

PROPHECY, POLITICS AND POWER: CHANGING RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE ZIMBABWEAN STATE (1980-2007)¹

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Abstract

The article investigates the role played by the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980. Of particular interest is the way in which the Catholic Church has exercised her prophetic office within the changing social, political and economic environment since independence. Although there are many ways of approaching the subject, I have decided to interrogate the role of the Church in the past 27 years on the basis of bishops' pastoral letters. Firstly, they are ready resources available for any study of the Catholic because they are published for public consumption. Secondly, they are themselves a product not only of the theological reflections of the bishops but of wide consultation that takes place prior to their publication. In this sense, they genuinely represent the thinking and position of the Catholic Church on issues discussed in the article. In the article I focus only on three issues: church and state relations; reconciliation; and governance. My conclusion is that the prophetic voice of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe was compromised by its proximity to state *power* in the first years of independence. However, as the state became more and more distanced from the people and began to *politicise* every aspect of life, the bishops finally managed to recover their *prophetic* voice, and have since 2000 come out

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openly in defence of the oppressed and marginalised citizens.

1 INTRODUCTION

Christianity is a uniquely historical religion by virtue of the Christian belief in the incarnation. The Church's mission and purpose cannot therefore be understood outside the world where it exists. Moreover, its concern is not only the individual's relationship with God (the vertical relationship with divinity) but also the relationship between this individual of faith and the world around him or her (the horizontal relationship with one's neighbour). At the heart of Christianity is the conviction that God has a purpose for creation, and that her will impinges on the history of the world. In keeping with this conviction, the Church, as a community of believers, consistently tries to interpret God's will in order to align their lives and the lives of those around them to God's will. The role of the Church leaders is to interpret and impart the Church's understanding of the will of God to their followers. As teachers of the Faith, Catholic bishops are thus associated with a discursive function that strives to embed the belief in a God whose will and purpose continuously impinge on and shape the course of history. The Second Vatican Council teaches that "Bishops govern the particular churches entrusted to them as vicars and ambassadors of Christ. This they do by their counsel, exhortations, and example, as well, indeed, as by their authority and sacred power" (*Lumen Gentium*: 27).

In this article, we examine the history of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, on the basis of the reflections, teaching and counsel imparted by the bishops through pastoral statements issued since independence in 1980. Furthermore, we investigate the extent to which the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference spoke prophetically in respect of the ways in which the ZANU-PF government has handled politics and power in Zimbabwe since independence. The key question that I grapple with is: How has the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe exercised her prophetic office in the light of the social, political and economic challenges that the country has faced since independence in 1980?

2 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is appropriate at this stage to briefly look at the methodology which informs my article. I decided to construct the historiography of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe around the pastoral statements of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC). This is a deliberate methodological choice that I made which is informed by a number of factors. Most importantly, I consider pastoral statements/letters by bishops as useful, credible, if rudimentary, sources that historians can use in crafting Church history. In spite of the theological bias that may colour the letters, there is no gainsaying that they are repositories of invaluable insights that many an historian will relish in the process of crafting the history of the Catholic Church anywhere on the globe. To support these pastoral statements, I also used a variety of secondary sources from many disciplines that include, among others, theology, general history, sociology, anthropology and politics. I have deliberately adopted a multi-disciplinary approach to allow insights from other disciplines to enlighten not only the purview of the subject under discussion but also my analysis,

According to Verstraelen (2002:11), "historiography is by its very nature selective, and any historian should be aware of his/her perspectives". For this reason, I will not make apologies for choosing to base this article on the pastoral statements/letters of the Catholic bishops in Zimbabwe. I am clearly aware of the fears and limitations associated with statements made by the leaders of institutions. However, as will become clear later, pastoral statements are not entirely the story of the leadership but often reflections of the faith stories of the entire Church that the bishops represent. In this regard, I am no disciple of Ian Linden's theory (Linden 1980) that creates a natural dichotomy between what he calls the "teaching Church" on the one hand, and the "listening Church" on the other. Such a dichotomy, in my view, does not capture the creative and complex relationship that the Church embodies as a community and not always as an institution.

The bishops' pastoral statements have traditionally been understood as forming part of the *magisterium*, that is, the teachings of the Catholic Church within a particular locality. While the terms "local church" and "particular church" are sometimes interchangeable, the former is often used to refer to a diocese (i.e. the territory that falls under the responsibility of a bishop), while the latter denotes the Church as a collective of local dioceses existing inside the borders of one state or states that form a regional

grouping. In this regard, pastoral statements contain the teachings of the bishops who, in their capacity as pastors, write them in order to enlighten and guide the faithful on the imperatives of faith amidst the challenges that they face in life. They are not private but public statements/letters, often addressed to Catholics, but sometimes addressed to the wider Christian body or the wider society, depending on the nature of the issues under focus. Through the pastoral statements the bishops build upon the foundation that the priests are expected to lay through regular pastoral engagement. Hence, communication by written statement/letter is one of the various ways that bishops use in the exercise of their authority.

The pastoral statements vary in purpose, ranging from theological exposition, practical instruction and definition of moral principles, to analysis of social problems accompanied by answers based on Scriptures, Church doctrine/tradition, and the social teachings of the Church. They also take the form of exhortation, criticism and rebuke (Holmberg 1978:11). Owing to the pastoral significance of the statements, bishops are normally obliged to consult widely before drafting them and issuing them for public consumption. There are many levels in the Church that they may consult, including, among others, Deanery councils, Diocesan Pastoral councils, Episcopal commissions, councils for the priests, councils for the laity, and theologians, among others. Sometimes, bishops invite experts to address them on a specific subject at a plenary meeting before they begin to work on the draft statement. Ideally, the principle of collegiality must inform the whole process, which culminates in the publication of the statement bearing the names of the bishops of that particular Church.

Since independence in 1980, the bishops of Zimbabwe have issued thirty pastoral statements. While most of them bear a specific salutation such as, "Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ" (ZCBC 1991:1), others are addressed to "all citizens of Zimbabwe" (ZCBC 1980:1), or to "our Christian people ... and all people of good will" (ZCBC 1984:1). The thirty statements address a wide range of issues, some of which we will examine below. For the purposes of this article, I will dwell only on three key national issues and challenges that the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe dealt with in the Bishops' pastoral statements, which are: the role and place of the church in the new state; national reconciliation; and the state's

constitutional obligation to respect and safeguard human dignity and human rights.

