) who was seen on the only TV channel to actively engage in political campaigning for ZANU-PF, even composing propaganda songs to the effect that the president is divinely given and that he should not be opposed.

There are also church leaders who have been co-opted by the powers that be, apparently because of their vested interests in land and property. A case in point is that of Bishop Kunonga (of what is now a faction of the Anglican Church), who apparently colluded with the land grab by occupying a farm about 10km from Harare. He also divided the Anglican church, running it like a political party. He too, like government ministers, holds on tenaciously to power. As a corrective to all this, the church needs to be self-critical about the image and example it gives.

Conclusion

The church shares in the mission of Christ to inculcate the Christian values of love, peace and justice. This is what underlies participatory democracy in the God-humanity-cosmos mutual connectedness. A transition to democracy in post-colonial Zimbabwe was put into sharp relief as a kairos moment in which the need for truth and reconciliation could not be over-emphasised, in order to heal wounds and ensure that past mistakes are not repeated. As a partner with the state, in achieving good governance, accountability, transparency, upholding human dignity and respect for the rule of law, the church by nature has the capacity to promote a culture of tolerance and inclusion and to dissipate conflict.

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