

New Contours of Church and State Relations: The Faithfully Obedient Indigenous Churches in 21st Century Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article explores the role of indigenous churches in the struggle for freedom and democracy in Zimbabwe. For many years, the government of Zimbabwe has been trying desperately to assert its authority over the church. Upon realising that it could not win the battle to control churches of Western origins, the government turned to the white garment worshippers, popularly known as *Mapostori*. It is no surprise that the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), looks to ecclesiastical institutions – particularly the indigenous Churches that used to sing the praises of Mugabe, and now of Mnangagwa – to boost its support base. The church can either legitimate the current state of affairs, or call for change of the status quo. Reconstruction and transformation are fundamental pillars of the beliefs of world-affirming Christians. Human transformation is part and parcel of the work of Jesus Christ. Through the interpretive phenomenological analysis the foundational nature and thrust of the church's evolution of religious social thought, and its understanding of reality is explored. Christians in Zimbabwe have been increasingly working to promote the creation of democratic structures and the rule of law. Democracy and freedom

are the foundations of humane existence. Without democracy and freedom, Zimbabwe cannot develop, and Zimbabweans can enjoy neither happiness nor tranquillity. The points of compatibility and incompatibility between the church and the state also depend largely on the theology of particular churches. Indigenous churches are diverse, among which are the Johane Marange Apostolic Church, Vadzidzi, Madzibaba, Johane Masowe eChishanu, Masowe enguwoTsvuku, Guta raJehova and Zion Christian Church. In local parlance, they are either termed *Masowe* or *Mapostori*, and the two terms can also be used interchangeably. This article explores the use of ecclesiastical bodies by secular authorities in 21st century Zimbabwe.

Keywords: indigenous churches, church, state, democracy, human transformation

1. Introduction

Since the turn of the new century in 2000, politics in Zimbabwe has been characterised by trampling of the principles of democratic norms, such as free and fair elections, independence of the judiciary, freedom of the press and civil society and rule of law. This article postulates that there is an unholy covenant in Zimbabwe, between the indigenous churches and the ruling political party, ZANU-PF. Bennet (2006, p. 57) points out that the church is a “sacred entity which should be beyond manipulation by racial, ethnic or party political interests”. The churches have been manipulated and inadvertently work to promote the interests of ZANU-PF in this unholy alliance. The pact between indigenous churches and ZANU-PF is the nemesis of democracy in Zimbabwe. As long as African independent churches lack the strategy and vision to disentangle itself from the evil deeds of the ruling political party, and avoid the present conflict of interest, there is no reason to believe it will change direction and terminate the unholy alliance between Africa-initiated churches and the ruling political party.

At the risk of oversimplifying, I state that the coexistence and symbiotic relationship between the two institutions are the sources of constant dilemma. Figgis (1900, p. 66) opines that the doctrine that claims that the state is superior to the church in ecclesiastical matters, commonly known as erastianism, makes churches lose their appeal among Christians. In simple terms, when the state controls the church, there is a crisis in the body of Christ. It is erastianism that Christians must reject, because it represents a menacing normality in Zimbabwe. Mountains may not move, but the words of African philosophers/religious leaders expounding extremes of faith are mobilising masses. Indigenous churches are prepared to make a substantial investment in appeasement – a policy of making concessions to dictatorial powers in order to have harmonious relations (Treisman 2004, p. 345).

Many indigenous churches are willing to overlook the unpleasant features of ZANU-PF, in the hope of ingratiating themselves in the religious panorama with many other churches. The never-mind-the-politics-feel-the-spirit syndrome is a danger to religion. There is no doubt that a have-faith-and-fear-not attitude characterises the relationship between indigenous churches and the state. Indigenous church leaders are guilty of parcelling religion into the mainstream of Zimbabwean political culture by purveying a new line in soul-purification services. Many believers in independent churches have no qualms about being puppets of the state, despite the authoritarian nature of the state. Those who feel ambivalent about the

credentials of a clergy that has been, for years, silenced, infiltrated and used, are willing to support indigenous churches as the flagship of their national identity. Indigenous churches have become an umbrella organisation for politicians; however, if the church is to be relevant to the democratisation process in Zimbabwe, the prophetic voice of the church cannot be muted and silenced.

It must be noted that various types of relationships between Christian churches and government have cropped up in history, sometimes friendly and harmonious, and at times frosty. The main types of these relationships between churches and secular authorities are inextricably linked to worldviews of different religious groupings and traditions. Church-state relations are bound to interact, since both deal with citizens of a particular society; they are both social entities. The state is responsible for the worldly affairs of the people, whilst the church deals primarily with people's spiritual well-being. The linkage between ecclesiastical bodies and secular authorities has been regarded differently by different people, even within the same essential community. Some regard the state as having a positive obligation to promote the true religion.

Sometimes, the church views itself as a sole institutional embodiment of truth and goodness. Sometimes, people think that religious personalities are in charge while, in reality, they are being manipulated by politics, for political purposes. Erastianism occurs when political entities manipulate religion for their own purposes, as was the case in the Roman Empire, when emperor worship was used to strengthen unity and loyalty among its citizens. The issue of religious leadership controlling the state might be a façade. Religion is highly exploitable. One of the threads is that the theology of indigenous churches has to be understood in terms of the political dynamics in Zimbabwe, and not God's two ways of ruling the world (two realms or kingdoms). Regarding *Mapostori* relations with the state, it must be noted that religion is highly exploitable.

Using ecclesiastical bodies for the purposes of the state is termed erastianism, in honour of the 16th century Swiss German, Thomas Erastus (Verstraelen 1998, p. 49). It occurs when political actors promote their interests to the detriment of religion. Japanese Shinto worship, for instance, was no doubt erastian. Control of religious institutions by the state entails a formal rejection of the transcendence of God. Verstraelen (1998, p. 49) points out that this happens when political ends are absolutised, and when the state considers itself as the epitome of ultimate goodness. This has been the characteristic feature of erastianism: the state regards itself highly and undermines churches and religious bodies. Some degrees of erastianism are unavoidable, because churches exist within society, however, full-blown erastianism that involves total control of churches, is idolatrous in principle.

Gifford (1996, p. 46) postulates that the church should play a critical role in promoting good governance in Zimbabwe. The church should always encourage and support the government – if the government acts according to Biblical standards. In cases of bad governance, the church should raise its voice to condemn the government, and not fall into the trap of appeasement, to the detriment of citizens of the country. For the church to be relevant, it must deal with practical day-to-day issues that plague humanity; it cannot afford to ignore them.

The church's role is to build a society according to the will of God; a moral and ethical society that pleases God. It is the business of the church to be guided by moral social programmes and ethical principles of togetherness, unity and justice. It is incumbent upon the church to resolve issues that restrict humanity, and to find solutions to help people to escape difficult situations.