3 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN POST-COLONIAL ZIMBABWE (1980–2007)

On 17 April 1980, on the eve of independence, the ZCBC issued a statement to mark the occasion of the independence of Zimbabwe. In it, they congratulated “all the citizens of the country and its new constitutionally elected government”. The bishops also used their statement as the occasion to pledge their “wholehearted co-operation and support in the difficult but rewarding task of nation building” that lay ahead (ZCBC 1980:1). Later, at midnight of the same day, at the independence ceremony, Archbishop Patrick Fani Chakaipa blessed the new Zimbabwean flag (Weller & Linden 1984:216). The foundations of a new Church history were being laid that night, since this was the first time in the history of Zimbabwe that a Catholic cleric officiated at a state function. For ninety years, since 12 September 1890 when Rhodesia had been founded, an Anglican cleric had played that role. The next day, Robert Mugabe, the new Prime Minister, attended a thanksgiving Mass at the Catholic Cathedral in Harare, for the birth of the new nation. Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa was the celebrant, assisted by 69 priests from the Archdiocese of Harare. This was a big event, indeed. In attendance also were representatives of parishes and religious orders from Harare Archdiocese. An overseas reporter for the *Catholic Herald* who attended the Mass wrote (*Independence supplement*:18, cited in Gundani 1994:246):

Now the Marxist wolf had come in from the wilderness into their (Catholics') fold. Was he a lamb – one of God's people like them after all?

Was this prophetic of the times ahead between the Catholic Church and the post-colonial state? This question will be answered in the course of this article as we examine the bishops' pastoral letters.

The pastoral statement addressed a number of issues. First, it highlighted the need for government to safeguard the norms and values that were enshrined in the new constitution. Top of the list of these norms and values was the need to respect human dignity. In

the bishops' view, the new dispensation of independence was a consequence of "a keen awareness of human dignity" by Zimbabweans. They also alerted the government to the importance of safeguarding individual rights and freedoms such as equality, the right to vote and freedom of association, among others, in order to create an environment where all citizens would actively participate in public for the common good. According to the bishops, the purpose, task and goal of Zimbabwe as a state rested on the common good of its citizens. The bishops called upon the new government to exercise political authority "within the moral order and according to God's law and the just laws of the state" (ZCBC 1980:2). They also warned the citizens of the danger of entrusting the state with "disproportionate power", and against the temptation to make "exaggerated demands on the government for benefits, thereby lessening their own personal and social responsibility".

Furthermore, the bishops defined the partnership between the state and the Church. They made it clear that while the two institutions were independent and autonomous, both were essentially constituted to serve humanity. "Their duty is to help man [sic] fulfill his personal vocation. The more they co-operate, the more effectively they will serve the good of all citizens." The bishops argued that

In a plural society like Zimbabwe, it is important to have a clear view of the relationship between the Church and the state. The Church is not identified with any political community, nor is she bound to any political system. Rather, her function is the moral conscience of the nation, the sign and safeguard of the supreme value of the human person.

In the same statement, the bishops boldly declared, "Everywhere and at all times, the Church must be in a position to preach the faith. She must carry out her mission unhindered. She must be in a position to make moral judgments, even on political matters, when fundamental human rights or the salvation of men [sic] require it."

Finally, the bishops made a plea for reconciliation as the sure way to bring about peace in the young nation where, to their dismay, the thread of violence continued to linger in the background. "Through his cross, Christ reconciled all men with God, making them one people and one body. Christ today can reconcile the black and

the white, the rich and the poor, the powerful and the weak, the unbeliever and the believer ...” Thus the words will be fulfilled: “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Is. 2:4).”

The importance of the pastoral statement issued on the eve of independence is crucial for our understanding of the history of the Catholic Church in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Through the statement, the bishops pushed into the public arena issues which would be the subject of public focus and contestation in the future relations between the Catholic Church and the ZANU (PF) government for the next 27 years.

4 THE ROLE AND PLACE OF THE CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE (1980–2007)

In the pastoral statement referred to above, the Catholic bishops made a salutary overture to clarify an issue that the Lancaster House Constitution had referred to in passing when it defined Zimbabwe as a secular state that recognised individual religious liberty as part of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual (Hallencreutz, 1988:12). Hallencreutz (1988:12) observes that a fully-fledged “policy of religion was left open to the new Government after the elections in early 1980”. The ZANU (PF) election manifesto of 1980, however, took the issue a step further by referring to corporate religious liberty, when it promised to “respect and promote the role of the Church and avoid completely interfering with the spiritual work of the Church”. It also added a peremptory close that provided that, “the Church and the state must thus feature as partners in the promotion of the welfare of the human being” (Hallencreutz 1988:12).

4.1 A church called to evangelise

The return of peace in Zimbabwe created an environment conducive to a return by the Church to its core business of evangelising. Those people who had fled to the cities for security during the last years of the liberation war began to stream back to the rural areas. Similarly, church workers who had relocated to nearby towns and could only make intermittent secret visits to the rural mission/parish now openly went back to set up church programmes. By 1981, most of the

missions and their mass centres were up and running (Bourdillon & Gundani, 1988). The lustre that the church had lost, however, during the late 1970s, when in some areas freedom fighters demonised and lampooned it as a “Whiteman’s religion”, took time to return.

Although the constitution provided for freedom of conscience, as already referred to above, conflict between the ZANU-PF party and the churches was looming ahead. The desire by the party apparatchik to control all the affairs of the citizens left little space for people to make independent decisions about their spiritual welfare. In the first three years of independence, there was an assumption that every Shona was a ZANU-PF member/supporter, a PF-ZAPU member/supporter or a misguided “sellout” (*Chimbwasungata*) in need of political re-orientation. However, after the fallout between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU due to the “dissident” problem and following the discovery of “arms caches” in PF-ZAPU properties in Matabeleland and later also in Mashonaland, PF-ZAPU members became targets for political re-orientation. The opportunity for the creation of a one-party state, which had always been ZANU-PF’s long-term objective (Martin & Johnson 1981:30), was given a boost. Thus anyone who was in the good books of the ZANU-PF party was expected to keep his or her party card up to date. Party meetings were therefore held regularly, especially on Sundays, thus forcing people to choose between church and party. This created a conflict in people’s loyalties.

