

‘Religion as a Riding Horse of Politics?’ A Critical Evaluation of Political Influence in the Zimbabwean Ecclesiastical Life

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Abstract

Religion and politics in Zimbabwe have always been trading together. The country won the liberation struggle because of the role played by religion. African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and Christianity contributed significantly from opposite angles. In the transitional processes of the post-independent Zimbabwe, religion and politics had marriage of convenience. Some politicians took it upon themselves to use, abuse, and misuse religion. Religion in Zimbabwe currently functions as a political platform, with AIR still dominating the political arena while the church denominations struggle between political puppets and opponents. This has resulted in the Zimbabwean church disintegrating. It has been argued that some politicians have turned African Independent Churches and some mega churches into their own havens while pushing mainline churches to the periphery of politics as anti-progressive. Against this background, the paper seeks to evaluate the extent to which the Zimbabwean church has become a ‘riding horse’ for politics in its socioeconomic and political transformation.

Keywords: Religion, politics, riding horse, Zimbabwe, Church

Introduction

The paper titled ‘Religion as a riding horse of politics?’ a critical evaluation of political influence in the Zimbabwean church today was first presented at the Transformative Religion: Religion as Situated Knowledge in Processes of Social Transformation, Summer School hosted by the Universities of KwaZulu-

Natal, Stellenbosch, Western Cape, Humboldt University of Berlin and Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS) on the 27th February – 1 March 2017 at SMMS. Using the Church-state theory of Hallencreutz (1988) the paper argues that religion and politics in Zimbabwe has always been trading as both soulmates and antagonists. The data collected from the existing literature on religion and politics in Zimbabwe in particular demonstrates that Zimbabwean liberation struggle was successful because of this good companionship in diversity (Chimuka 2013). However, in the recent years, the two institutions have a marriage of convenience. Politics use, abuse and misuse religion as and when it feels so. The situation in Zimbabwe presents a body of Christ that is divided on the political influence to the ecclesia. Politicians have embraced some denominations as their havens while treating others as opponents.

Most mainline churches which are the base of transformation through education and health have been pushed to the periphery of Zimbabwean politics as enemies and anti-productive. Politicians have taken advantage of African Independent Churches and some mega churches that have recently flourished to muddle as sheep in lion's fur. The years between 2000 and 2008 saw the religio-political engagement tension emanating from political violence, torture, human rights abuses, inflation and unemployment among other elements of direct and indirect violence that pervaded the Zimbabwean state (Munemo & Nciizah 2014:63). This paper will interrogate the existing literature on religion and politics/ church state relationship to investigate the role played by religion during and after the colonial period of Zimbabwe. It will also use the same works to voice the role played by other religions in politics. The research will also explore the concept of the 'religionization' of politics in Zimbabwe with the aim of understanding to what extent has religion become a 'riding horse' of politics in the socioeconomic and political transformation of Zimbabwe. The paper will conclude by challenging the church in Zimbabwe to be one, united and a prophetic church.

Selected Definitions of Religion and Politics

Definitions play a significant role in any writing and their primary purpose is to avoid some misunderstandings with the audience (Pepper & Driscoll 2015). Given the intensive research on religion and politics, the paper will hand-scrub some working definitions of the words. Religion in general is a system of beliefs and practices oriented toward the sacred or supernatural, through which the life

experiences of groups of people are given meaning and direction (Smith 1996: 5). In the socio-cultural context, religion aids the construction and creation of meanings and systems through shared codes, norms, values, beliefs and symbols that tell its members what to do with their lives and why. According to Smith, religion orients people to the world they inhabit thereby providing a sense of direction and purpose (1996:6). The second definition comes from McGuire (2008: 1) who defines religion as a significant aspect of social life. The third selected definition was provided by Geertz who argues that religion is one of the most powerful, deeply felt, and influential forces in human society. It shapes people's interactions and relationships with each other, it influence families, communities, economies, as well as political life (1993: 90). The definitions by these three scholars are very important, however, Geertz's definition will benefit this paper as it demonstrates how religion influences communities and politics.

The Merriam-Weber Dictionary, defines politics as the art or science of government concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy or winning and holding control over a government¹. Lasswell (n.d.:295) further defines politics as the study of the influence and the influential. The influential are the elite who get the most of what they have to get. Elite can be compared in terms of class as well as skills (n.d.:295). Lasswell views the word class as a major social group of similar function, status and outlook. The class formation in the world of politics has the aristocracy, the plutocracy and the middle class (n.d.:299). Although Lasswell did his research around the 1920s from an American perspective, his argument is still valid in the world and politics. Ellis and ter Haar further states that politics in the narrow sense is defined as the governing of a state or country while in a broadest sense, it is a process through which the production, distribution and use of resources is determined in all areas of social existence (2007:178). Although there are many definitions of politics, however the art of governing a country is what most people define as politics which emphasises on who gets what, when and how (Lasswell n.d) making this the working definition of this paper.