Hallencreutz and Moyo (1988) point out that the Marange church is one of the independent churches that has always been apolitical; the absence of any modernising elements in Marange church meant it played no role in politics. The Marange church has always been opposed to politics, right from the founding of the church, and there was never, therefore, serious conflict between the church and the colonial government, except for some minor issues. The churches were part of the total colonial structure, and, consequently, there is nothing new in the relationship between Johane Marange and the state. However, Auret (1992, p.13) states categorically that the Rhodesian government deprived churches of their neutral status and tried to solicit their support in the fight against the majority black citizens. The government wanted to muzzle the church, to gain advantage. This view by Auret is vital to the argument in this paper, since we wish to determine whether the state manipulated apostolic groups to entrench coloniality.

The post-independence government respected the Church and its mission, but bullied the church into supporting the government's political agenda. There is a tendency by politicians to manipulate the church for its own benefit. Whilst collaborating and networking with the government is critical, church leaders should avoid nurturing close personal ties with politicians. Church leaders should avoid aligning themselves to particular political parties or groups, because government may make decisions that are unacceptable to the church's moral teachings. Indigenous churches in Zimbabwe have failed to condemn government's brutality, because they support the ZANU-PF government's ideology. Church leaders, when speaking on behalf of the church, must help define the relationship between church and state relationship that must be based on freedom as a fundamental right.

2. Research Methodology

This was a hermeneutic qualitative study of social narratives by members of the indigenous churches and the state. The underlying philosophy guiding the study was interpretive phenomenological analysis. The interpretive phenomenological analysis aims at understanding the life experiences of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Qualitative research places emphasises on exploration and understanding of the meaning individuals or groups attach to a social or human problem. This approach helps the investigators to access information interpreted within the context of the people's experiences. The focus of this approach is to unpack the experiences of the people and draw meaning from these experiences. It draws meaning from these experiences and the opinions of participants. The qualitative method employed to obtain data was secondary data. The researchers made of the Internet and library research. Secondary data or library information refers already collected information with relevance to the current study. Secondary data serves as an attendant to future works with the same line of research. It must be noted also that research is not a closed

system but it is an open ended system. What it means is that researchers can build and develop the research work that has been produced by others. It means that the researchers will add on to that coming up with more and better materials that other researchers will build on (Harvey, 2010). Consequently, this research made use of a wide range of library resources on the theology of the Indigenous Churches in socio-political realities in Zimbabwe.

3. What are Indigenous Churches?

The colonial context within which many of the African indigenous churches (AICs) originated was characterised by genuine expressions of religious initiative and a desire for African Christian independency. The development of indigenous churches in pre-independence Zimbabwe tended to be strongly influenced by the political factor of colonial rule. For this reason, indigenous churches were feared by colonial rulers, who recognised their subversive and militant potential. In the majority of cases, churches sided with liberation movements working to achieve political independence.

Bourdillon (1977, p. 2) contends that the fundamental causes of the rise of indigenous churches can be sought in social alienation, which arises from segregatory policies, racism and unfair and tilted land distribution. The prophetic church required a leader who was a Moses figure, who could lead his people forth to the Promised Land. AICs arose in protest to the Western forms and expression of Christianity. This means that Africans were fighting for independence from the colonial master from within Christianity. In 1934, for example, the *Mapostori* movements of Johane Masowe and Johane Marange began to challenge mainstream churches, and the colonial government (Banana 1996, p. 123).

The African Apostolic Church (AAC), founded by Paul Mwazha, propagates a theology of liberation that recognises the potential of poor, oppressed and marginalised people to bring about their own salvation through their own efforts, rather than through the bureaucratic rubber stamp of approval from leaders of the Orthodox Church. However, after independence, AICs have tended to be co-opted by African governments, much to the chagrin of democracy campaigners in many African states. Africa-initiated churches have always been promoting a position that legitimises the perpetrators of coloniality.

Indigenous churches are churches that broke away from the North Atlantic captivity of the church in Africa, and from the inherited Western liturgy (Pobee 1991, p. 10). In Zimbabwe, they are either termed *Masowe* or *Mapostori*, which are interchangeable terms that mean the same. Daneel (1984, p. 56) identifies features of commonality in apostolic churches in terms of doctrines, beliefs and forms of governance, and concludes that their beliefs and practices are basically similar. Even though these churches have different doctrines, beliefs, and forms of governance, what makes them all indigenous churches is that they have common traits inbuilt in their doctrines, beliefs and practice. The term AICs is interpreted differently by different scholars, though the interpretations do not distort the meaning. Turner (1979, p. 92) terms these churches AICs, while Chitando (2004) terms them African instituted churches, or African initiated churches. Ter Haar (1998) called these churches African international churches, and the abbreviation AICs covers all of these terms. Simply, AICs are churches that were founded in Africa by Africans for purposes of worshipping in African styles. The

proponent of this thought is Turner (1979, p. 92), who advanced the view that AICs are churches that were founded primarily on the African continent by Africans for African people. In essence, they are entities of African origin, and in a theological sense, they rely on African and outside wells. They are funded by African resources, and their leadership is African and advances African sovereignty. Indigenous churches are adamant that Africa is a continent for Africans (Sibanda and Maposa, 2013, p. 131) – a claim that is central to their land theology. Their geopolitical space is Africa for black people. Indigenous churches are important, as they relate to the land.

Members of indigenous churches are sometimes called white-garment worshippers (Matikiti, 2017), because of the dominance of white regalia in these churches. Fasholé-Luke (1989, p. 1) opines that wearing white garments is

An indication that some African Christians were dissatisfied with the imported church structures, patterns of ministry, liturgical forms, hymnody and architectural buildings which had been introduced into Africa by Western Christian missionaries.

These worshippers wish to interpret Christianity in terms of an African ethos and insights, informed by an indigenous worldview and customs that had been undermined by Western interpretations and distortions of the Bible. So, Africans desire both political and religious independence, because Europeans fail to understand their indigenous cultures, religion and traditions. Africans had been uprooted and were no longer secure in their own land and culture; they were like aliens on their own land.

These churches are considered to be independent churches, because they are autonomous of Western representation, and they are churches, because most of the followers claim to be Christians and representing the genuine church of Christ. They are, indeed, independent churches, because they are Christian churches that originated in Africa, were founded by Africans, especially for African people.

