African Initiated Churches and Party Politics: Zimbabwean Experience

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Abstract

The author argues that some African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe like the Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC), Johane Masowe weChishanu Apostolic Church (JMCAC), and Africa Apostolic Church (AAC), were co-opted by the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front’s (ZANU- PF) political ideology of authoritarian nationalism and that made them an indispensable constituency for winning national elections. Co-optation into ZANU- PF’s political ideology was achieved through the combined use of violence and bribery on church members and leaders. AIC leaders were susceptible to co-optation because they deliberately disregarded social justice and human rights issues and opted for material and financial benefits from politicians. Their churches also lacked international connections with autonomous AICs of the same denomination. The research revealed a symbiotic relationship between church leaders and politicians at the expense of the laity and Zimbabwe. The analysis yielded the conclusion that AICs, political leaders, and others just like them, should be removed and replaced by people who better serve the well-being of Zimbabwe’s population.

Introduction

African Initiated Churches or African Independent Churches or African Indigenous Churches or African Instituted Churches (AICs), were all established by African initiative rather than by foreign missionary agendas (Oduro 2006: 1). AICs have, therefore, been defined as:
congregations and or denominations planted, led, administered, supported, propagated, motivated, and funded by Africans for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and worshipping the Triune God in the context and worldview of Africa and Africans’ (Oduro 2006:2). They integrated biblical Christianity with African Traditional Religion (ATR) to produce a unique Zimbabwean Pentecostalism which emphasized prophesy, faith healing, miracles, dreams, seeing visions and speaking in tongues. Apostolic AICs in Zimbabwe were all similar, for the devotees put on long white garments, were committed to live like the New Testament apostles, and had an experience of Christianity as vibrant and alive as when Jesus walked on earth. They emphasized the works of the Holy Spirit. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) ideology was authoritarian nationalism which was a form of social organization characterized by submission to authority and it opposed individualism and democracy. There was absolute obedience to authority, as against individual freedom. Totalitarian nationalism identified the nation with the leader, and made disobedience to the leader tantamount to betrayal of the nation. It put the nation and its people at the mercy of the leader. Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) pursued a liberal ideology which advocated equality of opportunity for all within the framework of a system of laws. Liberalism was also very much concerned with allowing a maximum of freedom for the individual within the context of a system of laws which limited interference with individual rights by government or by other individuals. Hence the liberal ideology also invariably involved a bill of rights to define the rights of individuals and especially to limit the power of government to interfere with those rights.
The Johane Marange Apostolic Church (JMAC) was founded by Muchabaya Momberume who changed his name to Johane on baptism at a Methodist Mission (Bourdillon 1987: 298) in 1932 and the Johane Masowe weChishanu Apostolic Church (JMCAC) was founded by an Anglican, Shoniwa Masedza who took the name Johane Masowe in 1932 (Maxwell 2006: 54, Hastings 1994: 521). The Africa Apostolic Church (AAC) was founded by Paul Mwazha in 1951. AICs were formed as a protest against white domination in mission churches, the impossibility of the promotion of Blacks above certain levels and a tendency to demote Africans as the white missionary force increased (Hastings 1979: 68). Lack of Africanization in the leadership of missionary churches provided fertile ground for the formation of AICs. During the colonial period, many Black converts to Christianity were discriminated against by white missionaries and were unable fully to reconcile their Zimbabwean traditional religious and cultural beliefs with the teachings of their church leaders, and hence splits from their parent churches were inevitable. The reasons for these splits were usually either: political - an effort to escape white control, historical - many of the parent churches, particularly those from a Protestant tradition like the Anglican and Methodist churches, had themselves emerged from a process of schism and synthesis and cultural - the result of trying to accommodate Christian beliefs within an African world view. Beginning in the 1930s, there began to be splits and breakaways from mission churches to form AICs. Africans had become aware that such things were not unknown in Europe and North America. Africans posed questions such as, why were there so many different churches and missionaries? Was there more than one God and different bibles? Missionaries had had to explain the origins of different churches.
The JMAC and the JMCAC looked much alike, in at least their early stages, for both Marange and Masowe heard voices, had visions and dreams, and each claimed personal revelations (Hastings 1994:521). Bourdillon (1987: 298) asserted that Marange claimed to have received a full charter of his Church with all its rules and practices through the direct dictation of the Holy Spirit. It is from his visions that Marange was regarded as the second John the Baptist who had come to redeem the world as it was written in the Bible. Like St. Paul on his way to Damascus, Marange saw the light and a voice said to him, ‘You are John the Baptist, an Apostle’ (Hastings 1979:77). In Marange’s case the revelation was found written down in a book, *The New Revelations of the Apostles*, which supplemented or even replaced the Bible (Hastings 1994:521, 533).

