

## THE CHURCH AND ZIMBABWE'S LIBERATION STRUGGLE

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It is widely believed that most of the early Christian missionaries in Africa were contributors to European imperialism. They “softened up” the Africans for the takeover, called on their metropolitan governments to come in, and afterwards helped them to impose a regime and ideology of white supremacy.<sup>1</sup> Whether or how far this interpretation is true in the Zimbabwean case one will judge from the details of this paper. But there is no doubt that the missionaries, specifically, the London Missionary Society (LMS), played a large and almost indispensable part in opening the country to European visitors, if not conquerors.

The relationship of the Ndebele<sup>2</sup> people with Robert Moffat of the LMS led to the selling of the country to the British as we shall see. This created a gray line between missionaries and settlers in Zimbabwe in the eyes of the Africans.<sup>3</sup> As a result there were always suspicions in the minds of the Africans when it came to some of the intentions of missionaries.

### Early Mission Work in Zimbabwe

This paper examines the major role played by Christianity during and after the Zimbabwean liberation struggle. However, it is necessary to account for the denominations which arrived in Zimbabwe as part of the great influx of settlers.

The first missionaries to enter Zimbabwe are believed to be Portuguese Catholics who attempted to evangelize the Shona or Mashona<sup>4</sup> people. Gonzalo da Silveira of Portuguese parentage became one of the most fervent and zealous of the Jesuits. It was reported that while Gonzalo was at Goa in India, Gamba, an African chief asked the Portuguese for missionaries to be sent

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph E. Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary* (Westwood, NJ: Flemming H. Revell Co., 1964), 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ndebele* are the second largest group of Zimbabweans who live mainly in about one quarter of the western part of the country. The name Ndebele or Matabele can be used for the name of the people or their language.

<sup>3</sup> From here on, when we talk of “African” in this paper, we are referring to the black Zimbabwean unless defined otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> I shall be using these names interchangeably since they mean the same thing but in different contexts. The Shona-speaking people are the majority of the black people in Zimbabwe with many different provincial dialects. Unless otherwise mentioned, the Shona's contribution to independence will be the focus of this paper.

to his tribe who lived in the south of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). Gonzalo was sent there from India accompanied by Brother Andre da Costa and Father Andre Fernandes.<sup>5</sup> While in Gamba's kraal, Gonzalo heard wonderful stories about the kingdom of the Monomotapa (Zimbabwe), and his heart was set to do mission work there. Gonzalo is believed to have arrived on Christmas Eve, 1560, and officiated three Christmas Masses, the first known to have been celebrated in the Monomotapa Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

This missionary was very different from others whom Monomotapa had seen. When Gonzalo was received with great hospitality, and valuable presents of gold, cattle and slaves were pressed upon him, it was said that he courteously refused them.<sup>7</sup> This led Chisamharu, the Monomotapa, to let Gonzalo have a hut for his own use. The chief and his people were addressed through an interpreter, and the Christian doctrines were explained to them. Gonzalo, however, was satisfied, and within a month of his arrival the chief and his mother were baptized. With them were baptized three hundred of their councilors and attendants.<sup>8</sup>

Within a short time, however, trouble began to brew for this missionary. Some Arab traders who had witnessed with alarm the sudden growth of Christianity at the Monomotapa court began to poison the chief's mind against Gonzalo. Mingane, the Arab leader, told Chisamharu that Gonzalo was a sorcerer and had come to bring drought and famine on the country, to kill the chief and to set his subjects at war with one another.<sup>9</sup> The plot was known to the missionary, but he refused to flee. On Saturday, March 15, 1561, Gonzalo gave his last Mass. J. Du Plessis states that there were two eyewitnesses who testified to what was done to Gonzalo. They reported:

After Cayado had retired, the Father continued to walk before his lodgings and that faster than customary. He sometimes raised his eyes to heaven, where he hoped shortly to see God, and he held the cross in his hands, offering his life for that Savior who had given His life for him, and breathing forth heart-felt sighs. He subsequently retired to his chamber and prayed before the cross. Then he laid himself upon a bed of reeds and tranquilly slept. Eight soldiers who were watching them flung themselves suddenly upon him and strangled him. One of them, a barber, with whom he used frequently to converse familiarly, dragged him from the bed. Thereupon he was taken by the feet and arms and raised up, while a cord was placed round his neck, by means of which he was dragged backwards and forwards, large quantities of blood flowing from his mouth and his nose.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> David Jankins and Dorothy Stebbing, *They Led the Way* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1966), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 4.

<sup>7</sup> This leads us to believe that traders would accept gifts from the local people before this time.

<sup>8</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 5. Cf. Baxter T. W. & Turner R. W. S., *Rhodesia Epic* (Cape Town: Citadel Press, 1966), 34.

<sup>9</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 5. We are led to assume that these traders knew that in African communities sorcerers were not welcome and people could do almost anything to get rid of anyone believed to be a sorcerer because he would be bringing misfortunes to the community.

<sup>10</sup> J. Du Plessis, *A History of Christian Missions in South Africa* (London-New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), 10. Cf. Jankins and Stebbing, 5-6.

His body was thrown into the Musengezi River.<sup>11</sup> Gonzalo became the first Christian martyr for Zimbabwe.