Furthermore, the Marxist rhetoric that characterised the first seven years of independence also created much uncertainty about the role and place of the Church among ordinary citizens, and anxiety among Catholic bishops. ZANU-PF had recently adopted Marxist-Leninism or Scientific Socialism at the 1977 Chimoio Congress in Mozambique. Hence, in 1980, as Mandaza (cited in Alexander, 2006:106) rightly argues, ZANU-PF’s “ideological commitment had not been translated into programmes and policies, remaining instead at the level of slogans and broad goals”. In a pastoral statement published on the World Day of Peace, on 1 January 1984, Catholic bishops expressed their views on the socialist path that the ruling party had chosen for the nation. They averred,

We acknowledge that socialism has inherited some elements from Christianity, but we also know that some forms of socialism do not agree with Christianity. It is

therefore up to us, who believe in Christ, to inspire our evolving socialism with the Christian vision. We do this through dialogue and free co-operation with all men of good will (Pope VI "The Development of Peoples") always bearing in mind, though, that the 'Kingdom of God' is greater than any political, social or economic system (ZCBC 1984:1).

However, they argued that they were not opposed to a socialist policy that promoted "equality regardless of race, creed or sex, an equitable distribution of land, health care and education for all regardless of income ... fair wages, a life style of self-reliance as well as sharing, the promotion of co-operative ways of production and a national policy of reconciliation". They did, however, beg to differ with some radical voices in government who preached an atheistic Scientific Socialism as a necessary precondition for the genuine liberation of the Zimbabwean people. According to the bishops, an atheistic Marxism or Scientific Socialism was not only incompatible with Christian belief but also African tradition. Another weakness they raised was that the liberation that Scientific Socialism promised was inadequate, since it could only be brought about by external forces such as the state, at the expense of the "inner change, (based on) the conversion of hearts". Furthermore, they decried attempts by some radicals who were preaching the need for force as the only viable way to achieve the goals of Socialism, arguing that such efforts undermined the dignity of the very people that socialist transformation aimed to liberate. In conclusion, the bishops wrote:

For us Christians, only with God's help can we transform a society inclined to greed, selfishness and hatred into a "new creation (2 Cor 5:17) capable of love, compassion and generosity. It is God's work through us. Atheistic Marxism, on the other hand, attempts to prove that Man can accomplish God's work on earth by himself. We, as followers of Christ, put all our trust in the Kingdom of God. Far from awaiting its arrival in passivity, we strive with all our might towards its realisation here and now, well knowing, however, that God alone, who has first announced its coming through Christ, will bring about its completion. This is the way in which the Church pursues

her aim of radical transformation of man and society. The spiritual mission is her specific contribution to the development of the country (ZCBC 1984:3).

In spite of the bishops' views, the radical rhetoric about Scientific Socialism/atheistic Marxism did not stop. The only concession that the Prime Minister offered them was the following retort: "If the problem with socialism is that it is Godless, then give it a God, but certainly not the God of capitalism" (Banana, interview, 7 May 1999). After this, the Church simply had to learn to carry on with its mission of evangelisation, knowing only too well that ZANU (PF) government and party had adopted an ideology whose thrust was contrary to church teachings.

Nonetheless, the Catholic Church's participation in fields such as education, health and social welfare proceeded smoothly and quietly during the independence era. Increased demand for these services after the war necessitated phenomenal investment in infrastructure development and training of personnel. In Catholic schools enrolment rose throughout the 1980s and stabilised only in the 1990s. The same happened in the fields of health and social services. The Church partnered with the state in the promotion of primary health care (PHC), and continued to be a standard bearer in the second and third decades of Independence. While over the past 27 years the Church's mission of service in these sectors has generally been upheld by the state, there have been exceptions. Since the year 2000, there have been tensions and conflicts over bureaucratic bungling and interference by the state at times when the interests of the ruling party were perceived to be under threat. Such instances include, among others, the sourcing and distribution of food relief by the Catholic Development Commission (CADEC) during times of drought, the provision of civic education by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), and lately, the regulation and control of fees for all schools across the country, including private church schools which are members of the Association of Trust Schools. Such cases have raised grave doubts about the ZANU (PF) government's commitment to an open and democratic society where individuals, communities and private institutions such as the church have a creative role to play.

5 NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

The results of the 1980 elections, which we referred to above, were announced at 9 a.m. on 4 March 1980. David Martin and Phyllis Johnson (1981:330) accurately capture the mood that followed the announcement. They wrote;

Joyful demonstrations began immediately in the African townships and outside the ZANU (PF) headquarters at 88 Manica Road, blocking traffic. The whites listened in stunned disbelief. Mugabe, the man Smith's propaganda machine had portrayed as a Marxist monster, had achieved what none of them believed possible. Riot police with tear gas were deployed at 88 Manica Road and wisely withdrawn. Heavily armed troops moved into the townships and armoured vehicles patrolled the streets. But the African mood was one of jubilation and not recrimination. The bitterness lay with the whites.

At 8 p.m. the same day, Robert Mugabe, the victor, addressed the nation. In "a masterly display of statesmanship" (Martin, 1981:330), he handed the nation a surprise gift when he announced that his government would be guided by the policy of reconciliation and not recrimination. In a style that was clearly informed more by Christian than Marxist-Leninist teachings, Mugabe called on all Zimbabweans to "turn swords into ploughshares" in an effort to work together towards the rebuilding of the nation. "Our new mind must have a new vision, and our new heart must have a new love that spurns hate, and a new spirit that must unite and not divide. This is the human essence that must form the core of our political change and national independence" (Auret 1992:140). He urged Zimbabweans to consider the wrongs of the past "forgiven and forgotten". Mugabe's reconciliation speech sounded surreal to the many ears who listened to him on that night. He appealed to Zimbabweans to let "bygones be bygones". He also urged "enemies of the past [to] become allies in a common cause" of building a "non-racial society".

There is no doubt that Mugabe's policy of national reconciliation was informed by political imperatives of nation building. Furthermore, it is instructive to note that the Lancaster House agreement, which had paved the way for the elections that ZANU (PF) won by a landslide victory, was a compromise. Weller and Linden (1984:215)

argue that “pressure was brought to bear on the Patriotic Front by the “Frontline states” which had suffered much both economically and militarily from the war”. This view is confirmed by Gregory, who argues that in the final stages of the negotiations, when it seemed possible that they might founder on the issue of the number of Assembly points that the guerrillas could report to, Machel cabled Mugabe from Maputo. His message was brief but clear. “Sign ... we cannot go on beyond July 1980” (Gregory 1980/1:31).