Bucher (1980, p. 129) states that there are two types of independent churches in Zimbabwe: Ethiopian churches, and spirit-type or Zionist churches. Ethiopian churches were founded by Africans who cut the umbilical cord with missionary Churches on account of social, political and religious differences. They were founded by Africans who felt disaffected and disillusioned about mission churches, and aimed to create true African churches with African religious and cultural practices. Ethiopian churches assign great significance to Psalms 68:31: “Let Ethiopia hasten to stretch out her hands to God”. Though these churches are separate from mission churches, they still retain the pattern of worship of their mother churches. The Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, founded by Ezekiel Guti, and Family of God, founded by Andrew Wutaunashe, represent the Ethiopian type of churches.

In turn, the spirit-type churches were mostly founded by prophetic figures, like Samuel Mutendi, John Masowe and Johane Marange. These churches epitomise the central role of the figure of the trinity, the Holy Spirit, in Christian worship. Bucher (1980, p. 129) argues that “the churches accused the mission churches most particularly of having repressed the

message of the spirit and of upholding Jordan baptism from Africans”. These spirit-type churches claim to possess the real Holy Spirit that is referred to in the New Testament as their counsellor and principal guardian. Unlike the Ethiopian churches, which follow the doctrine and pattern of worship of mission churches, spirit-type churches have developed an original interpretation of the gospel, in African context and terms.

This article focusses on the Ethiopian type of indigenous churches, and briefly discusses five independent churches in Zimbabwe: Zion Christian Church (ZCC), which was founded by Samuel Mutendi, African Apostolic Church (AAC) founded by Paul Mwazha, African Apostolic Church founded by Johane Marange, the Apostolic Church founded by John Masowe, and the City of God Church (*Guta raJehova*), which was founded by Mai Chaza. Mwazha (1998, p. 3) explains that the AAC came to fruition through the calling and vision of the apostle Paul Mwazha, in Zimbabwe in 1959. The AAC is one of the fastest-growing independent churches in Africa today. The genesis of this church is not found in the immediate past, as a divine proclamation in 1957 involved a heavenly voice proclaiming loudly: “The African Apostolic Church!”, which later led to the founding of the AAC in 1959 (Mwazha, 1998, p. 3).

Initially, Paul Mwazha was a member of the British Methodist Church (Wesleyan Methodist Church), and starting having visions while he was still a member of this church. He began preaching, and the members of the new church started to call him a prophet. His preaching led to massive conversion of people, until 1957, when he sent the newly converted adherents to the various churches at which he had preached.

Paul Mwazha’s church was more “African” for his followers, because he combined many elements of African traditional religion with Christian teaching, hence, making his church more appealing to Africans. Paul Mwazha was later excommunicated from the Methodist Church because of the healing and charismatic type of church services he conducted among the people of Sadza area in Zimbabwe. Mwazha was revered by his people as a great prophet. The ACC emphasises the wonders of the Holy Spirit as revealed through dreams and visions, and glossolalia, i.e., speaking in tongues and ecstatic prayer.

The ZCC is an offshoot of Engenas Lekhanyane’s church, which had been established in South Africa in 1924. Mutendi was a migrant labourer in South Africa, where he worked for many years. His church was attractive to followers, and offered faith healing, exorcism and performance of miracles (Daneel, 1987, p. 14). For this reason, Mutendi is seen as possessing a Messiah-like personality by a legion of committed followers.

It is not surprising that many members of his church anticipated that even after his death he would continue to guide the church. Some members of the church gave testimonies that he had promised that there would be signs of his presence at death and thereafter. In line with this belief, Zionists claim that, three days after his death, Mutendi appeared in the form of a star in Gokwe where he was buried. It reassured the members of Mutendi’s presence. For about a month after appearance of the star, members were comforted by the power of the Holy Spirit. Daneel (1988, p. 270) reports that members of the church witnessed the Holy Spirit descending on them and empowering them. They claimed to be guided by the Holy

Spirit.

Another important independent church founder is Johane Masowe. He was named Shonhiwa at birth and grew up with this name. In 1932, he was reported to have become seriously ill, and died. When people were getting ready to inter his body, he came back to life and told mourners that God had brought him back to life, as God's messenger. Masowe immediately climbed a mountain to reflect on God and pray. One of the messages he gave when descended from the mountain was that he was John the Baptist, who had come to chastise people who deviated from the will of God.

Johane Masowe Chishanu ("John of the Wilderness") Church was founded in the 1930s, and carried this name on account of services that were conducted on Fridays.

Masowe's church grew fast, as his message was appealing to people in Zimbabwe. He believed that he was the way, the truth, and the life, that the dead could not enter heaven without his approval, and that he held the keys to the kingdom of God, in heaven (Sundkler, 1961, p. 324). Members of the ACC saw in him a secret Messiah and representative of God, who was hidden from the eyes of those who were not initiated into the presence of the holy (Ndiokwere, 1981, p. 42). Johane Masowe fled south, to South Africa, to establish a church since the Rhodesian colonial masters opposed this religion (Dillon-Malone, 1978).

The original Johane Masowe Chishanu Church came to settle in Chitungwiza, near Harare, after being excommunicated from a church in Port Elizabeth, in South Africa, on 7 June 1962. Several branches of this church mushroomed in Zimbabwe shortly after the death of the founder, Johane Masowe, in 1973, when he was in Zambia doing missionary work (Dillon-Malone, 1978). Johane Masowe Chishanu Church splintered from 1973 onwards into various groups: Madzibaba Nzira led the Johane Masowe Chishanu Nguvo Chena Church; Wimbo led the Johane Masowe Vadzidzi Church; Madzibaba Micho led the Johane Masowe Chishanu Nguvo Tsvuku Church and Madzibaba Antony led the Johane Masowe Chishanu yeNyenyedzi Church.

Guta raJehova, which can be translated as City of Jehovah or City of God was founded in Zvimba, about 160 km west of Harare by Mai Chaza in 1954. She was a renowned faith healer with a Methodist background. She died in 1960, and her church has thrived after her death. So important is the figure of Mai Chaza as the leader of the church that, in 2009, ownership squabbles ensued over custody of her shrine. Mai Chaza attracts special attention from feminist scholars and those engrossed in gender and faith studies. In 1953, Mai Chaza fell ill and died, but she was resurrected by God to complete her mission as God's messenger.

Legend has it that, when she went to the mountain to meditate and pray, God gave her healing powers. At the mountain she experienced divine visitations and healing powers was, thereafter, renamed by the Holy Spirit as Sinai, after the mountain where Moses received the Ten Commandments reported by the Old Testament. Mai Chaza became known as "the new Moses". The village she lived in was renamed *Guta raJehovah* and the inhabitants were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and revelations from God. Ndiokwere (1981, p. 42) reports that people travelled from far afield to witness the power of the Holy Spirit and healing.