Party Politics in the Contemporary Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean politics is dominated by a number of political parties. The first being the ruling and the liberation struggle party called the Zimbabwe African

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/politics>.

National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and PF is a later development. ZANU and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) fought for the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe. ZANU won the 1980's first democratic elections under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. Seven years later the party merged with Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU to form ZANU-PF, the governing party of the country. ZANU-PF constitutes the majority of the parliamentarians today. Research by scholars such as De Jager and Musuva (2015:17) claim that ZANU PF is the one that has caused the untold suffering in the socio-economic, political and religious life of Zimbabwe. Charles further argue that the root cause of Zimbabwe's problems can be attributed to a 'crisis of governance' and that, for many reasons, ZANU PF has failed to provide its citizens with 'safety, the rule of law, human rights and sustainable economic development' (2016:7).

The other political party is the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) which has fragmented into different political parties with each claiming to be moving agenda of MDC upon its formation. Since its inception in 1999, MDC was led by Morgan Tsvangirai until his death in 2017. The disintegration challenges resulted to each faction surnamed after the leader. For example, the party split in 2005 forming two splinter groups with the one led by Morgan Tsvangirai known as MDC 'T'. The other faction led by Oliver Mutambara was called MDC 'M'. The two leaders later became Prime Minister and Deputy respectively in the Inclusive Government that ran from 2009-2013. When Mutambara, left party politics MDC 'M' was led by the former Secretary General of the original MDC Welshman Ncube thereby renamed MDC 'N'. In 2014, another split occurred when the then MDC-T Secretary-General, Tendai Biti and Deputy Treasurer-General, Elton Mangoma pulled out of the party to form MDC Renewal which also later split into two groups. The one led by Biti, became the People's Democratic Party and another led by Mangoma, called Renewal Democrats of Zimbabwe (Nkala 2015). When Tsvangirai died on the 14th of February 2018, MDC 'T' further detangled into two factions led by his two vice presidents Nelson Chamisa and Thokozani Khupe. On one hand, Khupe maintained the MDC 'T' name with some political players arguing that it is now MDC 'Thokozani'. On the other, Chamisa also maintained MDC 'T' but later joined with other smaller political parties to form MDC Alliance which is currently the biggest opposition party in Zimbabwe.

Other political parties are Zimbabwe African People's Unity (ZAPU). Although there was a unity accord in 1987, between ZANU and ZAPU, some members of ZAPU felt that they were tricked to be swallowed by with ZANU

and they still maintain the political ZAPU led by the Former Minister of Home Affairs, Dumiso Dabengwa. Dabengwa has also joined the MDC Alliance led by Chamisa. Moreover, there is the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) led by Lovemore Madhuku. There were over 123 political parties which participated in the 2018 Harmonized Elections (eNCA 2018) and this paper is not much interested in pursuing them, neither is the researcher saying those mentioned are the most important ones but some of them are seen as having the agenda of riding religion horse for their political manoeuvres .

Zimbabwean politics has grounded the socioeconomic life of the innocent masses thereby making 2017 a meltdown year. Most workers have been retrenched and the young people graduating, are jobless. A huge number of Zimbabweans are migrating to neighbouring countries like South Africa in search of 'greener pastures' and others as asylum seekers among other reasons (Kumalo & Mujinga 2017:48). The most shocking political development has been the desire and willingness for re-election by President Mugabe who was 93 with Grace Mugabe boasting that 'ZANU PF will field Mugabe's corpse as election candidate in 2018' (News24 18/2/17). In order to achieve this, Mugabe took religion at the forefront with the machinations of wanting to remain in power.

Religio-political Engagement in Zimbabwe

The relationship between religion and politics in Zimbabwe is compromised. A number of scholars have given different views on this engagement with Majome (2016) arguing that religion and politics are Siamese twins. This inseparability is evident in two ways. On one hand, churches have benefitted from the freedom of worship, protection and independence guaranteed by the Constitution and government policies. On the other, the state took advantage of the natural docility of the church. The church is the large majority and political leadership prey for votes during the election period (Majome 2016). This point is buttressed by the cover page of one of Chitando's publications, *Players and Prayers Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe* (2013) where the image of Mugabe from Catholic tradition was portrayed wearing a garment popularly regarded as belonging to 'vapostori' sect holding a staff at a gathering. Tsvangirai, a Methodist, was also pictured attending some church gathering seated on the floor and the Salvation Army former Vice President dances wearing a Zion Church uniform. In analysing this behaviour, Majome (2016) comments that,

politicians know when and how to turn on the charm when it matters most and the church meekly obliges. Majome (2016) concludes that, more and more, churches have started speaking against government ineffectual policies, however, the political leadership has predictably responded by warning the church to shut up or face unspecified dire consequences. According to the Zimbabwe Human Rights (ZHR) (2014), the government of Zimbabwe uses the soft underbelly to introduce their political doctrine into the church and in turn the church has largely supported political hegemony through selective application of scriptures which represents a dark underbelly. An example is the former Anglican Bishop of the Harare Province, Nolbert Kunonga who perpetrated gross human rights, in the name of God with impunity and state protection (ZHR 2014).