Alexander (2006:106) claims that ‘moderation and reconciliation’ applied to whites “who were willing to work with the new government and, initially, to ZAPU”. While I agree with her that the policy applied to whites, I differ with her when she extends the policy to PF-ZAPU. A closer reading of the Prime Minister’s speech does not lend itself to such an interpretation. Instead, the speech shows that the policy of reconciliation covered black and white, the two races that were fighting a racial war. In ZANU-PF’s view, the liberation struggle was thus a quest to dislodge the racial policies imposed on the black majority by a minority settler population. Reconciliation was one way of bringing peace to the country. Consequently, peace was a *conditio sine qua non* for development and a sure way of attracting international investment back to the country. Furthermore, the policy of reconciliation had the potential to bring about economic spin-offs. It sought to “combine a continuity of existing production structures with policies to improve the conditions of the majority of the population neglected during the colonial years” (Raftopoulos 2004:2). The civil service and the private sector were predominantly white. Thus any political misjudgment was likely to cause a mass exodus of skills that the country desperately needed for its recovery. Another critical dimension that must have informed the policy of reconciliation was the future security of the nation that was about to be born. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2004:21), “the post-colonial state was itself a nation-state in the making ... based on very poor political, economic and social foundations. As such its first priority was its security or rather the security of those who assumed power”.

Mugabe followed his policy of reconciliation through in a number of ways. He appointed a Rhodesia Front MP and former finance minister in Ian Smith’s government, David Smith, to the post of Minister of Commerce and Industry, and the President of the Commercial Farmers’ Union, Dennis Norman, to the post of Minister

of Agriculture (Gregory 1980/1:30). He also authorised General Peter Walls, Commander of the former Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF) “to preside over the integration processes with the commanders of ZANLA and ZIPRA”. This was another attempt to allay the fears and concerns of the white minority, “who it had been said were more afraid of losing the security forces than of impending majority rule” (Martin & Johnson 1981:331).

5.1 The Catholic Church and the policy of reconciliation

Reconciliation claims a major place in the mission and ministry of the Christian Church. According to Lochman (1980:79), Christians believe that God in her righteousness and justice opened up to humanity and through the cross reconciled with the world. A corollary to this teaching is that reconciliation with God “demands a corresponding real change” in the human world too. Verstraelen-Gulhuis (1992:28) confirms this view when she argues that the Church is called upon to preach reconciliation, love, justice and human dignity. Preaching reconciliation is thus an integral part of its mission to the world, and it consequently forms an integral part of its evangelical content. No doubt, it was the bishops’ understanding of the Church’s calling that guided them to call for reconciliation in the very first pastoral statement that they addressed to all Zimbabweans (ZCBC 1980:2). In this section we examine the extent to which this self-understanding consistently informed the Church’s future ministry in independent Zimbabwe. In other words, we explore the question: how did the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe follow through its commitment to reconciliation?

In April 1981, the bishops of Zimbabwe wrote their second pastoral statement, marking the first anniversary of independence. They commended the government and its leaders for having managed to “put aside the temptation to revenge” and for having given the nation “a truly Christian example of magnanimity by calling for reconciliation among all the people of this country” (ZCBC 1981:1). As a result of the policy, the bishops noted that, “a truly remarkable degree of peace” had been achieved throughout the country. They also noted the existence of “growing understanding between diverse races, tribal and political groups” across the country. According to the bishops, Zimbabwe was on its way to becoming “a

strong, united and peaceful nation”, provided that the mutual understanding and trust among its citizens continued.

In November 1982, the bishops strongly supported “the stress being placed on forgiveness and reconciliation”. They further argued that “these thoroughly Christian virtues are the only way to heal the wounds of the past hatreds and rivalries, and to foster a spirit of peace, love and brotherhood in Zimbabwe” (ZCBC 1982:1). In the pastoral statement, they addressed a wide range of issues with a bearing on, among others, the Christian social vision, the state, the church, the citizen and worker. In the section under the state they brought up the question of reconciliation and its importance. Although the bishops addressed the question in a general way, stopping short of personalising issues, it is easy to see that there was something involving the state and ZANU (PF), the ruling party, which had caused them unease in respect of the future prospects of the policy of reconciliation in the country. That warning signs were already flashing ahead is clear from their observation that:

a strident triumphalistic attitude by the state or leading political party can easily lead to intolerance and intimidation of minority groups and a disregard of their true interests. It also negates the policy of reconciliation by which the state endeavours to incorporate all within its fold and to treat with equal seriousness the interests of all its members (ZCBC 1982:4).

In addition, they argued that:

In a prolonged war, feelings of hatred, bitterness and hostility are aroused and the desire for revenge is strong. It is essential for the peace and prosperity of our land, and for the happiness of our citizens, that these feelings be forgotten and former enemies be forgiven. The state bears the responsibility to foster such unity and reconciliation. Her laws, directives and public announcements should be aimed to this end, and anything which provokes and enflames past hatreds should be avoided (ZCBC 1982:4–5).

Moreover, the bishops argued that, apart from the state, all other groups, organisations and individuals in the country also shared “a like responsibility to promote and consolidate such reconciliation”. Furthermore, the bishops noted that the Church shared the same responsibility for reconciliation and had “an especially important role to play”. Rather disappointingly, the statement went on to explain the scriptural basis for reconciliation (Eph 2:14), without spelling out clearly what the bishops’ concern was, and what the Church’s practical programme of reconciliation was.

The situation that had been behind the bishops’ unease became clearer when they issued another pastoral statement which they entitled “Reconciliation is still possible”, in Easter of 1983. They were concerned at the way the government had handled the “dissident problem” in Matabeleland. A combination of factors resulted in the outbreak of disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, which became popularly known as the “dissident problem”. In this article I will only give a summary of the developments that led to the escalation of conflict in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands, based on a report published by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources foundation, entitled *Breaking the silence: Building true peace* (1997:28–35). The dissident problem turned out to be a result of a combination of issues that included, among others;

- The eruption of pitched battles between ZANLA and ZIPRA forces in November 1980, (Entumbane Uprising I) which was allegedly caused by inflammatory utterances against ZAPU by Enos Nkala, a ZANU (PF) minister
- A second outburst of fighting between ZANLA and ZIPRA forces that occurred in February 1981 (Entumbane II) and spread to Ntabazinduna, Glenville and to Connemara in the Midlands, resulting in mass defections of ZIPRA members from Assembly points
- The “discovery” of large arms caches in Matabeleland, resulting in the dismissal of Joshua Nkomo, PF-ZAPU leader, and three PF-ZAPU ministers, resulting in the collapse of the Government of National Unity. This triggered a further and more massive defection of ex-ZIPRA combatants from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) and from Assembly points (over one thousand defected)

- The infiltration of Matabeleland by Super ZAPU, a South African-backed dissident group made up of recruits from Dukwe refugee camp in Botswana, in late 1982

In his book, *Robert Mugabe: A life of power and violence*, Stephen Chan (2003:23) argues that the turning point in the relationship between ZANU (PF) and PF ZAPU, the two coalition partners in government, came when arms caches were uncovered in strategic locations in Matabeleland. He goes on to argue that

The Government took them – or at least advertised them – as evidence of internal security risk; as evidence that disgruntled ZIPRA fighters were preparing for a western insurrection, that Nkomo's ZAPU party were untrustworthy and had withheld knowledge in bad faith and that it was necessary to stomp out the internal enemy.