Johane Marange is one of the most popular independent churches in Zimbabwe. Marange founded the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange (AACJM). He was born Muchabaya Momberume. He had joined the Methodist church in his youth, and had been educated in this institution. He established the largest apostolic movement in Rhodesia. Momberume founded AACJM in 1932, when he had a divine visitation in which the theophany pronounced him to be Christ's apostle, with a unique missionary agenda (Gifford, 1996, p. 46).

Momberume is reported to have been born in 1912 in Bocha. Muchabaya changed his name to Johane after being baptised (Gifford, 1996, p. 46). Momberume identified himself as the new Joseph and Moses (Daneel, 1987, p. 56). The Marange Church has always been opposed to the church's involvement in politics. To the colonial government, the Marange Church was just another native movement, which would, sooner or later, come to nothing (Hallencreutz and Moyo, 1988, p. 368). Hallencreutz and Moyo (1988, p. 368) explain that, during the liberation struggle in the 1970s secret agents of the Smith regime joined the church on the pretext of seeking healing, but found nothing incriminatory in the church Momberume was never interested in political power; he regarded his followers as sojourners in this world.

Local ecumenism transcends denominational and doctrinal barriers that do not encourage community unity and togetherness. This belief is most visible during religio-cultural events, for instance, participation in social gatherings, such as funerals and prayers for rain (Bakare, 1997, p.47; Verstraelen, 1998, p. 20). This environment provides space for shared experiences among different churches (Tswaedi, 2000, p. 10). At the national level, these churches are grouped according to confessional and doctrinal lines. The groups include Fambidzano, a national ecumenical body for AICs, the Catholic Bishop's Conference for the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Fellowship in Zimbabwe (EFZ) for evangelicals and some Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), for mainline Protestant and other churches.

4. Decolonisation of Christianity: Contextualising Indigenous Churches

Missionary Christianity created conditions conducive to the flowering of indigenous churches. African theologians, among whom Appiah-Kubi (1979, p. 56), believe that AICs took a major step in contextualising the Christian gospel by incorporating African spiritual elements into their church liturgies. They represent, in essence, a rejection of neo-imperialism and Eurocentrism:

Deimperialisation entails abandoning Eurocentrism and the spirit of the Western domination. It entails abandonment of the Western arrogance which breeds and perpetuates the idea that Europe and North America have everything to teach non-Europeans and nothing to learn from other people and their civilisations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013, p. 349).

Democracy is a subject to which indigenous churches attach great importance. They mistrust popular Western democracy, consequently rejecting missionary Christianity in favour of expressing their faith in the African ethos. Even before Zimbabwe's drive to achieve independence, they proffered versions of decolonisation and decoloniality. They rejected the

theology of Euro-American life-support systems, choosing to drink from African wells. Missionary Christianity was like a physiotherapist, who trained Africans to use their own initiative, and they had to depend on each other, just not depend on non-African ideas and people.

It was the inferior status of black people and racism, in particular, in white Rhodesian churches that stimulated the rise of indigenous churches. Racism in Zimbabwe was an impediment to social, cultural, religious and national identity. Missionary Christianity was influential in shaping black people's perceptions about their inferiority, and rubber-stamped it with religious citations. Missionaries made blacks believe that nobody can change the system from the way it is. In fact, they claimed it is God's wish that blacks live this type of subservient life.

Indigenous churches advocated for a contextual theology that would be relevant to the people and would solve their social and spiritual problems. Black Christian believers had to develop their own theological guidelines and escape the enslavement of Western theology. An indigenous Christian theology was designed to eliminate all the forces of negation that enslave people in misery such as poverty and hunger, sickness and death, ignorance and superstition, exploitation and racism.

Pobee (1991) asserts that indigenous churches have often been blamed for using unorthodox or unconventional approaches to solve challenges that plague humanity, and propagating unchristian ideologies. Indigenous churches are concerned with changing things they dislike in mainline missionary churches. They are tired of old approaches to dealing with theological issues that are bureaucratic and doctrinal, at the expense of expediency. They are practical in nature and use tangible materials to appeal to African sentiments. Indigenous churches reject the cultural paraphernalia that Westerners imposed on the Christian faith and, consequently, on African believers. Christianity was captured and domesticated by missionaries and their Western cultures. It has been wrapped up in a Western ethos, and there is, therefore, a need to peel off the cumbersome load it has accrued over the years of Western captivity. Christianity must be user friendly to all cultures, instead of condemning some cultures as primitive and pagan. Christianity must be reincarnated on African soil. Christianity has demonstrated that, throughout church history, it has the capacity and power to adapt to new cultures and environments, to meet humanity in its particular milieu. Banana (1985, p.15) has this to say:

I am sure that Jesus Christ never decreed that the black man should be saved through the medium of white culture. For Christianity to rediscover itself in the revolutionary process in Africa, it would need to abandon the unnecessary baggage that it has gathered through centuries of alliance with Western civilization. I am persuaded to believe that the church is fearful for its survival in emergent Africa, including here in Zimbabwe, because of its reluctance to adapt, indigenize and exorcise itself of Western mythology.

If the established missionary churches had listened to criticism, and used its ecumenical councils (meetings) to put right theological misunderstandings on the importance of culture, a break-away movement could perhaps have been avoided. After fellowshipping in missionary churches people developed a critical spirit, and they realised that all was not well in the church. Hackett (1980, p.216) opined that AICs' origins were largely influenced by the

negative effects of colonialism and the desire to challenge mainline churches that had arrived simultaneously with colonialism. In this regard, anything perceived to be aligned with Christian Western civilisation was heavily criticised, including the human rights discourse. The centre of the AIC's fundamental belief system is the castigation of Christian Western values and belief systems. Thus, the AICs represent resistance to change, especially change that promotes Western civilisation.

During the colonial period, it was not unusual to hear people talk of an African renaissance. Mathema (2003, p.50) describes renaissance as

something to do with a popular movement of reviving language, art, music, literature, culture, science and learning; it is a popular movement that brings back the interest among the people in the best social relations, economic activities and cultures that a people once enjoyed but had somehow abandoned on their own, or had abandoned them through physical and psychological force over a number of years and had been despising them, having been forced to regard them as no longer necessary, as 'primitive', by the new rulers.

For indigenous churches, this renaissance is of paramount importance, because it encourages them to be independent from dependence on missionary churches. They are questioning the values, experiences and practices that colonialism and racism left behind at independence; values, experiences and practices that colonialism and racism rammed down the throats of the people, using the cruellest military and psychological forces on human beings by other human beings.

Christians in regions subject to social change need to be clear in their thinking about the form of political organisation or institutions they wish to promote, so that they can participate in the political order as responsible citizens. To be effective in what they do, they must also take seriously existing conditions, the context, in which they will make political decisions. Indigenous churches realised that their history is erroneously judged as having started with the coming of missionaries, who came to eliminate what they saw as African ignorance and primitivism.