From the death of Gonzalo, no other missionary work in Zimbabwe was reported until the nineteenth century. It started in 1836 with Robert Moffat who felt that he should be friendly to the Matabele tribe. Moffat spent most of his missionary life at the station of Kuruman, in what after his time became British Bechuanaland, now Botswana. From that place he visited the Ndebele king, Mzilikazi when they were living in the Marico valley. Moffat is said not to have been afraid, although it was widely rumored that Mzilikazi was “thirsting for the blood of the first white person to fall into his hands.”<sup>12</sup> The king in fact received Moffat politely, and after discussions which lasted a couple of days, finally showed some interest in what Moffat had to say. The interest is believed to have had nothing to do with the missionary’s teachings, which Mzilikazi totally rejected. It had much to do with the protection of the Ndebele people from outside forces. As a result, Mzilikazi gave Moffat permission to establish a mission at Inyati, the first in Matabeleland and in Zimbabwe as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

Later on Moffat accompanied Sam Edward on a journey to the interior. On that journey he took the opportunity of paying a visit to his old friend Mzilikazi who gave him a royal reception. That paved the way for another visit in 1857, a visit which had far reaching effects. It was from this beginning that the missionaries eventually won the trust of Mzilikazi’s son Lobengula. This cleared the way for Lobengula’s treaty with Cecil Rhodes and the opening up of the country of Zimbabwe to the British.<sup>14</sup>

Mzilikazi having given him permission to work in his territory, Moffat went up to Matabeleland once more in 1859, accompanied by his son, John Smith Moffat, William Sykes, and Morgan Thomas. At the end of the year their station was established at Inyathi. A permanent European outpost was now placed in Matabeleland, but the evangelizing labors of these people were not destined to bear fruit for many years. On the other hand, the station provided a home for travelers, and, by being in regular communication with the outside world, did something to encourage European travelers to visit Inyati.<sup>15</sup>

Some missionaries not only engaged in Evangelism but also pressured for colonial annexation. The years of missionary presence in Matabeleland revealed the belief that this was due to the refusal of the king to allow conversions. It was concluded that the Ndebele state needed to be “broken” so that a more amenable regime could enter. The soldiers of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) therefore became providential nutcrackers for the

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<sup>11</sup> Du Plessis, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 12.

<sup>13</sup> J. P. R. Wallis, ed., *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, 1829-1860*, vol. 1, Oppenheimer Series, no. 1 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1945), 3-31. See also Jankins and Stebbing 12.

<sup>14</sup> Wallis, vol 1, Third Visit.

<sup>15</sup> Wallis, vol 1, Fifth Journey.

preaching of the gospel. I believe that their religious beliefs were never a universal position for there was injustice in these missionaries' acts. The LMS men in Bulawayo, and Rev. Charles Daniel Helm in particular, allowed themselves to be used as tools by Rhodes in securing the Rudd Concession in 1888. Helm signed as a witness of the Concession but also wrote the endorsement: "I hereby certify that the accompanying document has been fully interpreted and explained by me to the Chief Lobengula and his full Council of Indunas and that all the Constitutional usages of the Matabele Nation had been complied with prior to his executing same."<sup>16</sup> Helm is said to have thought he was advising Lobengula in the Ndebeles' best interest. Here, as in many other places, a pre-existing missionary presence somewhat eased the colonial advance.<sup>17</sup>

The Rhodesian missionary work is also illustrative of the speed and shape of the ecclesiastical scramble. At the beginning of 1890 there was still no white missionary work settled in Zimbabwe except for the LMS stations at Inyati and Hope Fountain in Matabeleland.<sup>18</sup> The Jesuits, after ten fruitless years north of the Limpopo, had just withdrawn from the Bulawayo area. They joined Rhodes' Pioneer Column as it marched northward to occupy Mashonaland as they were in search of gold and to found Fort Salisbury in 1890. These Catholics attempted to start their mission work in the north.<sup>19</sup> A group of Dominican nursing sisters under Mother Patrick Cosgrave followed afterward.<sup>20</sup> Knight-Bruce, an Anglican Bishop of Bloemfontein, visited Mashonaland in 1891 to scout the possibility of mission work in Rhodesia and he became the first bishop establishing an important station in Manicaland at Penhalonga. Three other denominations entered Mashonaland in the 1890s. In 1891 the Salvation Army, the Wesleyan (British) Methodists, and the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa arrived, each occupying part of the central province.<sup>21</sup> In 1893 the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions of the Congregational Christian Churches established a mission in the southeast, near Mount Selinda. The Seventh Day Adventist arrived in Matabeleland in 1894. The Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) sometimes called American<sup>22</sup> Methodist arrived in 1897 in Manicaland and began work in the east around Umtali. Thus within seven years the single mission of the LMS was joined, in what had become Rhodesia, by eight other ecclesiastically distinct mission bodies.<sup>23</sup> An important point to note is that

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<sup>16</sup> Constance E Fripp and V. W. Hiller, eds., *Gold and the Gospel in Mashonaland, 1888* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1949), 201-202.

<sup>17</sup> Baxter and Turner, 90.

<sup>18</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Baxter and Turner, 113

<sup>20</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 45-48.

<sup>22</sup> We use the term "American" to differentiate it from the many branches of Methodism in Zimbabwe. Since 1968 this denomination after the union of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church became known as The United Methodist Church.

<sup>23</sup> Jankins and Stebbing, 50-55.

the British Methodist and MEC in Rhodesia made a territorial agreement in order not to be in each other's way.<sup>24</sup> Bishop Joseph Crane Hartzell states:

One important item I must not overlook, and that is the fraternal relations established between myself, representing the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Wesleyan brethren and their work and Church in South Africa. By a happy arrangement a division of territory has been adjusted, so that in Mashonaland and in Portuguese East Africa there is no lapping over of mission or missionary work. The territory of each is abundantly large, and opens northward for both to advance toward the heart of the continent. The same fraternal rule applies elsewhere.<sup>25</sup>

From this mission work, the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and its successor denominations contributed to the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe.

### **The Place of the Church in Zimbabwe's Political Independence**

The Mashona people have three types of religious expression. The first one is the Shona indigenous religiosity. Second is the missionary religiosity which is experienced in "mission" or "missionary" churches. The third type of religiosity is demonstrated in the Independent/Indigenous Churches which have refused to be part of the "missionary church." These three strands have worked side by side during and after the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe. The legacy of the missionaries of American Methodism in Zimbabwe is a mixed legacy. To assess this legacy, in this section we are going to focus on the contribution of the Zimbabwean churches in relation to Zimbabwe's quest for liberation.