The politics of ZANU PF have manipulated the church in a number of ways. First, they have coerced the apostolic sects to advance their political agenda through visiting them and giving their leaders farms who in-turn declared these politicians as leaders from God. The membership of these apostolic sects is estimated to be over three million (ZHR 2014). ZANU PF has over the years managed to exercise both duress and undue influence over these sects to support their political supremacy (ZHR 2014). Second, over the years there has been a proliferation of Pentecostal churches which also command huge numbers and it is not surprising that the ruling party has managed to count most of these church members on their side (ZHR 2014). These churches in turn cherry pick some biblical texts to support the ideology that the church must respect and honour the national leaders and must not question their authority. Third, the ruling party has also used civilians in institutions like schools to advance their ideology. The magistrate presiding over the case of the End Time Message leader, Robert Gumbura, insinuates that, the state should supervise churches and their doctrines (ZHR 2014). Chitando (2013) bemoans that, politicians harness religious ideologies and concepts to their own gain. They go on to manipulate religious symbols, concepts and persons to consolidate their grip of power.

Ndoro (2015) further argues that; there is a clear demarcation between the pluralistic and diverse public sphere of the state and the private and voluntary religious space to protect religion from the state interference and protect the individual who otherwise will not want unwarranted or coercive religious influence unless voluntarily subscribed or affiliated to it. An analysis of Ndoro's view provides recognition of the independence of the public sphere of the state

from the private sphere of religion. Ruzivo (2013:10) prefers to call the political domination of religion as ‘civil religion’ where Mugabe is the high priest and pastor of the nation. Ruzivo avers that, the Mugabe regime demonstrates the interplay of a high priest and pastor at the burials, National Heroes Day, Independence Day, Defence Forces Day and the National Day of Prayer. Civil religion has symbols and emblems that are central to the practice of religion. These symbols and emblems include the National Anthem and the National Flag (2013:10). Mugabe believes that his party is divinely guided by both God and the national spirits of the ancestors and should remain in power (2013:11). All his actions were justified by the feeling that he was following the footsteps of Mbuya Nehanda, Sekuru Chaminuka and Mukwati and others who were executed for the ‘righteous cause’ of the liberation of Zimbabwe. AIR and Christianity are pushed forward by ZANU PF during the campaign periods. Mugabe’s justification to remain in power is nicely forwarded put by Ruzivo who states that, he swore by Nehanda that no other political party should rule Zimbabwe. In order to advance ZANU PF propaganda, Mugabe arms twist Christianity for his personal aggrandisement (2013:16). Kokosalakis (1995), concludes that, from this religio-political engagements, the total separation of the two institutions is neither final nor irreversible. In fact contemporary developments show that the divorce is far from being over.

Religio-political Space in the Pre-Independent Zimbabwe

The religio-political fusion in Zimbabwe has a long history although it was not an all-weathered relationship. In spite of the ideological and theological differences, the two institutions remain partners in human life and development. Chung (2006:197) holds that, from the 1890s, when the whites first entered the country, traditional religious leaders had opposed colonialism and were instrumental in organising opposition to its endeavours. One of the main leaders in the first *Chimurenga* (just war) against colonialism was Mbuya Nehanda a woman of outstanding religious and political leadership. Nehanda was famous in the 1896/7 war against the White settlers and was executed for her involvement in stirring the fighters (Bourdillion 1984:41). Both religious and political life of the colonial Zimbabwe were guided by Nehanda, Chaminuka, Mukwati and Sekuru Kaguvi who represented the Shona community cultures and political discourse (Chung 2006:198). These individuals were neither politicians nor chiefs but spirit mediums (*n’anga*), who

recruited masses into a violent rebellion against colonialism in what became known as the first *Chimurenga* of 1896-97 (Kaoma 2006:57). Chung states that, between 1896 and 1897 the Shona and the Ndebele community cultures sought *Mwari's* (God's) help in addressing the colonial crisis they both faced. With the help of the spirit mediums, the Shona and the Ndebele communities sought to reclaim their ancestral lands through violent means. In both eastern and western Zimbabwe, Whites were targeted and some of them were killed. The response from colonial master Cecil John Rhodes was brutal and furious: he declared war on the indigenous people. While the whites had the advantage of superior weapons, the Shona and Ndebele people had bows; arrows, *Mwari* (God), and ancestors on their side (2006:58). Although Nehanda was hanged by the British colonial administration, her spirit continues to be evoked in times of political discord and national crisis in Zimbabwe.