5.2 The deployment of the 5 Brigade into Matabeleland

In January 1983 the government deployed the 5 Brigade to Matabeleland North in an attempt to eradicate the “dissident problem”. At their passing-out parade, “Prime Minister Mugabe handed over the brigade flag, emblazoned with ‘Gukurahundi’, to Colonel Perence Shiri, the first commander of 5 Brigade.” He then instructed them to “plough and reconstruct” (CCJP 1987:47).

Various scholars have already written about this era and have shown that it was characterised by a most callous form of unbridled power and total disregard for human dignity. Richard Werbner (1992:159), in his book entitled, *Tears of the dead*, characterises the conflict that engulfed Matabeleland and the Midlands in the 1980s as “quasi-nationalism”, not nation building. In the footsteps of Werbner, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2004:22) explains:

This “quasi-nationalism” was a product of failed nation-building as well as the flawed and narrow ZANU-PF strategy of national construction premised on the assumption of absolute power and moral authority within a one-party political and ideological framework. The catastrophe of “quasi-nationalism” as opposed to pan-ethnic nationalism is that it legitimized and authorized

violence against all those that were perceived to be opposed to the new ZANU-PF agenda. The Matabeleland region and the Ndebele as an ethnic group were seen as standing in the way of the process of nation-building. Matabeleland and the Ndebele were soon identified as “other” and purging of the “others” became necessary for the progress of nation-building.

5.3 The response of the bishops to the deployment of the 5 Brigade

The five years that this crack squad spent in Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South and parts of the Midlands were characterised by “murdering, raping, pillaging and burning” (Martin 2006:249). Amidst the mayhem that was taking place in Matabeleland, the Church kept awake to the plight of the ordinary people. Worshippers told their priests what was happening in the villages. The priests, in turn kept records of events as they happened and forwarded them to the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in Harare. On 16 March 1983, Catholic representatives consisting of CCJP Chairman Mike Auret, Bishop Karlen and Bishop Patrick Mutume met with Prime Minister Mugabe over the crisis in Matabeleland. They presented him with a dossier of evidence of atrocities committed by the 5 Brigade, and a pastoral statement entitled, “Reconciliation is still possible” (CCJP 1997:53).

5.4 Reconciliation is still possible

At Easter in April 1983 the bishops issued the pastoral statement entitled “Reconciliation is still possible” to the public. In it they made it clear that the Catholic Church “supported the duty of Government to maintain law and order, even by military means” (ZCBC 1983:1). Dissidents, they wrote, had “maltreated and killed a considerable number of persons who do not immediately support them in their cause”. They had also destroyed vast quantities of private and public property. Furthermore, they had abducted children and held tourists to ransom. It was on the basis of these reasons that the bishops supported the deployment of “units of the army” in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the interests of restoring order. However, the bishops expressed serious doubts about government’s commitment to reconciliation. They catalogued actions on the part of government

which they argued were in flagrant disregard of good governance, and were inimical to reconciliation. They highlighted the following actions, among others;

- The conduct by certain influential people who inflamed the situation instead of pacifying it.
- The methods that government adopted which, instead of being firm and just, degenerated into brutality and atrocity.
- The perpetration of wanton brutalities, torture, burnings, raping, maiming, and the killing of hundreds of innocent people who were neither dissidents nor collaborators with dissidents.
- Advance indemnification of soldiers for unlawful acts committed against innocent or even suspected people (Emergency Powers Security Forces Indemnity Regulations, July 1982).
- The restriction or stopping of access to food supplies, thus causing deliberate starvation of innocent people.
- Attempts by public figures to hide the truth, i.e., the committing of atrocities against defenceless victims.
- Misinformation of the nation by the public media.

Recognising the grave mishandling of the situation in Matabeleland, the bishops reminded government of its duty to preserve the ethnic rights of the minorities. They also called upon government to stop the excesses, and to “appoint a judicial commission charged with the responsibility for establishing the truth, apportion blame and distributing compensation, so that justice may be seen to be done and honour saved”. Moreover, the bishops urged all the people of Zimbabwe to commit themselves to reconciliation. “Reconciliation is possible: it is the compelling duty of everyone to put it into effect,” the bishops wrote. They also appealed to all Christian churches to pray for those in distress and, “to help them in any way possible, and to pray for Government in their difficult task of trying to restore peace” (ZCBC 1983: 2).

The meeting held between the CCJP and the Prime Minister, where a dossier of atrocities was presented, and the publication and distribution of the pastoral, “Reconciliation is still possible” brought about a “marked decline in atrocities” in Matabeleland. The CCJP report attributes the decline in atrocities against ordinary people to the intervention by the Prime Minister himself (CCJP 1987:53). However, official government responses often “vacillated between

denial and guarded acceptance of wrong doing". Even the Prime Minister adopted the same ambivalence in his response to accusations of wrongdoing. On 6 April, 1983, he poured scorn and invective on his critics, and labelled them "a band of Jeremiahs [which] included reactionary foreign journalists, non-governmental organisations of dubious status in our midst and sanctimonious prelates" (CCJP 1987:53–54). He did, however, set up a commission of enquiry in September 1983 presided over by Mr. Stanislaus Chihambakwe.