With the establishment of the BSAC in Zimbabwe in 1890, the MEC, unlike other denominations had not been working in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia). MEC work began in 1897 with the arrival of Bishop Joseph Crane Hartzell. He noticed that great injustice had been done to Africans and was committed to giving them a bright future through educational facilities. In addressing people in America, Bishop Hartzell informed them of what Africa had gone through in the past, what it offered to the world, and what the world needs to do in return:

I plead for Africa, the land of sunshine and shadow; the continent on which God put more sunlight everyday than upon any other; and yet whose people for centuries and centuries had been peeled and murdered and enslaved, and who, in the blaze of our Christian day, sit in midnight darkness. I plead for Africa, where the early Christian church had its greatest triumphs, the land of St. Mark, of Tertullian, of Cyprian, of St. Augustine; the land whose Christian Bishops at the Council of Nice gave the early Church and the world the Apostolic Creed; the land that gave the world its lawgivers, that held the infant Christ in its bosom from his murderers, and whose son carried the

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<sup>24</sup> The missionaries were following the same pattern the European colonial powers took as they were partitioning Africa.

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Crane Hartzell, "Bishop Hartzell's Report," *Reports of the Missionary Bishops: General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1900* (New York: Eaton & Mains, [1900]), 27.

cross for my fainting Savior as he went to Calvary. O, Africa, I plead for thee, for thee I live, for thee I pray, and for thee, if it be God's will, I give my life.<sup>26</sup>

Not all missionaries who came to Rhodesia during and after Bishop Hartzell's time were friendly to the native people. On the issue of unfriendliness, Bishop Ralph Edward Dodge wrote about the attitudes of some missionaries as expressed by Africans:

The weakness of the church is due to the fact that the missionaries preach in church, telling people to love their neighbors but they themselves do not love their neighbors. The missionary school man is good only when he is at school. If you meet him in town, he shows you his true colors and does not recognize you.<sup>27</sup>

The training of Africans started at the very beginning of missionary activities in Rhodesia. By 1911, there were 79 "pastor-teachers" who were trained to serve a dual role, as the term implies. The number of African ordained clergy gradually increased, but not nearly as dramatic as the various lay offices in the church. By 1930, there were 10 African ordained preachers, in addition to 115 lay preachers and 48 lay exhorters. Conference statistics reveal a continuous trend to train and include Africans in the preaching ministry of the church, but more frequently as lay preachers than ordained. While allowed to preach, the Africans were generally not given leadership roles.

The missionary presence in the primary decision-making process impeded the development of top level African church leadership in Rhodesia for a long time. The organizational pyramid created no space for capable, intelligent Africans. However, in order to take advantage of the opportunities provided by mission institutions, the Africans had to become baptized Christians. This meant that they had to adopt a biblical or western name. One Zimbabwean is quoted by Bishop Dodge as saying:

Equally fantastic was the changing of names at baptism. Why should such beautiful names Chipo (Gift), Nyasha (Grace), Chuma (Jewel), Tendai (Be thankful), Kudzai (Respect), etc. be replaced with such names as Draper, Gift, Grace, Smart, Washington, Maxwell, etc. . . ? While there is nothing wrong with such English names, one really finds no sufficient reason to substitute them for the meaningful African names. I find nothing unchristian in them. . . I fear that the use of foreign names tends to alienate Christianity and thus stops it from anchoring its roots in the soil of the land. In addition, it helps to perpetuate the existing feeling of superiority on the part of one race, and inferiority on the part of the other.<sup>28</sup>

To the Zimbabwean, his or her African name reflects the person's life history, a reminder of his/her accomplishments or moments of sorrow or joy. To become Christian, therefore, meant to reject one's past. As it is well known,

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<sup>26</sup> Joseph Crane Hartzell, *Four Years of Progress on Africa: Bishop Hartzell's Report to the General Conference at Los Angeles, Calif., May 12, 1904* (New York: Open Door Emergency Commission, Missionary Society, Methodist Episcopal Church, [1904]), 31-32.

<sup>27</sup> Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> Dodge, 48.

naming means claiming something to be yours. This means that the renaming of the African Christians meant that in reality they were being claimed by other cultures. The missionaries believed it was claiming the African for Christ. Yet, there is nothing Christian in most of the English names.

Religious education was the core of educational life at the mission centers. Anyone who stayed at mission centers had to conform to the expected life style. Students who graduated from the mission schools, either as teachers or as pastor/teachers, had been transformed into devout western-style Christians. Christianity made an indelible imprint upon them, and through their influence, upon many others.

The education provided for Africans was intended to minimize the possibility that they might become a threat to the missionary position. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, the tide had changed. Some had gone to South Africa for further studies. When they returned, they were beginning to raise questions about the way the African people were being treated, both in the church and in society.<sup>29</sup>

I need to emphasize at this point that, in all fairness, not all missionaries that are guilty of the criticisms leveled against missionaries and the church. On the one hand, Rhodesia received some of the best church people the western world could offer. These men and women gave all they had to Rhodesia in terms of their time, energy, money, and even their whole lives to serve the African people. Yet on the other hand, the West also gave Rhodesia some who did great harm as missionaries of the LMS. This study will examine the contribution of some of the missionaries who were most helpful to the people.