African religions were in support of the struggle and the spirit mediums' office was concurrently political, social and religious. *N'angas* were central to African life something colonial settlers missed (2006:58). In view of this, when the military struggle began to escalate in 1972, one of the first acts of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army commanders was to persuade the traditional religious leaders to support the struggle. Some of these key religious leaders like Chief Reikai Tangwena were persuaded to follow the guerrillas into Mozambique to provide spiritual and ideological leadership for the armed struggle (Bourdillion 1984:43). The argument was that; the spirits are the traditional owners of the land in Zimbabwe, whose authority the White invaders usurped. Whereas Whites had taken land away, the spirits protected the land and provided fertility (1984:43). During the liberation struggle guerrillas strengthened their legitimacy through the co-operation of spirit mediums of high status (1984:44). In every refugee and every military camp, the spirit mediums had their own separate encampment where they practised their religion (Chung 2006:198). The guerrillas relied on the spirit mediums who helped by advising when and where to go, and by predicting the movements of the enemy (Bourdillion 1984:43). The roles of the spirit mediums were to make the guerrillas familiar with the forest and teach them to read the signs of the jungle. In addition, the spirit mediums used to send messages to guerrillas with information about the movements of security forces and advice on guerrilla operations (1984:43). Those guerrillas who were killed did not listen to the spirit mediums or they had not introduced themselves to the spirit mediums so they were not known (1984:44). The impact of religion during the liberation struggle

was expressed by Chung (2006:198) stating that hundreds of prisoners of war, both white and black, were released rather than killed because of the strong influence of the traditional religious leaders. What was certain after the liberation struggle, was; when victory came, both political and traditional religious leaders were commended as heroes.

Although AIR and Christianity were credited for playing a crucial role in the liberation struggle, Chung notes that Christian missionaries were largely left alone in the rural areas in the early stages of the war. Later there were moves to kill them partly because they insisted on helping persons beaten by guerrillas, and burying persons killed by soldiers (2006:199). Nevertheless, once the war was over, it was the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Harare Patrick Chakaipa and Bishop Peter of the Anglican Church who led the church services of dedication at the independence celebrations (Linden and Weller 1984:216). In the spirit of embracing all religions, there were also songs honouring the great spirits on the celebration day. The first move that the country took, in respect of Christianity, was to appoint Rev Canaan Banana a Methodist Church in Zimbabwe clergy to be the first President of Zimbabwe (1984:216). Banana commented on the Independence Day that the churches are an integral part of the struggle for liberation. Linden and Weller (1984:216) holds that, political leaders gave the church the mandate to heal the nation and the two institutions promised to improve their engagements. In the Second *Chimurenga*, the church was criticised for not being vocal enough, appearing to be on the side of the oppressors, although some churches and missions did not join or support the struggle for independence, particularly the rural missions however, they were perceived as being on the side of the minority government (Chung 2006:200). Traditional religions were playing an increasingly important role through co-operation with the spirit mediums. During the colonial rule the church promoted peaceful and harmonious existence between various racial and social groups in society. In spite of this role, the politico-ecclesiastical relationship was questionable. Ecclesia was targeted by the state for providing moral and diplomatic support to African nationalists who struggled against injustice from the white minority regime. In the post-colonial period the church has been married to the oppressed in the fight against colonial repressive laws and elements promoting human rights at times inviting the wrath of the state security apparatus and government officials (Munemo & Nciizah 2013:63). One notes with interest the conclusion of Chabal and Daloz (1999: 65-67) that, to this day, African politics is by definition religious.

Religio-political Transitional Trajectories in the Pre- and Post-Independence Zimbabwe

According to Majome (2016), since colonialism and the war of independence, political leaders have enjoyed a rather shrewd and less than innocent love-hate relationship with the church. Religion and politics cleave to each other when it was convenient and discard each other when one feels the other has encroached into their territory (2016). The religio-political connection is historical in Zimbabwean. The political arena was occupied by the supporters of détente, namely Bishop Abel Muzorewa, Rev Ndabaningi Sithole, James Chikerema, and Joshua Nkomo (Chung 2006: 105). In the pre and post independent Zimbabwe, religion played a pivotal role in politics pointing to the fact that the liberation struggle and the independence of Zimbabwe are not complete without the ordained clergy like Reverend Sithole of the United Congregational Church of Zimbabwe, Rev. Professor. Canaan Banana of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe and Bishop Abel Muzorewa of the United Methodist Church (Hallencreutz 1998). Sithole was one of the founding members and president of ZANU in 1963, Muzorewa was the first Black Prime Minister during the transitional period leading to the 1980 independence, while Banana was the first Black President of the independent Zimbabwe (Chung 2006:107).

