

The Church and Politics in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The impact of church and politics in Zimbabwe has been an ongoing process from the days of the liberation struggle to the independent and conflicted Zimbabwe of 1987, 2000, 2008-2009, and 2017 to date. The church has upheld peacekeeping roles as well as defensiveness in some political settings being viewed as enablers of the ruling government of Zimbabwe led by President Mnangagwa of Zanu PF. Since the dislodging of President Mugabe in November 2017 and the role played by one priest, Father Mukonori of Roman Catholic Church, to convince R. G. Mugabe to avoid bloodshed by resigning, the church has been an outstanding participant in politics. This study is a descriptive qualitative study and relies mainly on secondary data from associated articles and research. Through this article, the researcher indicates that the church had a huge role in the achievement of independence in Zimbabwe as well as in brokering peace deals such as the Unity Accord of 1987 after Gukurahundi and the Government of National Unity after the disastrous 2008 national elections. The church also intervened through the Catholic Commission on Gukurahundi though its findings were denied by the former President of Zimbabwe R. G. Mugabe. Findings establish a gap between the expected role of the church in politics and its actual role as the role of the church is dwindling as most of the churches are declaring allegiance to favourite parties, compromising their mediation roles locally. This article confirms that the established roles of the church, including mediation, peace broking, and advocacy, are being infringed by church leaders as spokespersons of their congregations. The article recommends that the church remain neutral (non-partisan) in order to partake in its key roles of mediation, peacebuilding, and advocacy.

Introduction

The involvement of the church in politics of Zimbabwe dates back to the time before the liberation struggle (Guti, 1994:6). The early involvement of the church included the critical role played by the Jesuit priests in the character formation of notable revolutionary nationalists like Robert Gabriel Mugabe (Kuvirimirwa, 2013). The duties of Jesuit priests were to identify and fund the education of potential leaders from the African continent and Zimbabwe. Robert Mugabe long confirmed his allegiance to the Catholic systems for their contribution towards the liberation of Zimbabwe and his personal life. In 1932, the African Apostle visited the Kutama area to declare a prophecy of Robert Gabriel Mugabe as the first black leader of liberated Zimbabwe, a sign that the church was and is still a role player in the politics of Zimbabwe (Kuvirimirwa, 2013). During the liberation struggle churches such as the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Christian Church (ZCC), and Johwani Marange and Masowe held different roles in the then Rhodesia, that led to the independence of Zimbabwe. Some of the churches preached a gospel of human rights and the need for Zimbabwe to be independent from the jaws of colonial imbalances. Other churches were peddling the discriminations through the support of the non-liberal Zimbabwe-Rhodesia of Bishop Abel Muzorewa (Oden, 2010).

Kuvirimirwa (2013) posits that the pressure of the church led to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 when then Rhodesian leader Ian Douglas Smith decided to detach Rhodesia from the rule of Britain. Even before the days of UDI, the church increased pressure on the civic society which led to the formation of different liberation movements such as that of Zapu in 1961 and Zanu in 1963 (Oden, 2010). According to Guti (2015:9), the African churches were not allowed to freely assemble during the Rhodesian rule, making them more politically conscious and supportive of the liberation of Zimbabwe. Their fight was to attain freedom of worship as well as restore the annihilated rights of the majority of native Zimbabweans. The church also contributed to the education of the nationalists in Zimbabwe. Mugabe was one of the beneficiaries of Catholic missionary education that benefited potential leaders. Some of the notable contributions of the church included assisting in the crossing of liberation struggle cadres from then Rhodesia into

neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zambia. The church also facilitated weapons through already established missionary routes in the case of those who opposed human rights (Dembedza, 2013). Through their mission hospitals the churches facilitated the treatment of injured liberation fighters through the likes of the late Doctor Simon Mazorodze who became the first health minister of independent Zimbabwe.