5.5 From the 1985 elections to the Unity Accord (1987)

Another potentially divisive time was during the run-up to the national elections in 1985. The Catholic bishops appealed to the nation for reconciliation "among the people of Zimbabwe despite their diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and different political persuasions" (ZCBC 1985:1-2). With reference to the civil unrest in Matabeleland, the bishops attributed what they called "the senseless loss of life" to disunity, hatred and ruthless hunger for power. They also called on the "dissidents" to use the vote to effect the desired change through peaceful and constitutional means. Most importantly, they called on the government "to continue to offer a hand of friendship to their erstwhile enemies" (ZCBC 1985:2). The Unity Accord that was signed between PF-ZAPU and ZANU-PF in December 1987 finally brought the military dimension of the Matabeleland debacle to a stop. However, the bishops have not since expressed their view on the benefits or otherwise of the Accord. What has become crystal clear is that the Unity Accord stopped only the "dissident problem" and consequently the scorched-earth tactics of pacifying Matabeleland and the Midlands. But absence of war should not be confused with peace. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2004:32) highlights two very fundamental flaws of the Unity Accord. First and foremost, the accord "was not a product of a democratic process that included the people. The accord was imposed on the people by the political elite and as such it was one of the authoritarian nation building strategies of ZANU-PF". Secondly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni observes "it was not "underpinned by a comprehensive post-conflict, peace-building package". Gatsheni's criticisms are fair and accurate if one goes back to look at the demands that the Catholic bishops made in the 1983 pastoral, "Reconciliation is still possible". They had called for a

commission of enquiry to establish the truth surrounding the atrocities committed, which would have provided a basis for identifying perpetrators in order to apportion blame, to be followed by compensation (ZCBZ 1983:2). Not much came out of efforts to mete out justice to perpetrators of the atrocities. Those members of the 5 Brigade who were found guilty of murder by the High Court in July 1986, and were sentenced to death, were immediately granted presidential pardon (CCJP 1987:62). Similarly, the Chihambakwe Commission of Enquiry turned out to be nothing more than a facade. The commission's findings have not been made public since. In November 1985, the Minister of State Security, Emmerson Munangwagwa, announced that "the Commission of Enquiry Report, whose publication had reportedly been held up at the printing house in October 1984, would not be made public. No explanation was given for the decision" (CCJP 1987:61).

6 GOVERNANCE IN ZIMBABWE'S THIRD DECADE (2000-2007)

6.1 From socialist to liberal economy (1990-1999)

With the Unity Accord signed between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU in December 1987 behind, Zimbabwe moved into the second decade of Independence (1990-1999) with new foci and concerns. The real turning point came in 1991 when the Government announced changes from a command to a market economy, and publicly debunked its desire to set up a one-party state by embracing liberal democracy. This followed the holding of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Summit in Harare, where the Harare Declaration was adopted by Commonwealth countries. According to Chan (Chan 2003:65), although the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Harare summit became "an historical beacon for human rights" it was "economical in its modes of application and enforcement". Hence from 1991, the Zimbabwe Government embraced the Economic Structural Adjustment Policies (ESAP) of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) with a view to making the economy more competitive and more productive. After the failure of ESAP, the government adopted the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), which it claimed had a more humane face. Through these

programmes focus was moving away from the socialist rhetoric of sharing to a new mode of politics called “politics of the belly”, which apparently saw the growth of unfettered individualism and unprecedented forms of corruption. Throughout the 1990s, pastoral statements of the bishops predominantly grapple with some of these social ills brought about by the new economic order. We will, however, not deal with these issues in this article.

Concern for governance only came to the fore after the failure of the government to grow the economic cake for everyone to partake in. By the late 1990s, a coalition of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and civil society organisations such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) began to push the issue of governance to the fore of Zimbabwean political discourse. For this reason, I will move on to the third decade of independence.

6.2 From stability to crisis (1999-2007)

The rejection of the government-driven proposed new constitution by the electorate in a referendum held in February 2002 constituted a defining moment, and turning point in Zimbabwean politics. Its impact was later to affect all levels of life in the next seven years. Its rejection sent immediate shock waves into the ZANU-PF leadership. The next day, Dr Chenjerai “Hitler” Hunzvi, Chairman of the Zimbabwe War Veterans Association, with the support of a core group of former ex-combatants, mobilised landless villagers, unemployed youth, and street urchins, and mustered the support of some members of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO), in a campaign that was to lead to massive occupation of mostly white-owned large commercial farms.

The land reform programme that followed has created its own crisis which is still unfolding. The crisis does not in essence centre on redistributing land to the landless black majority, a process that many Zimbabweans consider fundamental to the natural demands of justice. Instead, the problem had to do with the method of land redistribution, and the way political power was manipulated to exploit the poor (Gundani 2002:122-169; 2003: 467-502). Furthermore, many who had advocated a peaceful and orderly land reform became alienated from the whole programme, repelled by the-end-justifies-the-means philosophy that informed it. Such a philosophy has already shown that it is a recipe for disaster. The Catholic bishops of

Zimbabwe made this point very clearly in the pastoral statements covering the period beginning in 2000. In their Easter message in April 2000, when the country was plunged into the “land seizures crisis”, they implored all citizens to refrain from violence and urged them to learn to settle conflicts peacefully (ZCBC 2000:1). In a terse and succinct statement they wrote:

The real problems of this country...cannot be solved by violence.
Communal farmers have a legitimate claim on more and better land.
The urban homeless need decent housing.
The unemployed young people need work and a place in our society.
The sick, especially those infected with HIV/AIDS, need better health care. No part of our society must be allowed to settle their grievances by violence ...
There is a price to be paid for reconciliation: sharing the land and its resources more equitably.

These words fell on deaf ears. The Church’s prophetic voice was smothered by unbridled power in another form of “quasi-nationalism”. Ironically, the politics of “otherness” and of “purging and purification” that had dominated the 1980s under the pretext of nation-building came to the fore again when there was a perceived danger to the ZANU-PF hegemony.

As the 2000 June Parliamentary elections were approaching, the bishops wrote again to condemn the pre-election violence that had already claimed more than 26 lives. The violence was accompanied by the destruction of property worth millions. They restated the constitutional prerogatives to respect the right of citizens to freely choose their leaders and to live their convictions, be they intellectual, religious or political. They urged the electorate to make their choice in the freedom of their conscience. “Do not be afraid ... Whatever choice you make, remember to vote for people who are God-fearing, who will respect human rights and dignity,” the bishops wrote (ZCBC 2000:2).

In May 2001, the bishops issued an indictment against the tendency by politicians to abuse unemployed youths to perpetrate violence against opponents during periods of election campaigns.

“Violence, intimidation and threats are tools of failed politicians”, they wrote (ZCBC 2001:1). In an attempt to save the country from further descent into chaos in the run-up to the Presidential elections of 2002, the bishops called for a national dialogue where all citizens would be given space to contribute to a national vision.

All the words of wise counsel fell once again on deaf ears. The campaign period leading to the Presidential elections held on 9-10 March 2002 was no different from that of the parliamentary elections held in 2000. The spiral of political violence continued unabated.