Chung maintains that, Ian Smith proceeded to follow a dual strategy, one of internal negotiations with the more pliable black leaders, such as Bishop Muzorewa and Reverend Sithole (2006:108). Muzorewa, who had won a great deal of popular support during the 1970s, became the closest of Smith's allies (2006:108). Muzorewa became popular, that he could draw crowds of between 50,000 to 100,000 to his rallies and with this support, Muzorewa was certainly a credible leader (Chung 2006:229). Muzorewa had arisen as the natural unelected spokesperson for blacks. During the détente period, both ZANU and ZAPU decided to support Muzorewa and his political party- African National Congress as the voice of the black people. Unfortunately, Chung, with the aim of raising political leaders and downplaying religious leaders, comments that, Muzorewa was a peace-loving and obedient cleric who had little political experience and constantly revealed negotiating weaknesses and inexperience. His willingness to obey the Smith regime's authority unquestioningly was to cause his undoing (2006:230). This situation made him unpopular with the liberation armies. Muzorewa eventually agree to the formation of a coalition government with Smith's Rhodesian Front.

The ugly face of politics eventually led to an internal settlement to establish an interim government which was signed on March 3, 1978 by Smith, Muzorewa, Sithole, and Chief Chirau (2006:231). Immediately after signing the Internal Settlement Agreement, Muzorewa and Sithole flew to Britain to persuade the British government to accept the internal settlement (2006:232). From these actions, we note that politics had been religionized, especially as the clergy were on the forefront of agenda. Banana's role came in as those who supported the Patriotic Front of ZANU and ZAPU remained in prison when Muzorewa was the Prime Minister. An internal movement was set up by ZANU and ZAPU being led by Banana, who later became the first President of the Independent Zimbabwe from 1980-1987. At a stage when each black political party had established its own army, both Muzorewa and Sithole had received recognition and assistance from the Smith regime in setting up their own armies. In a deep political move by the religious leaders, Sithole's army was trained in Uganda by Idi Amin, one of the notorious African leaders (Chung 2006: 235).

From 1980-1987, there was turmoil in Zimbabwe. The government forces committed many atrocities in Matabeleland. This was itself a reaction to the carnages committed by dissidents against government officials (2006:236). ZANU PF speedily established a de facto one-party state through a campaign called the *Gukurahundi* massacres. The campaign was justified by its implementers as an attempt to stamp out dissident and terrorist activities which were allegedly being spearheaded by the main opposition party (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo who himself was a Methodist Local Preacher (Banana 1991). ZAPU members were mainly people of the Ndebele origin. Having succumbed to pressure and a growing concern for the loss of innocent lives, ZAPU conceded to the ZANU's proposition for the formation of a government of national unity. In 1987, the two parties signed a Unity Accord forming ZANU (PF). This effectively created a de-facto one party state (Kaulemu 2010). The civil war ended in a deal brokered by President Banana, who persuaded both sides to reconcile (Chung 2006). Unfortunately, the end of these clergy members is very shameful and up to today, they are not recognized in the Zimbabwean political discourse. Whenever their names are mentioned, they are referred to as sell-outs. One of Zimbabwe's liberal singers Hosiah Chipanga composed a song in memory of these clerics and how they were abandoned by politics especially by not being given the national heroes status. This answers the statement by Kokosalakis (1985:367) that religion in the past had been used to legitimize political power.