Colonialism made Africans think they were inferior, and that their history and personalities needed overhauling. The Eurocentric view of history made Europeans biased against Africans and their institutions. Frederikse (1982:9) points out that they taught in glorious ways about Cecil John Rhodes, who decided to settle some whites in Zimbabwe to make it part of the British Empire to fulfill his 'Cape to Cairo' dream. They regarded the first liberation wars waged by black Zimbabweans as rebellious. That already gave stigma of illegality- that people were rebelling against legal forces. They presented African history as deplorable as compared to the glittering history of Europe. For whites Vasco da Gama was a hero and Mbuya Nehanda was a traitor. They presented two contrasting histories: one which is full of progress and justice and ours which was not worthwhile.

Frederikse (1982, p. 9) explains that such distortions of history shaped the way Rhodesians saw the world. Rhodesians learned and believed that the settlers had discovered a land and made it theirs – indigenous churches found it necessary to correct this distorted history. The

narrative that the founders of AICs created can be equated to renowned Western philosophers who contributed to revolutionary thinking in Europe, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, John Stewart Mill, John Locke and Karl Marx. Human rights are a product of philosophical thinking. AICs reflected on the problems in society, and they emerged for a particular purpose, namely, to address particular problems in a particular epoch in history. Zimbabwe has produced countless men and women of deep religious convictions and insight. In Africa, philosophers such as Johane Marange, Paul Mwazha, Aaron Mhukuta (Wimbo) and Mai Chaza are not considered to be philosophers, but prophets. Shonhiwa Masedza, the leader of Johane Masowe eChishanu, was arrested and tortured by the settler government on allegations of inciting the masses against the colonial establishment.

The AICs appealed to their indigenous knowledge systems. They sought to preserve the essentials of their culture, which helps to identify people as a nation that differs from other nations. AICs adopted only those Western norms and values that they deemed good and benefited them, and these, together with indigenous norms and values, were used to develop Zimbabwean citizens who are endowed with norms and values that makes them better citizens. The acceptance of Christianity, urbanisation, and the proliferation of mass media made indigenous people despise their own culture. By indigenous culture one means traditional cultural practices of different ethnic groups; material culture, dance, dress codes, body marking and ritual practices are under threat.

In the 21st century, Presidents Mugabe and Mnangagwa's regimes employed religion to safeguard their interests. The relationship between religion and politics in 21st century Zimbabwe has seen politicians use religion to pursue political objectives. Meyer (2007) reports that, when religion is politicised, it can be dangerous to the political order.

In Zimbabwe, religion has been abused and taken advantage of by politicians to promote their own interests, particularly during election times (Chimuka 2013). At political gatherings, the members of the indigenous churches, especially the AICs of Masowe sects or white-garment churches are seen taking active roles on the podium. The church in the Second Republic is and has been an interested participant in national affairs that fuel a toxic coloniality. There is an increase in politicisation of the church in Zimbabwe, which is a clear sign of coloniality. The church is abused to sanctify political figures, it has been used as a political pawn in the game of politics.

Decoloniality is the search for a liberating perspective, especially in Zimbabwe political discourse, where religion is manipulated for political purposes. The church and politics of Zimbabwe need to be decolonised. Decoloniality theory enables the church to stand on its own feet, and the government to stand on its own.

5. Church and State Relations in the 21st Century Zimbabwe

According to McGowan (2005), the relationship between ecclesiastical bodies and secular authorities has been problematic since the Reformation. Since then, the church has fragmented into numerous different denominations, congregational affiliations, acrimonious fellowships, heretical sects and separatist cults. Religion is a worldview and influences people's way of life. It controls people's political views and perspectives. There is no doubt that churches have a bearing on the direction society takes. The social environment has an

impact of the life of the church too. Unfortunately, churches entered the 21st century handicapped and, thus, they failed to pursue their prophetic function of guiding society towards good governance and justice:

The church entered the new dispensation of the new Zimbabwe with largely otherworldly detachment from things social and political except for the Roman Catholic, CCJP and the ZCC, who even amid objections from some of its members, thought through the relevance of the Gospel values to the political and economic realities of the nation. Issues of democracy, human rights and development were, by and large, viewed as out of the jurisdiction of church activity. Some churches fell into the pit of political appeasement at the expense of maintaining the integrity of the church (Auret, Sep/Oct 2007, p. 22).

In times of human suffering in Zimbabwe, the church should not claim neutrality and take up a spectator role. It must not recoil into the cocoon of silence in the midst of evil. For example, the indigenous churches were largely aloof, and dithered when citizens experienced political violence. Churches in Zimbabwe decided to appeal to doctrinal affiliations, which left no room for a compromised church to question the government's political vagaries and excesses. The churches are divided, and do not speak with one voice. This situation makes it possible for the ruling political party to divide and rule them. The gist of the churches kerygma is total surrender, and limiting their role to spiritual spheres. This anti-prophetic attitude is an indictment to the body of Christ in the country. Many people believe the churches are out of touch with reality. They are advocating a postcolonial agenda, that of pacifying democracy campaigners. Their *kerygma* is tantamount to total capitulation and disregard for the cause of justice and the right to full citizenship.

The AICs' attitude, as expressed throughout postcolonial Zimbabwe, is instructive of the church's position on politics in the country. The first decade of the 21st century was an unstable period in Zimbabwe's history. Independent churches approved of President Mugabe's rule and condemned the activities of the opposition political parties, accusing them of pursuing the neo-colonial agenda of the West. Even today, the AIC see the opposition as puppets, and agents of neo-colonialism. They view all events through the political lenses of the late President Mugabe. Mugabe's reign was viewed as a yardstick of good governance.

On 15 February 2000, the ruling party lost a referendum on constitutional changes to enhance its hold on power. Civic organisations sided with opposition political parties, thereby thwarting Mugabe's proposed constitutional changes. Civil society was chastised by the ruling party and accused of being an enemy of the government. On 16 February 2000, war veterans embarked on farm occupations with the tacit approval of the ruling party. The white farm owners were accused of backing and bankrolling the opposition and, therefore, had to be evicted from the land they owned. On 17 March, the high court declared the farm invasions illegal, and ordered the police to eject war veterans from farms; the order was ignored.

Despite the sting of political violence, leaders of the AICs were among the most vociferous supporters of Mugabe; however, most have fallen foul of the law and have been exposed as criminals. One of the key independent church leaders, Madzibaba Nzira, who vociferously defended Mugabe, has been found guilty and sentenced to 32 years imprisonment for raping a

woman in his church. Mkunga (2013:2) reports that politicians have taken advantage of the Johane Marange, Masowe eChishanu and other apostolic denominations because of their illiteracy rate, the churches' subservient attitude to political leaders, and total loyalty to their spiritual leaders.