The churches also facilitated the organisation of the *pungwes* in the liberation struggle that facilitated the recruitment of young liberation fighters. The church preserved their security through educating young people in the communities and schools like St. Alberts Mission and Pamushana High School. According to Dembedza (2013) the greatest number of liberation fighters came from mission schools. The major facilitators were priests and bishops of various churches who commanded great respect in the communities affected. With the Rhodesians feeling intense pressure, they pushed for a church leader to takeover Rhodesia giving birth to Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in 1979. Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the United Methodist Church became the Prime Minister of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. The church realised that the imbalances were not fixed and rejected the pact leading to the universally accepted Lancaster House Convention. This saw the holding of free and fair elections in Zimbabwe in 1980 which confirmed the prophecy of Robert Gabriel Mugabe as the first elected black Prime Minister of independent Zimbabwe (Kuvirimirwa, 2013).

In the aftermath of liberation struggle, Zimbabwean leadership did not seriously declare their allegiance to church as its major influence according to Dembedza (2013). Despite all, the first black President was Reverend Canaan Banana another church personality who became instrumental in the joining of the two liberation movements Zanu and Zapu to form Zanu-PF in 1987 (Vengeyi, 2013: 29). The outcome of the 1980 elections triggered a civil war that led to the split of the unified Patriotic Front of the Lancaster House consisting of Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo. Realising the damage, the church came in using Reverend Canaan Banana as the mediator in the conflict which gave birth to Unity Accord of 1987. In the aftermath of Gukurahundi, the Catholic Commission played a role in researching the depth of the atrocities in the Midlands and Matebeleland Provinces. Despite these efforts, most of its findings were rejected by then President Mugabe. This led

to a temporary divorce between the government of R. G. Mugabe and the Catholic Commission.

Dembedza (2013) alleges that allegiance to church was made apparent in the wake of the threat to power when the new opposition of the Movement for Democratic Change was formed in 1999. The government-led Zanu Pto reignited its critical allies to save the fading giant from loss of power. Mugabe, then the President of the country, made frantic efforts to meet church leaders such as the popular Marange Sect, which declared its allegiance to Zanu PF leadership. The sect was not the only one as Johwani Masowe and other African churches such as ZCC through their founders and leadership also declared their allegiance. Ezekiel Guti was cornered at one point to declare allegiance and he confirmed supporting Zanu PF leadership (Guti, 2015:9). There were casualties of bishops who chose to stand with the opposition in the early 2000s such as Archbishop Pius Ncube of Catholic Church which led to embarrassment through a video footage of him with someone's wife. This silenced many Catholic priests who contracted their pledge to live their whole life without women in their lives as Pius Ncube was demoted from his church role as a result (Vengeyi, 2010:159). Pius Ncube's political influence had grown in Matebeleland as the first Catholic to stand against Mugabe.

Some of the chronicles of the influence of the church in Zimbabwean politics include the Catholics in Coalition for Justice and Peace (CCJP, 1997) report that eighteen Catholic missionaries and one bishop had been deported during the struggle and 23 expatriate missionaries and one local priest had been killed. By March 1979, 65 Catholic mission stations, schools, and hospitals had been closed according to Togarasei (2013:165). According to Ndlovu and Mwanaka (2017), the Church's Commission for Justice and Peace had been harassed and put on trial by the government of Smith. Its officers were arrested and deported, and its publications such as *Motto Magazine* by Mambo Press in Gweru which was blown up by Smith government agents during the election campaign of 1980 were banned. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace was founded in 1972 against the historical background of the Catholic Church's teaching on justice and peace spelt out in various papal encyclicals. The Commission strived to bring about a higher awareness in people of their socio-economic, civil, political, and legal rights. It is also acknowledged that the Commission was very instrumental in facilitating the negotiations leading to

the Commonwealth Conference held in Lusaka in May 1979. This led to the convening of the Lancaster House Conference followed by the Lancaster House Agreement. A ceasefire and finally democratic elections led to Zimbabwe attaining of independence on 18 April 1980 (Gunda, 2014:145). Today, Zanu PF is still in power thanks to the influence of the church as Zimbabwe is a heavily Christian society and most of its communities are guided by cultural and Christianity values from the economics and society to the political landscape (Vengeyi, 2013:30).