The great turning point of the American Methodist Church was its participation in the fight against colonial domination and racial segregation. In 1956, the American Methodist Church in Rhodesia welcomed Bishop Ralph Edward Dodge as its new bishop. In his first address to the pastors he said:

I would like to visit all of you, my brothers, in your circuits and get to know the people and the church well. But I am going to be radical. I will not carry any food when I visit you. I will come and stay with you in your homes, wherever you are. I know that is the African custom and we will observe it.<sup>30</sup>

Such action was radical break from the usual pattern of the missionaries. Many missionaries had always stayed in missionary guest houses and carried their own bedding and food plus a cook. Bishop Dodge's radical ideas continued to be manifested in his sermons, teachings, conversations and above all his actions. The old pattern of racial segregation within the church was breaking down and Bishop Dodge would work to break down the customs of the white settlers in the society at large.

<sup>29</sup> Dodge, 54-55.

<sup>30</sup> Ralph E. Dodge, *The Revolutionary Bishop: Who Saw God At Work In Africa: An Autobiography* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, c1986), 116.

The period from 1955 to 1958 saw an awakening of African nationalism in the country. The honeymoon of racial partnership during the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland<sup>31</sup> was over. All this now marked the beginning of the fearless opposition to the white racists by some church leaders, including Bishop Dodge. As a spokesperson of the American Methodist Church, he was committed to fight against racial oppression by the white minority in Southern Rhodesia.

The new bishop puts his finger on the crucial point about the missionary work in Africa saying that

The major blind spot of the total missionary program in Africa may well be the failure of white leaders to foresee the approaching rebellion and to train nationals for administrative responsibility. Although some colonial governments have shown interest in educating the masses of Central Africa, none have set about training Africans realistically for administrative responsibility under democracy.<sup>32</sup>

Before the time of Bishop Dodge, instead of teaching the African students to think independently and to develop fully as human beings, much of the curriculum, especially the religious elements, trained the Africans to be obedient to their white masters. On that point Bishop Dodge quotes one high school student as saying:

I dare say that many missionaries I have dealt with leave not much to be desired about their earnestness in their Church work. There is an undeclared emphasis on seeking a livelihood and perpetuating their position as bosses over the Africans.<sup>33</sup>

No Zimbabwean who went through the time of political strife could fail to recognize Bishop Dodge's dismay: "Some missionaries refused to promote Africans, saying that if they did so, they themselves would be forced to leave Africa."<sup>34</sup> Bishop Dodge claims: "If Christianity calls for love, why is it that some of the white people don't show in their treatment of the Africans? The answers is, 'They don't believe the gospel or they would act as Jesus did.' In Africa, as in Europe, America or the Orient, many look at the church and shout 'hypocrisy.'<sup>35</sup> It is important to remember that oppression permeates not only a political system, but it involves, most importantly, a spiritual system that claims God on biblical grounds. The oppressors saw themselves as members of God's elect nation. What kind of theodicy can one propose in a system where God's omnipotence is seen in the force of the policy, where the state maintains law and order against the majority of the population?

In the Foreword of the biographical account of *The Revolutionary Bishop*, Bishop Abel T. Muzorewa writes:

Physical giants are measured in feet and inches, heroes and heroines of military

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<sup>31</sup> This Federation covered Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

<sup>32</sup> Dodge, *The Revolutionary Bishop*, 153.

<sup>33</sup> Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*, 32.

<sup>34</sup> Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*, 32.

<sup>35</sup> Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*, 55.



careers are appraised in terms of the number of battles they fought and won. But the person whom the reader is about to meet and experience is neither giant nor military hero. Yet in terms of the quality of his life, the degree of his commitment to ultimate values—to God, Christ, and the Church, his love for people, his indomitable spirit and his inimitable insight, Ralph Edward Dodge is indeed a giant and hero.<sup>36</sup>

Bishop Dodge came at a time when the hierarchical structure of the church was so dominated by white missionaries that the chance for African advancement was apparently negligible. In the late 1950s, there were nearly four hundred white American Methodist missionaries in Africa. At least ninety of them were in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

Bishop Dodge immediately advocated the transfer of power within the church from the white missionary community to indigenous leadership. His first action was to bring some Africans into his cabinet. With this inclusion of Africans on his cabinet and the appointment of Africans as heads of schools, Bishop Dodge broke the long-standing domination of missionaries in these most critical decision-making boards.

In his capacity as the leader of American Methodism and in his determination to prepare Africans for leadership in the church, Bishop Dodge worked very closely with Bishop Newell Booth in North America. He made a special appeal to the Methodist churches across North America. The response was phenomenal. In 1961, over forty Africans left Rhodesia for colleges and universities in Great Britain and North America. One of these people was Rev. Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa who later succeeded Bishop Dodge and became the first African Bishop in the Rhodesia United Methodist Church. Muzorewa returned from studying in the United States in 1963.

His return home coincided with the coming to power of the Rhodesia Front Party with Ian Smith as its leader and Prime Minister. By that time, all the nationalist leaders were put either in political exile, detention, or in prison. This was the point in history when the Zimbabwe nationalist politics had gone bad. There was significant fighting among the black people themselves in 1963 because of the split between the followers of Joshua Nkomo, a Ndebele, and those led by Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole, a Shona. It was during this time also that the churches started to assume a prophetic voice to liberate Zimbabwe.

By early 1965, most of the positions in American Methodism that had been in the hands of missionaries had passed into the control of these Africans. Indeed, Bishop Dodge's vision became a reality. He portrayed an image of a committed church leader who was trying to fight against an unjust segregated church and society.

It should also be noted, however, that while the missionaries were reluctant to develop higher education for the Africans, other factors also mitigated against education. These included the following: (1) the Africans

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<sup>36</sup> Dodge, *The Revolutionary Bishop*, vii.

themselves initially were reluctant to go to school so that some of the early years of missionary work were spent in visiting people in villages and persuading them to come to the mission to learn. In some cases they had to be bribed with clothing and food. (2) Colonial governments did not encourage missionaries to introduce higher education for Africans; in fact, they frequently discouraged it. (3) Many Africans were very poor and could not afford higher education for their children. The conservative missionaries and the colonial governments took advantage of African ignorance and poverty and intentionally delayed the introduction of higher education for Africans, while at the same time; they encouraged the establishment of industrial schools.