AICs' attitudes to politics has prompted many Zimbabweans to ask whether the churches are agents of political parties, and whether political propaganda has approval from the divine. According to Mkaronda (2003:6), the co-option of the faithful by the ruling party is ZANU-PF's master plan to stifle and muzzle the prophetic ministry of churches. If religious leadership in Zimbabwe questions the status quo, they are harassed, while those who surrender their prophetic role and give in to erastian features, are rewarded. Indigenous churches' leadership is suffocating the prophetic voice of the church. AICs claim neutrality in public, while they clandestinely endorse the policies of the ruling party. In reality, churches have become apologists for the ruling party – they never criticise the party, evidenced by their presence at major functions or at the airport when Robert Mugabe returns from trips abroad. The leaders of apostolic sects across the country encourage their members to buy ZANU-PF cards, to ingratiate themselves with the powers that be and curry favour. The church has abandoned its God-given mandate to be the moral harbingers of society. AICs have become appendages of political parties (Machoko, 2013, p. 21).

Some AICs invited political leaders to address their members during church gatherings. When the ruling party lost the election in 2000, it embarked on a drive to win the hearts of AIC members. Noah Taguta of the Johane Marange, Godfrey Nzira of the Johane Masowe eChishanu Apostolic Church, and Paul Mwazha of the African Apostolic Church were cunningly drawn into the politics of ZANU-PF and became willing vessels for attacking forces of change (Mkunga, 2013, p. 38). It is common knowledge in Zimbabwe that the ruling party manipulates AICs to win elections. Their members wear political party regalia at church functions where politicians are invited guests. Mugabe was seen masquerading as a white-garment worshipper, even donning their regalia, to solicit votes during election time. The religious constituency is a critical base for political parties, as it constitutes large percentage of voters in Zimbabwe. The independent churches constitute a "constituency" for politicians who are not popular, and is ready market for indoctrination.

Robert Mugabe, a Catholic by baptism and marriage, was garbed in the Johane Marange bishop's cassock, firmly held a sacred wooden bishop's crook and joyfully hummed religious songs with members of Johane Marange at Mafarikwa village, thereby exhibiting clear Erastian features (Machoko, 2013, p. 21). We could ask, is this the way bishops are ordained? Certainly not! Instead, it is a position given to a person after a great deal of consideration, after proving beyond a reasonable doubt the person's loyalty and commitment to the church. According to *The Standard* (*The Standard*, August 3, 2011), AICs publicly associated and endorsed ruling party politicians and, in turn, politicians have been reported by the media wearing independent-church regalia, which has led to criticism by other churches, which declare it blasphemous, sacrilegious and an abuse of the holy.

Machoko (2013, p. 21) reports that some senior members of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church were surprised to see Mugabe at their church; they did not know that he had been invited to their annual Passover meeting at Mafarikwa village. Ordinarily, politicians don't

visit such holy places, which insinuates that Mugabe imposed himself against their will. Some courageous believers rose up to defend their church's theological position of neutrality. They objected to being called sell-outs, and being subjected to accusations that the church's hierarchy had accepted financial hand-outs from ZANU-PF. The church played a role as a puppet of ZANU-PF, even though ordinary members, according to church doctrine, are not permitted to be involved in politics. ZANU-PF knows that most members of AICs are poor, and frustrated by the government's economic policies, and could, therefore, be manipulated easily. Zebia Chitanda, the bishop of the Johane Masowe, and president of the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), was allegedly murdered after advocating for churches being apolitical (Machoko, 2013, p. 21). Politicians should cease manipulating independent churches in Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF supporters labelled Chitanda a prophet of doom. Chitanda stood up for the truth, and this truth led him to the grave.

Material greed by some AIC leaders make them easy prey for politicians and soft targets for assimilation. ZANU-PF dangles money, food and material wealth, which are temptations many fail to overcome. Whilst church leadership live luxurious lives, the majority of church members live in abject poverty. Some AICs had become captives of ZANU-PF. Even after the removal of Robert Mugabe as president, the Association of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe (AACZ) continued to pledge its unconditional support for him, and reprimanded religious leaders who demeaned Mugabe, as false prophets. The president of the AACZ, Bishop Tsungai Vushe, said, "Those who claim that we are against ZANU PF are lying because we do not have a problem with the party and it is not abusing us" (Machoko, 2013, p. 21). The AACZ is credited with releasing a hit song, entitled *Mauya baba*, which praised, thanked and honoured the state president and extolled his virtues.

6. The Indigenous Church in the Second Republic

Mhandara, Manyeruke and Hofii (2013) maintain that the relationship between the church and politics can be likened to that between a horse and his jockey. Political activists have, for generations, used religion for colonial political gains. The Second Republic, led by President Mnangagwa, has used religion far more seriously than the Mugabe government did. Mnangagwa, during his campaign for presidential election, used the slogan, "The voice of the people is the voice of God." (Ziburawa, 2019). The cliché gained the attention of God-fearing Zimbabweans, who regarded Mnangagwa as a committed Christian.

However, just like his predecessor, Mugabe, Mnangagwa had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, and resorted to the party's tried and tested philosophy of closing up the democratic space in the country. As a result of this relationship between religion and society, Christian scholars emphasise the unity of spiritual and temporal aspects of Christianity. President Mnangagwa and his wife, Auxillia, attended numerous religious gatherings, some wearing church regalia, and calling for prayers for Zimbabwe.

Before the 15 November 2017 coup d'état, Mnangagwa visited the Mt Darwin Wimbo Shrine. The purpose of the visit was to officiate at a religious school, which had been constructed to honour the achievements of the late Madzibaba Wimbo, who had been the leader of the Johane Masowe Chishanu Vadzidzi church. The visit had political connotations, because Wimbo had, in 1957, predicted Mugabe's ascent to power (Manhanga, 2016).

The subservient role of the church is demonstrated by the switching of sides of the president of the Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), Bishop Johannes Ndanga. Ndanga said the rally on 5 November 2017, addressed by Grace Mugabe (wife of former President Robert Mugabe), was a sign that Mugabe was no longer in charge. He pointed out that ACCZ was ready to work together with the new government and urged churches to rally behind President Emmerson Mnangagwa in prayer:

We were invited to the Super Sunday and agreed but were shocked with the manner the guest speaker delivered her speech. The event was politicised and ended up being a platform to attack the now President Mnangagwa (TimesLive, 2019).