In the run-up to the 2018 elections, many parishes campaigned for conflicts to be resolved without violence. Since the riots in January 2019, the churches in particular have offered a forum for victims to discuss their experiences. Victims were encouraged to go public with their stories which the church presented as the first decisive step on the long road to restoring justice. In many regions, Catholic and Protestant churches have founded and trained local committees and groups such as the Peace Ambassadors in Mutare or Local Peace Committees in Bulawayo that unite people from all walks of life, parties, and religions. In the latest conflicts in Bulawayo, the churches assumed the important role of a civil society representative that the government could approach and talk to. These efforts for peace and non-violent conflict management are resulting in development initiatives within which people themselves are starting to take action, to negotiate with the authorities, and to improve their situations (Vengeyi, 2013:29).

Method

Research methods consist of research design, procedure, and data analysis (Vengeyi, 2010:159). This study uses a qualitative study with a descriptive approach using desk research form dominated by theoretical analysis. A qualitative study uses descriptive data for its data collection (Zaluchu, 2020). The study results are then supported by various existing literature and theories (Gilbert et al, 2018). This study aims to observe the impact of the church on politics in Zimbabwe. The descriptions in this study related to the positive and negative impact of the church in Zimbabwean politics are supported by the literature and authorities as well as previous research and writings.

Results and discussion

Several researches and results indicate that the role of church in Zimbabwean politics is both inevitable and critical as the church has become an integral part of Zimbabwean society. According to Vengeyi (2013:30), the relationship between the church and Zimbabwe politics can be discussed in various headings, all in line with their involvement in the day-to-day events of the country. Taylor (2002) posits that Zimbabwean politics' marriage to the church was inevitable as they walked a long road together in the liberation of Zimbabwe. Manyonganise (2022) indicates that there are perceptions that the church is siding with the ruling party given the long silence of these formerly vocal partners in the struggle for human rights. This comment is followed by an encouragement that the convention of the churches recommend strategies for the good of Zimbabwe which was taken as the first radical charge against the ruling party by the church in Zimbabwe. The church has a marriage with Zimbabwean politics which is usually perceived as alignment with the ruling party. The church is taking a brave stance in confronting the Zimbabwean government to address the socioeconomic issues affecting the ordinary people of Zimbabwe. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) posits that Zimbabwe was heavily influenced by Mugabeism and that the strategies of Mugabe on church were clear in that he would isolate churches that were against him by making their operations difficult while making it easier for those churches that supported him. Such indications are visible in the wake of the child marriage issues that surrounded the Marange Sect which was apparently swept under the carpet. This article further discusses the involvement of the church in Zimbabwean politics today as critical events in the country indicate its heavy involvement. According to Dube (2021:304) the government of Zimbabwe denounced the bishops who gathered towards finding a solution to a government seen as ignoring the pleas of its ordinary citizens. The role of the church in the national events such as the Heroes Day, Independence Day, political rallies, and the issues to do with gathering in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic are discussed hereunder.

Heroes gatherings

Dube (2021) chronicles the contribution of the church in the liberation struggle and how the priests and bishops sacrificed their lives in supporting the liberation of Zimbabwe. Their efforts are still immensely appreciated and have inspired the traditional churches to commemorate these sacrifices by commemorating the National Heroes Day on the calendar through a heavy presence in stadiums to support the commemoration of souls lost towards the emancipation of Zimbabwe. Raftopoulos (2013:4) argues that the church continues to support politics directly in Zimbabwe and that most of the political influence comes from church hence commemorations such as Heroes Day in Zimbabwe have a lot of significance in the history of Zimbabwe. Church leadership such as that of ZCC, Johwani Masowe, Marange sect, Forward in Faith, Roman Catholic Church among others are observed as the prominent churches still visible in their uniforms. Until today most the government events have the slot for the Roman Catholic Church priesthood to preach and pray for the nation. This in turn makes it an open fact that the church is still heavily involved in Zimbabwean politics and their role has not been compromised because they have large numbers of followers from whom the politicians want votes.