In spite of all this, some Africans took advantage of what was provided by both missionaries and colonial governments. At the World Methodist Conference in Nairobi in 1986, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa made reference to the gift the missionaries and colonial governments gave to Africa unknowing of its liberating power, the Bible:

when the white man came to Africa he came—we had the land, you see—and he came and had a Bible. And he said, “Hello, hello.” And we said, “Hello,” and he said, “Let us pray.” And when we open our eyes we discover he’s got the land now, and we’ve got a Bible. . . . But who said that that was a bad bargain? We are taking the Bible seriously, because when you came and you gave us this you gave us one of the most subversive things in a situation of oppression and injustice.<sup>37</sup>

Some missionaries, like the colonial powers, forgot that God intervenes in God’s time. Zimbabwean Christians, on the other hand, with an increasing number of missionary allies, believed that God would lead them out of oppression. Bishop Dodge, indeed, appeared on the scene at the right time and with a specific assignment from God, namely, to transfer power in the missionary-led church to the Africans.

People who were not in the midst of this struggle accused the church in Rhodesia, particularly the American Methodist Church starting with Bishop Dodge and later Bishop Muzorewa, for being involved in the liberation struggle of the Zimbabwean people. What these people forgot was that one cannot preach a gospel of salvation to an oppressed people. During the struggle for liberation in Zimbabwe, many churches moved from the time in history when the church preached a civil religion, a nationalized triumphalist gospel that sought “conversion” of the “savage” before they could taste the sweet honey of “salvation” with their masters. This is how most of the missionaries coming into Zimbabwe thought of the African people (savages). Bishop Muzorewa had this to say:

It soon became clear to me that our theology needed to be clarified and our concerns needed a broader base. I felt at ease in following in the footsteps of Bishop Ralph Dodge. He, too, had stressed that the Christian faith must be proclaimed as a total

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<sup>37</sup> Joe Hale, ed., *Proceedings of the Fifteenth World Methodist Conference* (Nairobi: The World Methodist Council, July 23-29, 1986), 66.

gospel for the total person. The whole gospel for the whole person I believed-and still believe-has a dynamic that will lead many to Christ as their liberator, their Savior and Lord.<sup>38</sup>

Many Christians were, and some are still, lacking in this kind of understanding. They had yet to seek effectively the peace of the Lord in the heart of the social struggle. They needed to seek communion with God and one another. This kind of understanding is needed in all cultures where people are under oppression. It needs to be known that these church leaders and many Christians in Zimbabwe fought to give “a total gospel to a total person.”

The African knowledge of God affirms a God who is in the midst of our historical situation, God who is the liberator of humanity from oppression, exploitation, and all forms of alienation. It is in this spirit that Gustavo Gutierrez writes:

we can say that all the political theologies, the theologies of hope, of revolution and of liberation, are not worth one act of genuine solidarity with exploited social classes. They are not worth one act of faith, love, and hope, committed. . . in one away or another. . . in active participation to liberate man from everything that dehumanizes him and prevents him from living according to the will of the Father.<sup>39</sup>

Bishop Dodge, as a church leader, voiced the concerns of the African people in Rhodesia at the very time the political parties were banned and their leaders silenced in detention. He had, from time to time, preached “a total gospel for the total person.” That is the gospel of political and spiritual freedom. He led the church in a denunciation of the proposed Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI).<sup>40</sup> He also severely criticized the government’s practice of detaining people without trial.

Following the publication of his book, *The Unpopular Missionary*, Bishop Dodge was labeled an enemy of the status quo in racist Southern Rhodesia. This resulted in his being declared “*persona non grata*” by the Smith regime. On July 17, 1964, Bishop Dodge was deported, together with his colleague Rev. Robert Hughes.<sup>41</sup> His deportation stunned the nation, especially the oppressed majority, the African people. This was a great loss not only to the American Methodist Church, but to all Africans in Rhodesia. This deportation brought with it public demonstrations by the American Methodist Church members wearing their church uniforms, both lay men and women. Clergy wore black suits with their clerical attire. They all wore black armbands signifying that they were in mourning, as it is in the Shona

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<sup>38</sup> Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa, *Rise Up and Walk: The Autobiography of Bishop Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 68.

<sup>39</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1973), 308.

<sup>40</sup> George Klein, “Rhodesia and the World’s Conscience,” *The Christian Century* (February 2, 1966), 83:5, 158.

<sup>41</sup> “Bishop Dodge expelled by Southern Rhodesia,” [editorial] *The Christian Century* (August 5, 1964), 81:32, 981.

culture. They carried placards protesting the deportation of Bishop Dodge. Other denominations joined the demonstration. Fifty-eight Salisbury clergy of different denominations carried the protest to Mr. Ian Smith's office.<sup>42</sup> In their letter to Mr. Smith, the Salisbury clergy made it clear that the act of deporting Bishop Dodge and Rev. Hughes "would create a wide gulf between the government and world Christian opinion."<sup>43</sup> Their words fell on deaf ears, but the demonstration initiated many leaders into a new style of political involvement. Bishop Dodge was given only two weeks to say goodbye to his conference. Those two weeks were enough for him to empower and encourage the church to continue to fight for justice, peace and freedom.

In the true stature of a God-led church leader, Bishop Dodge had accelerated native educational, medical and church leadership and had campaigned vigorously against oppressive rules of the Smith regime. Although he was deported, he had stimulated hundreds of Zimbabwean church people to take up the torch in the quest for independence. Seeds of revolution had been sown in the minds of many clergy in the American Methodist Church. One does not have to wonder why many of the American Methodist pastors participated in politics.