In typical Erastian fashion, Ndanga distanced himself from prior events, in which he had actively participated, as politicised and unchristian. On his visit to Bocha Johane Marange Apostolic Church, President Mnangagwa situated the role of indigenous churches:

We are approaching elections and you have assured me victory. What God has written with his hand is final. My victory has been prophesied here and nothing is going to stand in the way of that prophecy. I thank you all for that (Chiwanga, 2018)_

The president acknowledged the power of the church over governance-related matters. Chiwanga (2018) points out that the Marange Apostolic church responded to Mnangagwa's visit by assuring victory in the 30 July 2018 general elections. The assurance was given at the Mafararikwa Shrine in Marange near Mutare city which was attended by more than 250, 000 members of the independent church during the annual Passover feast:

President Mnangagwa was invited by the church's leader, Mutumwa Noah Taguta, to attend the 17-day event that ends on Tuesday. Thousands of congregants from several African countries also turned up for the Passover event. More than six evangelists who ministered during a church service held before the Passover said Mnangagwa would romp to victory with ease. (Chiwanga 2018)

Mnangagwa was assured victory regardless of the shrinking democratic space in the country. State-church relations were at play showing the impact on the current interface between theology and politics. The opposition political party, Movement for Democratic Change Alliance disputed Mnangagwa's legitimacy, and disputed the 2018 presidential elections. A close ally of Mnangagwa's, Reverend Andrew Wutaunashe, used the Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (IICC) meeting at State House platform on 1 December 2019 to implore the opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, to accept Mnangagwa's legitimacy.

We would like to emphasise as the Church that we seek dialogue that begins from the recognition that our State, our nation of Zimbabwe and all its institutions must be preserved and respected. To this end, we as the indigenous (church) leaders, we are also saying there cannot be genuine dialogue based on trying to determine whether or not you are the President of Zimbabwe; you are the President of Zimbabwe (Chiwanga 2018)

State media reports that some of the churches at the Council of Churches meeting were ZAOGA, ZCC, Johane Masowe, Jekemisheni, Bethsaida, African Apostolic Church (Mwazha) and Johane Marange (Chiwanga, 2018, p. 4). In total, 110 indigenous churches were represented. Not to be outdone in showing loyalty to the ruling party, Wutaunashe did not mince his words in declaring that Mnangagwa had won the election and that there had been no rigging – this claim had been confirmed by the constitutional court. Wutaunashe was supported by Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, the patron of the IICC, who warned that politicians were expected to comply with advice from indigenous churches, because the churches were pioneering the country's liberation struggle. He commented:

A country without laws is a jungle. If we say courts and the country's institutions are useless or say let us suspend everything for seven years, you wonder if those people are indigenous people. We are here to pray for our country and the good health of all Zimbabweans (Nhengu, 2019, p. 77).

The above statement must be understood in the context of the Movement for Democratic Change Alliance's insistence that it will not recognise Mnangagwa's presidency – they claim that he rigged the 2018 elections. Religious groups affiliated with the IICC on 2 December 2019 pleaded with Mnangagwa to support local churches, and to match the Western funding that mostly missionary mainline churches, such as the Catholic, Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, had received when they established their entities in the country:

We seek two things, namely to bring this organisation to your awareness. We seek first of all that you take note of our request that we need you and your government to dignify indigenous churches," he said. We are very grateful for the way you have listened to our voice and visited us, sometimes even under trees. But we are also saying that we would like government to take note that most of the churches, which are known as the traditional churches, were originally originating from foreign lands and Western-funded. Sometimes they make statements that represent where they come from. (NewsDay, 2019).

The IICC also asked government to disregard calls by other ecumenical bodies that had voiced concern over the parlous state of the economy and political polarisation in Zimbabwe. On 29 December 2019, President Mnangagwa thanked leaders of indigenous churches for organising a church service in Bulawayo, dubbed the Faith for the Nation Campaign. He said the platform provided an opportunity for believers to meet the country's political leadership, and to intercede with God for the nation (ZTN News Blitz, 2019).

7. The Forces of Change

This section discusses efforts to change the situation of dictatorship, either totally or in part. In Zimbabwe, the democratic system broke down with amazing rapidity and completeness. Zimbabwe moved from being ruled, virtually, by a single party, to being ruled by a military government. Dictatorship in Africa has been justified by those in power on the grounds that, in Africa, the conflict used to be between colonisers and the colonised, and that now the colonisers have gone, the unity of the colonised should not be lost.

Mugabe's civilian regime had been overthrown by a military coup, which gave way fairly rapidly to another civilian government. Military rule was a result of protests against government extravagance and corruption. The motives of the soldiers and the movement of popular discontent coincided. There is no doubt that military governments are the true successors of colonialism, which was also imposed by military violence. The status quo in Zimbabwe is maintained by the government's capacity for military violence, and the government is extremely authoritarian. One disadvantage of an authoritarian regime is that it restrains candid public debate and muzzles the freedom of the media.

Indigenous churches tend to cooperate with government dictatorships, for several reasons. Often, it is their only way of gaining the favour of the ruling party. Once a dictatorship has existed for years, people grow accustomed to it, and tend to take it for granted. There is no doubt that the commissioned commanders of the Zimbabwe national army wield immense power. On 17 December 2019, cabinet fast-tracked a bill that would do away with the running mates clause for vice presidents, which gives the president appointing powers. The bill will also empower the president to appoint the prosecutor general and human rights authority. Some farsighted Africans recognised the evils and fought against it, while independent churches found nothing wrong with such amendments.

Talent Chiwenga of Jesus Revelation Ministry in Zimbabwe is an example of a church leader who embarked on a prophetic ministry to challenge the status quo. Mavaza (2019) states that Chiwenga had gained fame by attacking government and, particularly, ZANU-PF. Talent Chiwenga has been taken in for questioning by the Central Intelligence Organisation several times, for protesting evil leaders who steal from ordinary citizens. Some people believe that the accident in which his wife died was a government plot to silence him. Vice President Constantino Chiwenga warned Apostle Talent Chiwenga against attacking senior government officials under the guise of religion:

There are some who now call themselves prophets. There is this one who is called Talent. Let it end today. Let it end here now. We don't have that way where someone moves around attacking seniors claiming to be worshiping God. God does not send you to insult others (Mavaza, 2019).

Apostle Chiwenga came to prominence after a series of pre-election predications, in which he claimed the election would be rigged and that a number of senior officials linked to the November 2017 coup would die in quick succession.