The Twenty-First Century Religio-political Landscape in Zimbabwe

Most scholars agree that although Zimbabwe is a multi-religious country, Christianity controls a major share of the spiritual market (Mangwana 2015; Moyo 1996; Mutangi 2008). The three scholars agree that the Zimbabwean religious landscape generally refers to Christianity. A conformation of this assertion is evident in the survey conducted by Pew Research which discovered that, out of the estimated 12, 5 million Zimbabweans, (87.0%) are Christians, (0.9%) Islam, (<0.1%), Buddhism, (<0.1%) Hinduism and (<0.1%) Judaism. Those who belong to other religions are (<0.3%) (2012). This report was buttressed by the International Religious Freedom Report on Zimbabwe of 2007, which stresses that 76 of the 87 percent are Christians ...thereby making Christianity a dominant religion in Zimbabwe. Chitando observes that these statistics have resulted in the institution of the church to always play a role in social, political and economic issues whether it actively seek to or not (2013:43). The understanding of religion in Zimbabwe would compel one to conclude that it is a Christian state. However, this assertion was challenged by scholars like Moyo (1996) and Ndoro (2015). Ndoro (2015) charges that 'any attempt to refer Zimbabwe as a "Christian nation" and to argue that "80 percent of Zimbabweans are Christians", is not accurate as both statements are false, reckless, unhelpful and informedly meaningless'. Zimbabwean Constitution only states 'the Almighty God' in the preamble, a phrase which has to be read as a generic reference to the Divine acknowledged by the religious and sometimes the non-religious. The phrase does not give superior status to any particular religion over others (2015). If anything is to be said about the religious life of Zimbabwe, the correct and more accurate representation according to Ndoro would be to say, 'Zimbabwe is a secular state that recognises the multiplicity and diversity of (non) religious expression' (2015; Majome 2016). Moyo (1996: vii) asserts that 'Zimbabwe is a secular state officially not committed to any particular religious faith or confession. However, inspite of the constitutional rights, Christianity has become a de facto religion of Zimbabwe given that most funeral rites are conducted in a Christian way, thereby making religion and politics two sides of the same coin' (1996:viii). Besides Christianity and African Indigenous Religions, Machingura (2012: 13-14) contends that the royal ideology around Mugabe is a synthesis of religious ideologies from AIR and Christianity and he calls this new brand of religion *Mugabology*.

Churches in Zimbabwe are divided into, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Evangelical fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Union for the Development of the Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe-Africa (UDACIZA), Council of Apostolic Faiths the Heads of Christian Denominations in Zimbabwe (HOCD), Christian Alliance and the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) (Matikiti 2014: 92). The new unaffiliated categories consists of the new charismatic movements common among these movements are the United Family International Church (UFIC), Spirit Embassy, Heartfelt Ministries, Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries (PHD) among others. Togarasei (2005:349) argues that this new breed of Pentecostalism tends to attract the middle and the upper class urban residents and the elite. As argued earlier politicians form the category of the elite: they frequently visit these churches to demonstrate their religiosity. Sometimes, they solicit votes or public sympathy (Ukah 2007). For example, at the PHD Ministries all-night programmes, some prominent politicians were seen in attendance. On November 13, 2015, Magaya conducted a Turnaround All Night Prayer in Harare after visiting his spiritual father T.B Joshua that was attended by senior political figures from ZANU PF such as:

Media and Broadcasting Services Minister Christopher Mushowe, Information and Technology, Postal and Courier Services Minister, Supa Mandiwanzira, Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development Deputy Minister, Abigail Damasane, Minister of Local Government, Housing and Community Development, Ignatius Chombo, ZANU PF politburo member Tendai Savanhu, Zimbabwe Tourism Authority boss Karikoga Kaseke, Zimbabwe Football Association President Philip Chiyangwa and other foreign diplomats. During the South African crusade the Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development Minister Nyasha Chikwinya, Tourism and Hospitality Industry Deputy Minister Anastancia Ndhlovu and Mufakose legislator Paurina Mpariwa Gwanyanya were in attendance (Online Correspondence 13 November 2015).

Although there is no clear record of Mugabe attending PHD ministries, but there are facts that Magaya went to his home during the fiftieth birthday gala and fundraising dinner celebrations of Grace Mugabe and bought a pictorial book at Fifty Thousand United States dollars (Tendai Mugabe 2015). In 2014,

Makandiwa had splashed Ten Thousand United States Dollars on the bridal shower of Mugabe's daughter, Bona (Chidza 2014). Magaya at one time described Mugabe as a 'highly blessed and ranked man' (Magaya 2015). Moreover, Makandiwa's UFIC also attracts senior political figures and he appointed the Deputy Spokesperson of ZANU PF Psychology Maziwisa to be his deputy spokesperson (News Day 24/08/14). This action contradict Makandiwa's claim that he does not support any political party (Daily News 06/10/14). In 2015, Makandiwa and Magaya were requested by ZANU PF to support the party's congress since the party was failing to raise funds for a budget of Three Million United States Dollars in a country with more than 4500 companies that closed within four years (Majaka 2015).

In addition, Paul Mwazha, Aaron Mhukuta (Madzibaba Wimbo), and Noah Taguta Momberume (Marange) involved themselves in Zimbabwean politics, supporting ZANU PF. These prophets participated in the Anti-Sanctions campaign rally in 2011 together with Makandiwa. Although religion in Zimbabwe seems to be dancing the tune of politics, Chimuka warns that in our daily life, religion poses a threat to politicians because it appeals to the deepest and most profound of human passions, in the process of creating its institutions, something which the state can never do (Chimuka 2013:20).