Bishop Dodge, as a church leader, proved that it is possible to suffer with the oppressed and walk with them in their struggle for liberation. Through his guidance, the American Methodist Church had now been found to be committed to the struggle of the black people who were oppressed on their own land. It was now clear in the minds of many that the church needed to assume a prophetic voice and to speak with one voice on behalf of the oppressed masses of Zimbabwe. Through his leadership, the American Methodist Church assumed the status of the church of the people. Many clergy joined Bishop Dodge in leading their societies in the battle to recover their own identity and the struggle to be human again before the eyes of white people living on their land.

As a way of saying thank you to Bishop Dodge for standing with them in times of pain, the Zimbabwe Annual Conference invited him to participate at its centennial celebration on December 9-11, 1997. This was the first time that Bishop Dodge went back to Zimbabwe after his deportation in 1964. He was quoted saying:

I have never craved leadership. I'm not a natural leader and was forced into the things I've done. My whole contribution to Africa came at the right time for what I felt I could give. My contribution was trying to encourage people to assume responsibility and leadership. The reason I was expelled was that I had written a book that criticized the church on racial matters and said the church should be preparing to take over or train people to take over responsibilities. The assumption was that if the church could prepare people to take over, then why couldn't the government do the same thing? There was the assumption there that the time had come for a transfer of authority. . . and the government did not like this. . . Politics,

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<sup>42</sup> Klein, 158.

<sup>43</sup> "Bishop Dodge expelled by Southern Rhodesia," 981.

economics, social life all interact with religion, and certainly religion, if it is vital at all, should influence each of the other phases of life. True religion has no bounds, knows no frontiers.<sup>44</sup>

Bishop Dodge was not the only church leader who stood up to the Smith regime; there were many. Another influential missionary church leader was Bishop Donald Lamont of the Roman Catholic Church in Umtali. In 1964 when Ian Smith declared the UDI, Bishop Lamont was one of those from the Salisbury Council of Churches who stated that the African people did not recognize the Smith regime as a legal authority in Rhodesia.

When the Land Tenure Act was proposed by the Rhodesian Front in 1969, Bishop Muzorewa had this to say about his colleague Bishop Lamont and his church:

It was the Catholics who championed most effectively the cause of the oppressed. Bishop Donald Lamont of Umtali called the Smith regime with its oppressive laws 'the real terrorists.' He said: 'The Rhodesian system which keeps a whole people in subjection differs not in essence, but only in degree, from the Nazi doctrine of racial superiority.'<sup>45</sup>

This statement by Bishop Lamont could have claimed his life. But here is a church leader who felt that dying with the oppressed was better than accepting a constitution which only gave freedom to a few privileged people, the whites. The ultimate destiny of Bishop Lamont took place in 1976 when he was accused of failing to report the presence of the freedom fighters. In his defense, he said, "to have reported the presence of the guerillas would not have been compatible with Christian conscience."<sup>46</sup>

The Rhodesian government found Bishop Lamont guilty of the charge, and they deported him. Nevertheless, Bishop Lamont's actions and speeches had an impact on the Smith regime. His speech about harboring terrorists had made the whole world aware of the plights of the suffering Africans in Rhodesia. If the Zimbabwean history is to be correct, the names of Bishops Dodge and Lamont deserve special recognition because of their sterling performance in the quest for independence in Zimbabwe.

With the deportation of Bishop Dodge, the American Methodist Church was left in limbo. People were like sheep without a shepherd. For four years, Bishop Dodge continued as their bishop in exile. A bishop for Rhodesia needed to be elected in 1968. In the same year the denomination changed its name from the Methodist Church to The United Methodist Church (UMC). This came as a result of the union of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Churches in the United States.

In Rhodesia, the question was, "Who will take over the office of bishop in this church?" Another question on people's minds seemed to be "Whoever

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<sup>44</sup> Linda Green, *United Methodist News Service Online*, <http://www.umc.org/umns.html>, January 5, 1998, 1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Muzorewa, 136.

<sup>46</sup> Muzorewa, 174.

will be elected, will the person take the same political stand Bishop Dodge took?" These questions represented the atmosphere that prevailed in the church as they looked forward to a new bishop and a new era in the history of the church and country. This is the kind of atmosphere which witnessed the inauguration of Bishop Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa as the first African bishop in Rhodesia.

Bishop Muzorewa recounts Bishop Dodge's five principles of leadership given in the charge to him during his consecration service as the Rhodesia Resident Bishop:

First, maintain your personal integrity; honest in dealing with other people, honesty in dealing with yourself, honesty in dealing with the Father. . . . Second, maintain your concern for people; do not forget those of different classes, those who walk far from where you normally walk. Don't forget the despised. . . . Third, maintain an open mind; learn as well as speak; admit your mistakes. . . . Fourth, maintain vision and foresight; he who would lead people must be ahead of them; he must look into the future. You must begin now to build the foundation in Africa upon which our Church of the year 2000 can stand. . . . Finally, maintain contact with the true vine; your ministry will fail if you are out of harmony with God's plan and purpose for you and for His Church; keep sensitive, deeply sensitive to the whisper of God's voice. As God has spoken through the prophets in past generations, so prophets must continue to speak to His people today. Listen to the Holy Spirit, and as you listen you will be taught, and as you are taught you will go forth in faith to help to establish God's Church-a new Church in a new Africa and a new world.<sup>47</sup>

This powerful commission became a motto in Bishop Muzorewa's term as bishop of the UMC in Rhodesia and later Zimbabwe. One thing was clear in Bishop Muzorewa's mind as he assumed his position of church leadership: people needed "a total gospel." This meant that to love as God loved meant to be in total service to the total person, spiritually and socially.