The period beginning in 2000 also witnessed a reinforcement of colonial-era repressive laws. The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) (2002), for instance, reinforced the colonial Law and Order Act which had been used by colonial governments to crush the quest for freedom by the African people. The other legislation passed after 2004 was the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPA), which has been effectively used by government to intimidate and muzzle the independent media and the freedom of expression. (Ironically, when the acronym of this law is Shonalised, it means “He has gone mean/bad: *Ayipa*”). In a critique of these legislative developments, the bishops wrote, “It almost appears as though someone sat down with the Declaration of Human Rights and deliberately scrubbed out each in turn” (ZCBC 2007:4). Thus the third decade of independence in Zimbabwe witnessed the dawn of a new social dispensation where every aspect of life was politicised and where political patronage dominated everyone’s life. In this period, the redistribution of the land was only the first taste of more to come: which was, among others, the politicisation of the presidential election of 2002 by the military leadership; politicisation of the police, the National Youth Service and food distribution, and the political tampering with the local councils.

In August 2002, the bishops urged government “to quickly depoliticise the procurement and distribution of food, and to put in place controls to minimize acquisition of food by threats or any other means, corruption and exploitation” (ZCBC 2002:2; ZCBC 2003:7). In March 2003 (5), they condemned what they termed, “preferential treatment and selective justice”, which in their view undermined the stability and credibility of the government. They reiterated the position they had adopted in March 2003 when they condemned some government civil servants for practising partiality by openly refusing

to serve people who did not belong to their own party. In the bishops' view, this behaviour undermined and discredited the proper manner of governance. In a bold, if rare, act of courage, prophecy was forced to finally confront partisan politics and unbridled power. The bishops were forced by the deteriorating political situation in the country to call a spade a spade. They wrote:

We as teachers, therefore call upon government to carry out its duties to all citizens with fairness and commitment. It should be clear to citizens as well as government that "no social group or political party has the right to monopolise power ... In fact, power rests with the people who should duly elect whatever party or whoever they chose according to the just laws of the country". The question of just laws is absolutely important. Hence the need to safeguard just laws and develop a balanced Constitution that removes unjust structures (ZCBC 2003:5-6; ZCBC 2007:5).

Since then, the Catholic Church has openly given its full weight to the urgency of crafting "a new people-driven constitution that will guide a democratic leadership chosen in free and fair elections that will in turn offer a chance for economic recovery under genuinely new policies" (ZCBC 2007:5).

In an Easter message distributed in April 2007, the bishops characterised the unresolved economic crisis in Zimbabwe as, "in essence, a crisis of governance and a crisis of leadership, apart from being a spiritual and moral crisis" (ZCBC 2007:2). They called on all Christians to pray for the return of peace, which in their view, could only be achieved if truth, justice, love and freedom were respected (ZCBC 2007:2). In spite of the crisis affecting the country, the bishops continued to preach hope. In the pastoral statement they assured the people of Zimbabwe that, "God ... is always on the side of the oppressed (Psalms 103:6)" (ZCBC 2007:6), and "that God hears the cry of the oppressed" (ZCBC 2007:1).

7 PROPHECY, POLITICS AND POWER

I concur with Like Eduardo Hoornaert (1988:21) that it is difficult and almost impossible to study the history of the church without touching

on the question of power. The triadic interplay between prophecy, politics and power in the history of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe is obvious. There is no need to be pedantic about these three concepts. I made a deliberate decision to use them as my scaffolding so that I keep a full view of developments relevant to the story as it unfolds.

The prophetic ministry of the Church is not the monopoly of the bishops. The Church as the entire People of God shares in Christ's prophetic office by means of bearing witness to the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium* 12). Hence, this article's focus on pastoral statements of the bishops is not an attempt to exclude the witness of ordinary Catholics, but to provide an entry point into the entire prophetic witness of the Church which the bishops represent. In Lochman's (1980:61) view, when the Church teaches prophetically, she operates within "the horizon, indeed, the fundamental instruction of the prophecy of Jesus". He further argues that prophecy "is a question of recognising the signs of times, of not letting our 'today' slip thoughtlessly and aimlessly through our fingers but letting it be renewed and shaped by the completeness of (God's) 'today'. Because God is 'at hand'; new life is possible for all, and is meant to be and should be lived, therefore".

Power is defined by Galbraith (1983:2) as "the ability/capacity of one or more persons to realise their own will ... against the will of others who are participating in the same act". Power takes many forms, and manifests itself as coercive (when physical force is used), conditional (when knowledge is involved, hence we say, Knowledge is power) and condign (when access to material resources is at work). The English historian, Lord Acton famously said, "All power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely." His insights on power sound prophetic for Zimbabwe.

Politics has become the Achilles heel of Zimbabwe. In its ordinary meaning and practice, politics is a basic human right, since it involves managing the resources at one's disposal for the furtherance of life. In the history of humanity, however, politics has been one of the means to access power. In Zimbabwe, it is partisan politics – in its most violent form – that has dominated the lives of citizens.

The relationship between prophecy, politics and power is patently clear in the history of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. If prophecy is largely concerned with evil and the proper response to it,

it is apparent that evil has a propensity for taking the form of power. Thus the interface between prophecy, politics and power becomes obvious. There seems to be an interesting relationship between prophecy and power. The closer the prophet gets to the seat of power, the easier it is to have his or her prophetic voice smothered and compromised. Was this not the case with the court prophets of the Old Testament, the likes of Zedekiah, Gad, and Nathan, to mention but a few? For prophecy to be credible, it seems to me, one has to keep a safe distance from the throne.

In my view, the pastoral statements of the first decade suffered from this proximity in respect of the seat of power. Catholic bishops placed too much confidence in the Prime Minister and his government. The pastoral statements of the first decade generally recycled theological platitudes and were eclectic. Talk about reconciliation, for instance, was of little practical value in a country that was historically known for race separation. One even wonders whether reconciliation was a smokescreen for keeping blacks in their place. As Verstraelen-Gilhuis (1992:28) writes, although reconciliation with God and one's neighbour is a central given in Christian doctrine and the Christian life, "it is not, however, available in isolation, nor does it transpire on a purely spiritual level". The pastoral statements of the first decade, except when they touched on the crisis in Matabeleland, preached a purely spiritual reconciliation.

Unlike ZANU-PF, which put stress on the reconciliation between black and white races, the bishops found the concept of reconciliation more applicable for purposes of fostering peace and harmony between the Shona and Ndebele, and between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU. ZANU PF believed in the need to create what it termed a "non-racial" society, where all races lived in harmony. For it, that was the essence of the policy of reconciliation. Therefore, in ZANU-PF's philosophy, the harmonious relationship between black and black did not amount to reconciliation, but to unity. Hence the significance attached to the Unity Accord of 1987 between PF-ZAPU and ZANU-PF. Of course this unity has to be understood within ZANU-PF's goal of creating a one-party state. Curiously, the bishops' pastoral statements began to apply the concept of reconciliation to the black and white races only after 2000.