According to Tshuma (2019) in publications in online news of late, churches are seen to be trying to make their contributions towards improving the country for the better of all Zimbabweans. Catholic bishops met President Emmerson Mnangagwa with his deputies Vice President Kembo Mohadi and Constantino Chiwenga at State House where they discussed issues affecting the country. Some of the outcomes of their Indaba included a 48-hour moratorium on the dismissed doctors returning to work without reapplying or being asked questions. The bishops also stressed the need for inclusive political dialogue in resolving Zimbabwe's challenges. Another group of church leaders under the banner of Inter-Denominational Churches met the President and Vice Presidents at State House where they discussed the political situation in Zimbabwe. All these indicate the visibility of churches in the politics of Zimbabwe.

According to Raftopoulos (2013: 4) in the times of leaders like Mugabe, the leader frequently attended the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Harare for mass

with the priests which made the priests feel honoured. The same priests would then make sure that all national events such as Heroes Day were attended. During the Mugabe regime, the church would be given the podium to explain their role in the liberation struggle so that they could justify their role in the planning and funding of national events such as Heroes Day. The stadiums would be filled with church members wearing different uniforms representing their churches, a move that has been observed as a marketing strategy to lure followers to vote for the ruling government. Opposition parties have criticised such gestures as being misleading since not many of the opposition leaders attended such events. Church leaders such as Andrew Wutawunashé have openly told their congregants that they need to vote for the ruling party as a sign of respect for the lost heroes according to Tarusarira (2020).

Mangudhla (2014) alleges that in the early 2000 the Masowe sect had one of their own Madzibaba Border Gezi die through an accident and the ruling party gave the church the hero's shrine in respect of one of their own who was buried at the national shrine. In many cases when there was a burial of a national hero before the COVID-19 pandemic, there were buses allocated for different churches to ferry them to the national shrine. They would have a chance to visit the national heroes acre and pay last respects to the predominantly Zanu PF cadres who fought in the liberation struggle. The opposition parties argued that they are a Zanu PF enabling group of churches. Mangudhla (2014:23) further postulates that churches such as the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and the Roman Catholic Church have had a huge bearing on the burial of the national heroes and the Masowe people have their own known terraces. The White Cloth predominantly maintain their presence since independence as some of the most loyal people of the cloth to the ruling Zanu PF. In return most of the politicians frequent their churches for blessings and healing and some to probe the next leaders of Zimbabwe. This has given the church huge relevance in the country's politics as it is believed that their leaders are able to foretell the Zimbabwean leadership (Togarasei, 2013:165). Madzibaba Wimbo was also known for prophesying the coming of Emmerson Mnangagwa and it came to pass. This has cemented the relationship between the church and the country's leadership and ruling party. In most cases, when they are given the time to speak, they end up encouraging their congregants to remember the liberation war and the sacrifices that were made by the fallen heroes, despite the young age in the liberation of Zimbabwe.

In that regard this article can tell that the national events such as National Heroes Day are sometimes where people from different parties collude to celebrate brevity. However most of the opposition leaders do not do that and usually take the days to criticise the mistakes which were made by the current government and the church as enablers of those mistakes. Mangudhla (2014:20) argues that the presence of the church in such gatherings is more historical than looking at the prevailing situation in Zimbabwe. Hence, to conclude that churches are being used would be an overstatement as they have fought even during the Rhodesian period for their rights of worship and freedom of worship hand-in-hand with the liberation movements something which cannot just fizzle out overnight.