As far as Bishop Muzorewa was concerned, participation in politics was not a secular activity only, but also part of the Christian duty. With this kind of thought, he felt comfortable following in the steps of Bishop Dodge. All this meant that the American Methodist Church now known as The UMC was once more going to pursue the issue of fighting against injustices in Rhodesia. In his life as bishop, Bishop Muzorewa spoke of and believed in God who not only created humanity in God's likeness, but who also liberates creation, since, as Gutierrez puts it "the church has for centuries devoted her attention to formulating truths and meanwhile did almost nothing to better the world."<sup>48</sup> This is what Bishop Muzorewa and many church leaders in Rhodesia were doing, "formulating the truth and making the world better for everyone," which became unacceptable to the outside world. True spirituality is rooted in one who comes to uproot injustice and to offer total liberation. Gutierrez has this to say:

This is a spirituality which dares to sink roots in the soil of oppression-liberation. A

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<sup>47</sup> Muzorewa, 66.

<sup>48</sup> Gutierrez, 10.

spirituality of liberation will center on a conversion to the neighbor, the oppressed person, the exploited social class, the despised race, the dominated country. Our conversion to the Lord implies this conversion to the neighbor. Evangelical conversion is indeed the touchstone of all spirituality. Conversion means a radical transformation of ourselves; it means thinking, feeling, and living as Christ—present in exploited and alienated man. To be converted is to commit ourselves to the process of the liberating of the poor and oppressed, to commit oneself lucidly, realistically, and concretely. It means to commit oneself not only generously, but also with an analysis of the situation and the strategy of action.<sup>49</sup>

With Bishop Muzorewa choosing to follow in the footsteps of his predecessor, Bishop Dodge, there was no going back of the church's involvement in the liberation struggle. The stage was set. People had to be liberated from the feeling that it was right to suffer here on earth because Christians can look forward to a better life in heaven.<sup>50</sup> After his election as bishop of the Rhodesia Annual Conference of the UMC, Bishop Muzorewa's actual immersion into the political arena as a church leader began in 1969. He joined hands with the Catholic and Protestant church leaders to reject the new constitutional proposals of the Smith regime.<sup>51</sup> The new proposals were earmarked to cater for white people. On June 5, the bishops sent a joint letter for publication entitled "BISHOPS SLAM PROPOSALS: Church warns, this will breed hatred."<sup>52</sup> This was only the beginning of the involvement of Bishop Muzorewa in the quest for liberation in Zimbabwe.

One needs to keep in mind that there were many clergy who helped to teach Africans in Rhodesia about their rights to freedom as human beings. Among them were Rev. Canaan Banana (British Methodist), Rev. Paul Burrough (Anglican), and Rev. Christopher Chikasha (African Reformed), to mention a few. They represent a group of church leaders who spoke out boldly against the Smith regime. The involvement of these people of God gave encouragement to the struggling, oppressed, underprivileged people of Zimbabwe. The church was seen as an organization addressing the real problems of the people. Members of the clergy were in the forefront denouncing the evil system of racial discrimination and the oppressive laws of the Smith regime.

Following the victory of the Smith regime in the constitutional referendum, the government sought to pass a Land Tenure Act which was to bring about land apartheid in Rhodesia. In January, 1970, the UMC Rhodesia Annual Conference declared that:

We. . . view with great alarm the passing through Parliament of the Land Tenure Act. The philosophy behind this Act and the possible grave results issuing from the enforcement of it, will, in our opinion, not avoid racial friction but on the contrary will seriously intensify it. . . . The Church is one. We cannot tolerate any division into African and European congregations. . . . We stand for equal rights for all racial,

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<sup>49</sup> Gutierrez, 204-205.

<sup>50</sup> Muzorewa, 55-56.

<sup>51</sup> Muzorewa, 76.

<sup>52</sup> Muzorewa, 77.

cultural, and religious groups.<sup>53</sup>

The declaration was sent through the Rhodesia Christian Council when it met for its annual meeting in Umtali in March of that year. The Christian Council then proposed civil disobedience as the appropriate Christian response to this racist matter. Bishop Muzorewa was then chosen as one of the church representatives to lodge a strong protest to Ian Smith. This confrontation with Mr. Smith took place on June 4, 1970, in Mr. Smith's office.<sup>54</sup>

This proposed Act included regulations which would restrict the church in a number of ways. Fr. Randolph of the Roman Catholic Church explained to the bishops and leaders of different denominations the restrictions which would be imposed on the church as follows:

The church is no longer at liberty to move freely among people of all races to carry out her mission. People of different races may no longer freely associate for the worship of God in churches outside their own prescribed racial areas. The church has no longer the right to admit to her schools whomsoever she wills. The church is forbidden to admit to her own hospitals people of a race different from that of the prescribed area. The church can no longer—without a permit from a Minister of State—admit ministers and other church workers of different races to live in the same communities. The church can no longer use freely its own land or property.<sup>55</sup>

After hearing what the Land Tenure Act was all about at their Annual Conference at Old Umtali, the UMC leaders endorsed the ecumenical statement concerning this Act stating that “it cannot be reconciled with the Christian faith.”<sup>56</sup> It was during this conference that Bishop Muzorewa realized that even his very presence at Old Umtali could be prohibited because it was in the white people's area. As an African, he would be required to have a permit to enter that zone. Later that day he gave a statement on his plan of action:

Let it go on record that I will fight as a Christian and by Christian methods of non-violence. But I will sit in the same chair as I have been sitting in the chair before... and I will not move from it. I will not move from it! They will have to carry me away instead.<sup>57</sup>

In the true image of a church leader who was committed to liberating his race, Bishop Muzorewa was not going to give in, and there was no room to retreat. He felt that the church and the Zimbabwean people were comrades in arms. The bishop's effectiveness in consciousness-raising of the people resulted in his being banned to enter any of the rural areas where the majority of the African population lived. The bishop was not intimidated by this act

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<sup>53</sup> Muzorewa, 79-80.