Religionization Process of Politics in Zimbabwe

Religionization of politics is a process whereby some members of the clergy appoint themselves to be key players in the religio-political engagement with a political bias. Meyer (2007) notes that, when religion is politicised it can be very dangerous to the political order, however, throughout history, the relationship between religion and politics exhibits a suspicious communion. Meyer adds that, on one hand, there is perceived cooperation between religion and cultural traditions and politics. On the other, there seems to be mortal conflict. These noticeable bi-contradictory trajectories have continued to characterize the relationship between religion and politics whenever they occur (Meyer 2007). Religions have been very instrumental in the political affairs of Africa in a number of ways. For example, its solutions on social capital issues in providing the moral foundation for civic education, providing services and looking after the citizens, assist in the provision of health care services and education and providing safe haven to the political violence victims and advocacy for good governance (Muchechetera 2009). In view of this point, religion in Africa

pervades all aspects of life, including politics. According to Chimuka (2013), religious movements have political bearings in Africa, especially as religion and politics tend to merge with respect to the distribution of power. In Zimbabwe religion has been used as an instrument by which political formations have been able to propagate their views and garner support ahead of elections. It is important at this stage to sample some individuals who made all efforts to religionize politics from the mainline churches, AICs and Pentecostal churches.

The first individual in open support of ZANU PF was Madzibaba Godfrey Nzira. Nzira was a leader of the Johanne *Masowe WeChishanhu* (JMC) apostolic sect. He was seen by his followers as a demi-god and was also regarded as one of the most 'faithful sons' of Mugabe (Mlambo 2011). Nzira was accused by his critics of forcing his followers to grace the ZANU PF functions that include going to the Heroes Acre (Mlambo 2011). In 2002, Nzira claimed that Mugabe is 'divinely' appointed king of Zimbabwe and no man should dare challenge his office (Nehanda Radio 2011). In contrast, when Nzira was charged of rape, 2000 members of his sect went ballistic outside the court, beating up court officials and policemen on duty. Even the magistrate was argued to have narrowly escaped death when the Masowe followers pounced on her (Mlambo 2011). When Nzira was eventually released from prison by the Presidential Amnesty, he celebrated his early release by hosting a week long party, killing two beast each day to feed the guests while trucks were delivering beer (Mlambo 2011). The party was attended by the Attorney General Johannes Tomana and the then Minister of Information and Publicity Webster Shamu from ZANU PF party. After wining and dining, Nzira went on a tour drumming up support for Mugabe (Mlambo 2011).

The second example is the president of the African Apostolic Christian Council (AACC) Johannes Ndanga. Ndanga was caught in a controversial banning of an apostolic sect led by Madzibaba Ishmael Chokurongerwa in 2014. Although New Zimbabwe (2014) argues that the ban was on the allegation of abusing women and children, Ndanga visited the shrine with the uniformed police and the media crew (New Zimbabwe 2014). In 2011 Ndanga was accused of politicising church business by requesting ZANU PF to provide cars and allowances to church leaders who were spearheading party business (Zimbabwe Daily 2014). An analysis of this action brings religio-political confrontation. Matikiti (2014) succinctly captures the extent to which AACC is a ZANU PF political tool by forwarding two important points. First, he argues that the ecclesiastical organization was officially launched by then Vice President Joyce

Mujuru in 2010. Second, the open declaration by AACC to support the ZANU PF political agenda using ecclesiastical structures does not exonerate her from being a ‘horse’ being rode by politics (see Matikiti 2014:93). Matikiti decries that although AACC’s aim is to unify its member churches, they are often targeted for support by politicians who find them easy to convince. As a result, they are seen to have very good attendances at ZANU PF party rallies (2014:94). If one goes by Matikiti’s claim, it becomes clear that Ndanga went to Budiriro as a politician in religious attire, from a political background to accomplish a political mandate in the name of religion against the ZANU PF nonconformist.

Besides the fact that some mainline clerics were against the political abuse of authority, some of their partners joined politics in the use, misuse and abuse of the church. Such clerics include Kunonga supporting ZANU PF. His declaration comes at a time when other mainline churches were attacking Mugabe. For example, the Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube denounced Mugabe as a murderer (McGreal 2007). Ncube, mobilised the country’s Catholic bishops to issue a pastoral letter calling Christians to pray for Mugabe’s death (McGreal 2007). Kunonga sided with political powers to destabilize the Anglican Church in Harare. Police using the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) took sides in an internal dispute between factions of the Anglican Church, the government arrested, harassed, and prevented church attendance by Anglican clergy and parishioners of the Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA). They forced and barred several hundred CPCA-affiliated pilgrims from entering the Bernard Mizeki Shrine in Marondera. Buses and other vehicles carrying the pilgrims were turned away at roadblocks, and people were forced to hold the commemoration at a nearby showground².