Independence celebrations

Raftopoulos (2013:4) posits that churches have been the main players in the celebration of independence and most of the churches, especially traditional churches, have had a huge influence on the recognition of the independence of Zimbabwe. We have witnessed apostles in white garments at many independence celebrations in Zimbabwe, followed by the heavy presence of different uniforms in the stadiums, an indication that there is a cordial relationship between the church in Zimbabwe and political holidays. According to Taylor (2002), despite criticism from some sectors of politics, the churches have maintained that they will stick to the ruling party of Zimbabwe as was confessed by the Marange Sect leaders that they were told by the Holy Spirit that they should vote the current government and not any opposition parties since it is the government that was installed by God. This portrays the Zanu PF as God's gift to Zimbabwe because of the role it played in the liberation struggle. According to Togarasei (2013) even new Pentecostal churches such as Prophetic and Healing Deliverance Ministries (PHD) and their leadership are believed to be forging relations with the Zanu PF government towards a consolidation of power through preaching. This has seen a lot of criticism of the church in the situation of Zimbabwe as peddlers of the ruling party forget the suffering of the masses from the policies of the country. Apostle Guti's spiritualised theology on politics was highlighted as a major setback for the church leader becoming the voice of the voiceless in the early 2000s. However, many other Zimbabwean Pentecostal church leaders have propagated the

same theology. For instance, as highlighted elsewhere in this article, Prophet Andrew Wutawunashwe of the Family of God Church was a close associate of the ZANU–PF party at one time and could not speak against ZANU–PF (Togarasei, 2006). However, the same Wutawunashwe, who professed that President Mugabe was chosen by God, in 2017, after the coup, reversed his statement. He purportedly admitted that God had elected Mugabe to finish his race, just like Moses who handed over his work to Joshua. He claimed to have talked from a spiritual point of view, but, in the end, that is not what happened. The country was not developing; rather, it was having factional wars. He commended the Zimbabwe Defence Forces for the wisdom they applied in midwifing a peaceful transition in the governance of our nation, Zimbabwe (Ndlovu and Mwanaka 2017).

From the narratives we can tell that the church is married to politics in Zimbabwe. Most of the churches are simply abiding by that covenant. This has incensed many opposition politicians. They believe that the independence of Zimbabwe should mean independence of all sectors of the country for everyone to participate, something they believe is not the case. They believe that the media remains controlled by the government in office hence, they do not celebrate the independence of Zimbabwe (Dube, 2021). Despite all these reservations, the apparent reality of the church and Zimbabwe politics is that they are still in a marriage relationship. The leading party, Zanu PF, still leads in the cordial relations, making the church an ever-present stakeholder in their independence celebrations and commemorations across the county.

Political rallies

Dembedza (2013) confirms that Zanu-PF presidents have been an ever-present feature in the Marange Shrine during their congregations, claiming that people are dying during those congregations because the sect refuses medication. The current scenario claims that the Marange people have refused to vaccinate their people against the coronavirus, something the government cannot deny or force because they have given them a freedom of worship that respects their ethics. According to Dembedza (2013), child marriages are happening under the government's watch but because of the cordial relationship and government respect for their beliefs, the government is playing catch and release. Human rights organisations decry the cordiality as they believe it is

suffocating some congregants from the sect as the government cannot be seen to be disturbing the cordial relations because it guarantees votes. In 2013 Cde Mugabe was seen in the congregation and instead of introducing himself in the church shrine with the '*Rugare*' meaning peace, he introduced himself by saying '*Pamberi neZanu PF*' which means 'forward with Zanu PF.' Rather than incense the congregants, it excited them instead. This confirms that there is a huge relationship to be safeguarded between the church and politics of Zimbabwe. The Zanu PF is the only party that is allowed to campaign at a church service and given the coverage in those Mapostori (Apostolic churches) of white cloth and the Zion Christian Church in Zimbabwe including the Family of God led by Reverend Wutawunashe. Mapostori is a syncretistic church in Zimbabwe, mixing traditional African beliefs with Christian teachings. This group pledged loyalty to ZANU-PF, instructing all adherents to vote for this party in the past election (Kuvirimirwa: 2013) and pledging to support and help the party win the election in 2018 (Dembedza, 2013). As an outcome of this relationship President Mugabe spoke to a group of over one hundred thousand Mapostori at the Johane Marange Apostolic Church during his campaign before the last elections (ZANU-PF Team, 2013). This was a strong endorsement of the *Mapostori* by the President.