<sup>54</sup> Muzorewa, 80. Rev. Andrew Ndhela and Rev. Christopher Chikasha, together with Bishop Muzorewa, were the three blacks in a delegation of seven church leaders who represented the voice of the church at their first confrontation with Ian Smith on that day.

<sup>55</sup> Muzorewa, 81-82.

<sup>56</sup> Muzorewa, 82.

<sup>57</sup> Muzorewa, 82.



and he declared that he would “rather obey God than man.”<sup>58</sup>

The Smith regime was not aware that they had ignited a spark of fire in members of the UMC. The very day the bishop was banned from going to the rural areas, about 300 women, on their way from a revival meeting they were attending, demonstrated in the city of Umtali wearing their church uniforms and holding placards. Bishop Muzorewa recalled the incidents which followed these women’s demonstration:

The following Saturday, Salisbury shoppers, politicians and police were startled to find persons at every major intersection of the downtown area who were protesting against my banning. Without any notice they had descended on Salisbury by night so as to be in their places by 6 a.m. There were women in the sky-blue dress, with red sleeves and belt and white turban—the uniform of United Methodist Women. Men wore the blue sashes across their chests which were the insignia of ‘Fishermen’ (*Vabvuwi*), a churchmen’s organization. Missionaries from America and Sweden demonstrated side by side with their African colleagues.<sup>59</sup>

It was reported that two grandmothers stood outside Ian Smith’s office holding a placard saying “Woe to Christian Oppressors!”<sup>60</sup> This shows that every generation was affected and people were ready to fight for their rights. Many small towns and rural areas also stood behind their bishop and they, too, caught the fire of demonstrations. These demonstrations helped the African people in Zimbabwe to see the bigger picture of how strong the oppression had grown in their country.

It is important to bear in mind that by this time all the political leaders in Rhodesia were in detention. The situation now was demanding a political leader who was neutral to lead a unity movement to fight the Smith regime and its oppressive doctrines. Bishop Muzorewa’s lack of any previous experience in nationalist’s politics in Rhodesia was, therefore, a major factor in his selection as the African National Council (ANC)’s leader.

Bishop Muzorewa was reluctant to accept the position because he was not sure it was acceptable with the leaders of the two political groups which were coming together—the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU). Bishop Muzorewa was assured that both Rev. Ndabaningi Sithole (ZANU) and Mr. Joshua Nkomo (ZAPU) would support this new party. Bishop Muzorewa also feared how his church members were going to react to the idea of him not only working together with other church leaders but serving as a political party leader as well. For three weeks he prayed about it and conferred with his church leaders, and they gave him their word of approval and support. He finally accepted the position and the party chose Rev. Canaan Banana as his Vice-Chairman.<sup>61</sup>

All this came as a result of the Rhodesian and British need to impose

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<sup>58</sup> Muzorewa, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Muzorewa, 85.

<sup>60</sup> Muzorewa, 86.

<sup>61</sup> Muzorewa, 94-95.

the Pearce Commission Proposal as an acceptable means of independence.<sup>62</sup> The Zimbabwean people also needed a leader who could restore international confidence that the people of Zimbabwe were ready for African majority rule. They needed someone who could inform outsiders that the proposals for a settlement were a clever way to legitimize and empower white minority rule. The bishop, in his initial stages as the leader of the ANC, was able to persuade people to oppose the Pearce Commission Proposals as an acceptable means of independence with a resounding *Kwete*, "NO."<sup>63</sup>

On behalf of the ANC, Bishop Muzorewa traveled to London's Trafalgar Center and to the United Nations Headquarters in New York City. He informed the Security Council that

The African National Council is a spontaneous grass-roots reaction. . . not a political party. It represents the overwhelming number of persons in Rhodesia who have rejected the Proposals as being unacceptable to them. . . . The Proposals, contrary to some arguments, do not de-colonize Rhodesia, rather, they re-colonize the country and to ensure the success of this dangerous and dishonorable venture the British Government seems prepared to subsidize it. . . . Our rejection of these proposals is therefore unanimous.<sup>64</sup>

All this fell on deaf ears, but we thank God because Bishop Muzorewa did not give up his quest for liberating his country. These activities could have cost Bishop Muzorewa his life, but he was determined to preach the "total gospel for the total person" in their quest for freedom. He believed that there was no peace without freedom and vice versa.

Through the leadership of Bishop Muzorewa, a devoted and God-fearing church and political leader, the Zimbabwean people won their country back in 1979, and he became the first black Prime Minister in this country. The Zimbabwean general elections were held in 1980, and the political leadership went to Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe as the Prime Minister and Rev. Canaan Banana became the first African President of Zimbabwe. As we can see, both the first Prime Minister and the first President of Zimbabwe were church clericals. This shows how religious leaders played an important role in Zimbabwe's quest for liberation.

If the history of Zimbabwe is to be accurate, the name of Bishop Muzorewa, as a church leader, rightly deserves a place. What he did will forever be part of Zimbabwe's history whether written or not. It is common knowledge that many criticisms have been made of Bishop Muzorewa's activities in politics. Many things have been imagined about him. Many people did not take time to look at his positive contributions as a church

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<sup>62</sup> Muzorewa, 97. This was a settlement these governments had proposed which stated: "In the period before and during the test of accountability normal political activities will be permitted to the satisfaction of the Commission, provided they are conducted in a peaceful and democratic manner." This was a way of wanting to control what the Africans could and could not do politically.

<sup>63</sup> Muzorewa, 95.

<sup>64</sup> Muzorewa, 111-112.

leader in the liberation of Zimbabwe. His good deeds have been smeared by the propaganda campaign against his integrity. The American Methodist Church through the leadership of Bishop Dodge and later Bishop Muzorewa, among other Christians from different denominations stood with the African people during the time people needed them most. Many thanks go to God of all ages for making it possible for the church to stand by the people when they were in time of need.