In 2009, Kunonga succeeded to block all CPCA-affiliated Anglicans from performing religious services, including weddings and burials, in almost all churches in the Harare diocese being supported by the Mugabe regime. When CPCA ecclesiastical doors were forcefully closed by the police, congregants resorted to conducting Mass on sidewalks outside the church walls or renting other premises. In addition, police routinely disrupted Sunday services conducted on outdoor premises assisted by ZANU PF. Police continued to arrest and interrogate parishioners, priests, and lay leaders, charging them with committing malicious damage to property³. Most of the CPCA church buildings

² <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com> (10 February 2017).

³ <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com> (10 February 2017).

in Harare were transformed into preschools and some Anglican offices were rented as business offices or residential quarters. There were many incidences where one notices the interference of politics in religion in support of Kunonga. In one of the incidents, a police officer in Harare Suburb of Hatcliffe denied a congregation access to church premises. The priest attempted to conduct services outside the church and was detained at the local police station. The congregation followed and conducted the full service at the police station, stating that they would gather there weekly if police continued to bother their services. In one of his gathering Kunonga openly declared his support of ZANU-PF in the 2013 Harmonized elections. He urged Zimbabweans to reject MDC-T leader Morgan Tsvangirai and his party, saying they are an embodiment of evil⁴. When eventually Kunonga lost favour from ZANU PF, one political commentator scoffed that, 'Kunonga is now out of the political equation because he does not have a constituency. ZANU-PF could not continue backing him because he alienated most of the urban areas. He has reached a dead end and at the moment he is just an unemployed doctor' (Manyuke 2012).

The fourth 'cleric' is Obadiah Msindo who presents himself as a Reverend of Destiny for Africa Network an organization registered as a company. This point was confirmed by Justice Bere, in the High Court on the matter between Destiny for Africa Network (Pvt) Ltd and Obadiah Msindo (Bere 2007). According to Guma, (2013) Msindo once described Mugabe as a 'Black Moses'. Msindo was open that in 2008, he was going to get votes for Mugabe through doling out residential stands and creating employment. Political elites in Zimbabwe tended to be associated with one of the established Christian mainline or Pentecostal churches. According to Chitando (2011), the net effect of ZANU PF was to divide the church into two broad groups – those in favour of Mugabe and those opposed to his continued grip on power'.

Chitando (2011) notes that AIC such as the Zion Christian Church and the apostolic churches like the Johanne Marange have urged their members to support the President while the likes of Levee Kadenge and Sifiso Mpfu of the Christian Alliance, Bishop Anselm Magaya of the Zimbabwe National Pastors Conference apparently sympathise with the opposition and have joined it in denouncing government repression. In spite of these controversies, Mangwana warns that those religions supporting the status quo should not be seen as collaborators whereas those who oppose it are seen as heroes. Religion is an

⁴ <http://www.thezimbabwemail.com> (10 February 2017).

issue of conscience. And everyone has a different one. When the church provides a moral voice in a political discourse, it does not always have to be anti-establishment. All political parties are aware that churches complement or oppose their work. And naturally both politics and religion are divisive and they will always have a strained or complementary relationship (Mangwana 2015). Mangwana further charges that, if there is nothing wrong with Kadenge issuing statements against the Government, maybe there is also nothing wrong with priests like Rev Andrew Wutawunashwe, who are deemed to hold either Pan Africanist or nationalistic slant in their life outlook, issuing pastoral sermons deemed to identify with the same ideals as ZANU-PF. If there is nothing wrong with Pius Ncube delivering religious edicts against the Government, what would be wrong with *Mapositori* uttering supplication for the health of ZANU-PF leadership? (2015). Mangwana's statements are an attempt to balance the political and ecclesiastical equilibrium.

In concluding this discussion, religion and politics in Zimbabwe are both soulmates and antagonists. More often, politicians always attempt to make political capital out of displays of religious allegiance or respect. ZANU PF, has caused serious economic meltdown, and as a result, they are using, and abusing the church for their advantage. If the church tries to voice, the individuals are victimised. A case in point was Pastor Evan Mawarire, the champion of the #thisflag movement, who uttered a prophetic voice, which was weakened by ZANU PF through arresting him. From the discussion held in this paper, the church in Zimbabwe has allowed itself to be a tool of political entry. The researcher is challenging the Zimbabwean ecumenical church bodies to voice to the issues that affect the body of Christ. The paper is also cautioning the self-styled prophets to separate political gains from religious faith. The question to the church in Zimbabwe, is- when is Balaam (politics) riding his (donkey) (religion) going to see the Angel of God (Numbers 22:21-39), when is the donkey of Balaam going to open its mouth so that in the process of discussion with Balaam (politics), Balaam will see the angel of the Lord and stop beating the donkey? When is the church going to realize that we are just horses that are being driven by politicians for their selfish reasons? If the church, can be used, the people can be abused and resources misused by politicians.

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