Mutongiwa (2019) posits that Bishop Ancelimo Magaya, the leader of Zimbabwe Divine Destiny, advised President Mnangagwa to attend to the deteriorating economic situation or risk punishment by God. Magaya said the people of Zimbabwe have suffered enough because of bad leadership, and it is up to Mnangagwa to make sure that normality returns – since Mnangagwa played a part in causing the economic downturn:

It is not the will of God that Zimbabweans suffer this much in a land with natural resources. We have started to witness a new wave in price increase of every commodity including basics such as bread, mealie-meal, cooking oil, etc. How do you expect families to survive? (Mutongiwa, 2019).

Magaya warned that the church will enhance its prophetic ministry in order to alleviate the

plight of the vulnerable in society. In Magaya's view, Mnangagwa should be removed through street protests. By admonishing the ruling party against dictatorship, Magaya fulfilled the prophetic mission of Matthew 5:13-16, that Christians be the salt of the earth and light of the world.

8. Towards Creative Faith

For Christians, the reason for trying to understand their experience is to enable them to make the Gospel their own. It is incumbent upon Indigenous churches to rethink theological and moral questions relating to humane living. There is no doubt that the Gospel is to be "delivered" and "received" (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-5); however, it is incumbent on recipients to make it relevant in the here and now. Theology is not necessarily a universal language about God; it is situational, and a contextual language about God. The cultural world of Zimbabweans is of paramount importance to AICs. Early missionaries, who came to Africa to spread Christianity, solicited the services of the colonial powers to impose themselves on the natives.

In the process, the conquest nature of the colonial system caused African traditional religion to diminish, and this thereby creating a vacuum that had to be filled by an alternative. This belief of the natives contributed to the rise of AICs in Zimbabwe, as AICs claimed to restore African values. The theology of AICs is based on a reconstruction approach. AICs peddle a narrative that strikes a balance between Christianity and African traditional religion, by blending the two already existing religions. AICs arose at a particular juncture, when the effects of colonialism were acute, and at a time when people were no longer in support of the colonial regime. It was a philosophical stage, as most natives had lost hope in colonial masters, and the AICs offered African churches for African people and challenges.

It is the business of theology to understand the essence of Christ and to relate the divine in terms that are concrete and meaningful to the Zimbabwean situation. African Christian theology must, of necessity, interact with material culture (dwelling places, pottery, craftwork, music, dance and dress), death rituals and burial systems, marriage rituals and initiation ceremonies. This rich store of indigenous knowledge systems must be used as a guiding reference for African Christian theology. This system of thought must be revived and revamped, and must resist the disintegration of culture. There should be a revival and promotion of the continuity of these traditional and cultural practices, since they help to show the people their identity as African people.

Colonisation by Britain and globalisation has led to cultural alienation in Zimbabwe. Biko (1978) claims that, wherever colonisation sets in, it undermines and destroys local cultures, leaving behind an adulterated culture. Western worldviews have undermined the sovereignty of developing countries. Globalisation and the spread of Christianity has had adverse effects on African ways of living. Westernisation has not made Africans better people; instead, it has led to moral decadence. It has led to the undermining and despising of African culture. The African elites who are supposed to be the custodians of culture also undermined their own culture.

This emphasis on culture does not mean abandoning Christology and the Christian faith, but it does mean rejecting Western value system and norms as being normative and of universal

validity. They are not appropriate for local Zimbabwean situations. In the words of Tutu (1978, p. 369):

We are still too docile and look to the metropolis for approval and permission to do our theology. Play games according to the white man's rules when he often is the referee as well.

In times of cultural erosion, a theology of tranquillity and doctrinal niceties is tantamount to betrayal and dishonesty. All faith is creative, because of the interplay among its internal elements. The way the traditional message is reinterpreted must be based on new questions posed by a new cultural framework – it involves rereading of the Gospel in new circumstances. The identity of the Gospel remains untouched: The fundamental core of the Gospel is unquestioned truth, it is Christological.

Over the years a great deal of culture and traditions have been added to the Gospel. The Gospel is never delivered in isolation from cultural structuring. The restructuring of the Gospel in light of African cultural particularities provides possibilities for spiritual growth and for each generation. Indigenous people see their history through daily work and culture as expressions of an irrepressible will to live a fuller life, and to achieve liberation. Theology must flow from the lives of indigenous people themselves, whose culture and faith have to serve as its foundation. There is need to distil the truths expressed in African culture, symbols and religiosity. The secularisation of Zimbabwean culture has more practical work to do with wishful thinking of Westerners. Failure to provide practical solutions is a betrayal of ordinary Zimbabweans. Theology must flow from believers' self-perception and socio-political environment. Any approach that fails to take the cognitive effects of the milieu into account misses the mark. To be authentic, any process of cultural liberation must be undertaken by the indigenous people themselves and must stem from the values of the people.

There is no developed country in the world in which the local discourse is dominated by ideas from other countries. Only neo-colonial countries are dominated by ideas of other countries. Neo-colonial ideas have done nothing to improve the lot of the black people; instead, these ideas are psychologically exploiting the people to the marrow. No country will develop if it remains a slave of foreign ideas. Theology must be indigenised for it to be beneficial to believers.

Independent churches must interrogate their pastoral ministry, fulfil its prophetic function and challenge any form of dictatorship. In the current crisis in Zimbabwe, independent churches have a duty to act on behalf of the people who suffer under authoritarian rule. These churches must embrace prophetic theology as a matter of urgency, and in line with biblical teaching. Such a paradigm shift in Zimbabwe will promote good governance and justice. Independent churches have a major role to play in the democratisation of Zimbabwe.

9. Conclusion

This paper demonstrated the long historical relationship between indigenous churches and the ruling political party, and how churches have promoted the interests of politicians in Zimbabwe. We can conclude that this paper showed that the independent churches in Zimbabwe are deeply involved in partisan politics. The paper argued that indigenous churches in Zimbabwe enhanced coloniality, due to their proximity to and endorsement of

state power in the first years of independence. The church lost its vision by engaging in political appeasement; the church has been co-opted by the ruling party. The church has been manipulated to fulfil political ends. It is interesting that ruling party activists have used the sacred places and regalia of independent churches to win votes and stay in power.

Church leaders should maintain their credibility by rejecting political worldviews that dominate them. They should not be manipulated by politicians, and should speak out against tyrannical tendencies in the country. Indigenous churches see nothing wrong with supporting the ruling party, whose interests overlap AICs views of reality. The majority church leadership became willing allies of Presidents Robert Mugabe and Emerson Mnangagwa in running down the country. This has given rise to Erastianism, whereby the state controls the church, to the advantage of the former. Indigenous churches' leadership have failed to side with the people on the periphery of society. Instead, the church has sided with politicians for the church's benefit. In order to be prophetic and relevant to society, and to question that which hinders the true good of African people, Christians must be informed by the Gospel in their day-to-day lives.

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