The former opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, had on more than one occasion visited Nigerian Prophet T. B. Joshua, probably seeking divine guidance (Staff Reporter, 2013). Another example of political interaction with the prophetic churches is the desire of the Minister of Tourism to use the popularity and crowd-pulling ability of the churches to create a market for religious tourism. He hoped that twenty-percent of Zimbabwe's tourism earnings would come from religious tourism, much of that from prophetic churches. He argued that sixty percent of tourist arrival in Nigeria to visit T. B. Joshua's church (Mangudhla, 2014). He would like to see similar inflows in Zimbabwe. The high-level interaction of prophets with political leaders is notable. Zimbabwean prophets Makandiwa and Mudzanire known as Hubert Angel have been invited to private meetings with national leaders like the late Robert Mugabe (Mutsaka, 2012) and President Ruto of Kenya (Staff Reporter, 2013). This all demonstrates that the church and politics in Zimbabwe are inseparable. Campaigns are apparently happening in churches making the houses of God into political rallies. This is evidenced by the then First Lady Grace Mugabe inviting all the apostles in Rufaro Stadium to address supporters

of the firing of now President Emmerson Mnangagwa, indicating the power of the church to influence the political outcome. Unfortunately, that was the last address before the coup. Grace Mugabe would frequent the Forward in Faith Conventions in the National Sports Stadium on Women Days and preach the gospel of maintaining the leadership of Cde Robert Mugabe on a church podium with ululations from crowds using the church to campaign.

The church's response to politics (2000–2020)

At the dawn of 2000–2020, Forward in Faith's leadership was quick to shift from its open support of the ZANU–PF government. As ZANU–PF's legitimacy grew ever more tenuous and it resorted to more political violence to stave off its opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change, Forward in Faith's relationship with ZANU–PF became shaky. From 2000 to 2020, Apostle Guti decided to change the phrase 'Praying for our President Robert Gabriel Mugabe and praying for our soldiers and police' to 'Let's pray for our country Zimbabwe so that God may have mercy on us'. This is a sign that Apostle Guti deliberately decided to edit his Ten-days letters by removing the phrase 'pray for President Robert Mugabe' to maintain his political camouflage. Praying for President Mugabe would indicate open support of Mugabe who had caused much suffering to the ordinary masses. Thus, to mention Mugabe in his prayer letters during this time would imply that Apostle Guti openly supported ZANU–PF and not the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) which was controversial considering the MDC support in the urban constituencies. Furthermore, in doing that, Apostle Guti would lose a sizeable number of the youthful members who constitute the majority of his urban church membership. Again, for Apostle Guti to keep his church from splitting, during Prophet Andrew Wutawunashe's time as President of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Apostle Guti and his church, Zimbabwe Assemblies Of God Africa, also known as Forward in Faith, left the organisation and rejoined the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), citing the partisan attitude that EFZ was now exhibiting (Togarasei, 2013:165). Prophet Wutawunashe, as the President of the EFZ, had come out openly as a supporter of the ZANU–PF party and worked closely with the party. As a result, Wutawunashe was regarded as a ruling party collaborationist by some members of his church. Wutawunashe would often be seen praying at national

events such as the independence celebrations. As if that was not enough, Wutawunashe endorsed the presidential election results of 2002 as the will of God, and he openly supported the controversial land reform programme the ruling party had introduced in 2000. However, Apostle Guti did not want it to be so apparent that he was pro-ZANU–PF. Thus, Apostle Guti withdrew from the EFZ and joined the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. To authenticate that his moving from EFZ during Prophet Wutawunashe’s tenure was Apostle Guti’s political camouflage, after the lapsing of Prophet Wutawunashe tenure as the EFZ President, the Forward in Faith bounced back to the EFZ.