It is also instructive that the bishops failed to come up with concrete ideas as to how to make reconciliation meaningful within the new era of majority rule. This may be attributed to the type of life that

they themselves lead. Catholic bishops lead a middle-class life, and have for millennia on end harboured aristocratic aspirations. Apparently, their proximity to power, in the economic sense, also compromised their prophetic voice. They only started to urge white farmers to share under-utilised and excess land with African communal farmers in the third decade of independence. One wonders whether the bishops and the white community had not for twenty years taken the African people for granted. They had possibly taken the same stand as Hastings (1989:23) who, in his book entitled *African Catholicism*, contended that Africans are “not very historically-minded people – they are not at all, one might say, like the Irishmen. The past fades quickly into the mists of time: that is perhaps one reason why they can be so forgiving”. Such stereotypes as these, which came from a former missionary to Uganda, and a former professor at the University of Zimbabwe for that matter, could have dire consequences for genuine reconciliation between blacks and whites in Africa. As much as such shared stereotypes of African amnesia proved disastrous for the white commercial farmers, the failure by the Catholic bishops to make a theological conjuncture between reconciliation and liberation proved equally disastrous.

Ironically, the bishops, like the white commercial farmers, have since the colonisation of Zimbabwe been landlords too. Their farms have lately not been known for high productivity. However, their farms were saved from seizure by the very same government that encouraged the seizure of land from the white farmers. Was it a political ploy by government to keep them close to power? Have they served government so well that they are afforded protection from the marauding masses that have already made a few attempts to “invade” Church-owned farms, only to be chased away by the law enforcement agents? It is clear that a middle-class episcopacy such as that of the Catholic Church will always be in need of a Constantine or a Theodosius, because they preside over a highly institutional Church which does not know what it is like to worship under a tree and to have a church without walls and without a roof.

Fortunately for prophecy, by 2000 Zimbabwe’s Constantine had grown too aloof from the people. Even the bishops found him inaccessible. The more distant they became from the crown with its trappings of power, the more free space they claimed for themselves. By default, prophecy was finally freed from the firm grip of power. The bishops finally recovered their power of speech. Hence the radical

tone in their prophetic voice following the referendum of 2000. It is not, therefore, surprising that it is in the third decade that the bishops come clean on the need for a people-driven constitution and free and fair elections that will ensure the installation of a new leadership in the country. Like Samuel who became fed up with the antics of Saul, they look forward with hope to the emergence of a David figure.

Since the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in early 1998, which became the gestation chamber and cradle for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), it was the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and especially Bishop Peter Nemapare, the then Vice-president of the ZCC, who openly supported the need for a new constitution for Zimbabwe. They were, however, silenced by the government, which threatened to boycott the World Council of Churches 8th Assembly that was due to be held in Harare in December of the same year. No Catholic bishop was anywhere near this formation, nor did any one of them offer moral support for its programmes. Only individuals like Mike Auret of the CCJP, who was one of the founding members of the MDC, did so (Perpertua Bwanya, Interview 2000).

In spite of the human weaknesses of the Church as an institution, it would be fair to say that in many instances the bishops stood on the side of the poor and oppressed. The Matabeleland crisis attests to this fact. The same is true during and after elections. They spoke boldly in favour of the urgency to have peace flowing across the nation. During these difficult times, the bishops truly incarnated a morality of love, reconciliation and justice against hate, retribution and injustice. It is in the interests of this morality that they advocate a new constitution that will be the basis of a new democratic government. In the majority of cases, they have managed to read the signs of the times and have related the Christian morality very deeply to the world of the living. No doubt, they have faithfully carried forward the prophetic tradition of the Church. Their pastoral statements generally throw light on the Catholic Church's self understanding and priorities in a dynamic and changing society. They also throw light on the Zimbabwe Catholic Church's understanding of the use and abuse of power in the state and society at large, of politics and its evangelical duty to provide a prophetic ministry to its followers and the world around it.

8 THE RELEVANCE OF CHURCH HISTORY TO THE ZIMBABWEAN SITUATION

Henri Marrou (cited in Hoornaert 1988:8-9) argues that a historian is “a missionary dispatched to the past to strike a hyphen between the past and present”. Diarmaid McCulloch (1987:1) provides one of the best answers on the need for, and relevance of history to society. I often cite this quotation as a way of motivating my students when I introduce Church History to them.

Putting it crudely, it is to stop you going mad. Those who have no history are always on the verge of insanity. When individual people lose their memory, they find it a very distressing experience; history is like a collective memory, the recollection of a nation, of a culture, or of the entire world. When a nation forgets its history, or worse still, invents a history to take the place of facts, the consequences are tragic.

But then you may say, that may be true for history in general; what about Church history? Church history, in particular, is a theological science at the service of the memory of the Christian people (Hoornaert 1988:9). Firstly, it gathers their recollections and, secondly, transforms their memory into a coherent, intelligible discourse about their relationship with God, their neighbour, and their social, cultural, economic and political milieu. A church history at the service of the Christian people is therefore not the place for what Hoornaert calls “new legends, new apologetics, and new triumphalisms” (Hoornaert 1988:9). Instead, the Christian community across the globe, as consumers of Church history, deserve better. They deserve “to know not only the uplifting, encouraging things about Christianity, but the struggles and the sins of Christianity as well. They must know the mistaken alliances struck by historical Christianity for the sake of interests that have not always been evangelical” (Hoornaert 1988:10).

9 CONCLUSION

The tragedy that has ensnared Zimbabwe for the past seven years has been characterised by an insatiable appetite for invention. Not

invention in the usual technological sense, however. Instead, this appetite has to do with the very human domain of making and interpreting history. The Zimbabwean state has for so long embarked on the very dangerous and slippery road of inventing a 'national' history: a partisan and parochial history that is a result of a perverted understanding of power and politics. It is my considered view that, if the current young generation are the future leaders of tomorrow, what they lack and dearly need is a national history based on the struggles of ordinary people, for it is through such histories that they will learn how to exorcise the demon of power in order to free the spirit of service, justice and peace. Out of this new understanding of history will emerge a new constitutional dispensation characterised, first and foremost, by the "sovereignty of the people", in which prophecy, politics and power can coexist synergistically.

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