On 26 January 2020, Apostle Guti received President Emmerson Mnangagwa and gave him a platform to address men and women of the collar who had come all the way from different continents for a spiritually deeper life conference. Perhaps President Mnangagwa had imposed himself on the conference, but it confirmed the continuous political conniving of the church leader. In his address, Mnangagwa confirmed that the church leader had intimated to him that the church prays religiously for the state President and his ZANU–PF government every day of the first 10 days of January (Mpofu, 2020) even though the Ten-days letters since 2000 were no-longer stating that people should pray for the President and the ZANU–PF government. Accordingly, it is against this background that the presence of President Mnangagwa at this leadership summit underscores the church leader’s motive with regard to setting the politics of the agenda.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that churches in Zimbabwe should avoid declaring allegiance to certain parties even if they support the parties in order to be able to be recognised as neutrals. There are times when conflict needs church to resolve the conflict as the only objective mediator or to be the salt of the world. In the Zimbabwean setting, it is difficult for Reverend Wutawunashe, Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, Noah Marange, or Destiny for Africa Network to mediate the dispute between the opposition parties and Zanu PF. They have already declared their allegiance creating polarisation in the churches and among the members. The researcher also recommends that church takes a distance from political rallies to avoid discrimination in the society as that can turn into future conflict in cases where the opposition gets

a nod in the elections. The researcher also recommends that the church attend national events but not to denounce any other political player in their speeches because they will leave other political players feeling that they are irrelevant. Thus, safe-guarding the role of religion and the church in the nation is important to avoid conflicts in the future such as are happening in the Arab world where the same religion fights for leadership making everything politicised. Praying for leadership is a better way than declaring prayers for a specific leader which may be taken as a marketing gimmick by other political players. Hence, the recent efforts to locally solve Zimbabwean political conflicts proved difficult, thus the resorting to the likes of Comrade Thabo Mbeki or Kgalema Monhlante of South Africa to broker peace while before that Zimbabwe used to do it on their own with the use of Canaan Banana and Catholic Commission among other local credible conflict resolvers.

Conclusions

The church has sought to provide effective leadership in a heavily polarised political environment. In particular, church leaders have challenged the political leadership to give dialogue a chance in many settings from the time of Lancaster House in 1979, Unity Accord in 1987, Peace and Reconciliation in 2008, Government of National Unity in 2009, the dislodge of Mugabe being facilitated by a Catholic priest Father Mukonori convincing Mugabe to resign, which he did, and most recently the Compensation of the White Commercial Farmers for developments made of their lands. They have openly denounced violence as degrading both the victim and the perpetrator. They have called for realistic economic policies that place the needs of the poor at their centre as well as trying to foster national healing through the Catholic Commission. Recently the bishops signed a petition to seek the audience of the President on the challenges facing Zimbabwe which was rejected because the coordinator had previously criticised the government. All these efforts were made to create and maintain the influence of the church on politics of Zimbabwe and for the welfare of the society of Zimbabwe. In many cases churches are caught in the conflict of criticising the state while cooperating with it and performing their function as a forum for resistance and opposition. They remain in discussion with the governing authorities, organise the National Dialogue, and prepare the ground for resistance and opposition

against excesses of power. There are certain church leaders who do not value the views of their followers and declare allegiance to certain parties which then reduces the ability of those churches to participate in the acceptable dialogue when it involves the opposition. There are some impressive examples of how the churches engage in witnessing peace such as Unity Accord and GNU in Zimbabwe. Such indications of influence of the church on the politics of Zimbabwe are critical and valued.

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