Both Marange and Masowe had almost messianic authority; nobody in their congregations was to challenge what was revealed to them. Authority came to them directly, and only, through personal revelation and the power of the Holy Spirit (Hastings 1994:521).

Both Marange and Masowe developed a very rich, symbolically complex liturgy; neither developed a city or central location of any sort. Both believed in water baptism, though Masowe allowed no one but himself to baptise (Hastings 1994:521). Refusing the church right to baptise to anyone else was an indication that the JMCAC had the character of a totalitarian, but industrially modernizing society for it encouraged its followers to start their own small industries for making and selling baskets, furniture and tin ware (Hastings 1979:77). From my observations at church gatherings, authoritarianism in the JMCAC equalled that of Mugabe in that the way Mugabe centralised state power in himself was the same with JMCAC leaders.
Masowe proclaimed a message of withdrawal from European things-no bibles for his followers, though he had one himself from the start, no schools, no one was to be employed in companies (Hastings 1979:77, 1994:533). That was done so as to destroy colonialism. His followers were to survive by making and selling baskets, furniture and tin ware (Hastings 1979:78). The element of visions and dreams provided personal guidance for the interpretation of the scripture or to add to scripture in a fairly minor way (Hastings 1994:521). The JMCAC was a Christian church which did not read the Bible. They claimed they did not need the Bible because they received the word of God ‘live and direct’ from the Holy Spirit (Engelke 2007:3), as did some biblical characters like Abraham, Moses, David, St. Paul and the Old Testament prophets who spoke directly with God. The JMCAC considered scripture as unnecessary, even a dangerous mediator (Engelke 2007:3) because people who used the Bible interpreted what God said to specific people at a specific time and place and within a specific cultural context. It was not said to them. They also misinterpreted the scriptures because the time and context when God said the words recorded in the Bible to people like St. Paul had changed. For the JMCAC, the materiality of the Bible marked a distance from the divine and prohibited the realization of a live and direct faith.

AICs were both religious and political movements. That was true with the JMAC and JMCAC. Governments fought against their anti-social teachings such as refraining from going to hospitals when sick, and their refusal to enter the colonial labour market. Both the JMAC and the JMCAC did not allow their children to go further than elementary grade seven in education, fearing that their children might be won by mission churches. The JMAC allowed children to do only elementary education which made them able to read the Bible. Masowe’s denunciation of
the Bible was formed against the backdrop of colonial history, and his rejection of the Bible was, in part, a political critique of colonialism. By forming their own AICs, Marange and Mwazha critiqued colonialism, but they did not reject the Bible. They used the Bible as a tool for the liberation of Africans. The missionaries in the Gandanzara area, Makoni District, where Masowe was born and raised, emphasized literacy and literature as key dimensions to the ‘richness’ that Christianity would bring to an impoverished people (Ranger 1999: 198). That impoverishment was understood as both spiritual and material. Books were presented to Africans as the answer to both spiritual and material poverty. Masowe regarded books as oppressive tools used by colonialists to subjugate Africans (Angelke 2007: 5). As a way of decolonizing his followers’ minds, Masowe discouraged them from getting book education. It was also a way of sabotaging the British colonial system (Angelke 2007: 162).

By the 1930s, the then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwean) authorities consolidated the power of the white settlers. Literacy and the book had both become highly charged instruments of the struggle, for soon after starting his own church, as an act of defiance, Masowe told his followers to burn their Bibles because they came from men with evil hearts (Angelke 2007: 5). Masowe attested that whites and their book were not trustworthy, for missionaries said one thing, the Bible another (Angelke 2007: 5). Polygamy, which was part of Zimbabwean culture, was condemned by the missionaries, but was not condemned in the Bible, for kings like Solomon were polygamists (1Kings 11:3). St. Paul argued that only those who would like to be deacons, priests, and bishop should be monogamists (1Tim. 3:2, 12, Titus 1:6). History was written by the victors and that was the problem with the Bible. The Bible was written by the colonialists who were the victors over Zimbabweans. When asked why his
people did not become Christian, King Mzilikazi replied that the Matabele liked many wives (Hastings 1994:320). The JMAC allowed its members to be polygamous so as to destroy the missionary church which advocated for monogamy. The JMAC knew that Zimbabwean men liked many wives and hence many Zimbabwean men would leave missionary churches and become members of their church.

Masowe viewed the Bible as reflecting white might and as a record of what the missionaries and colonialists wanted Zimbabweans to know (Angelke 2007: 5). He did not trust what he read in the Bible. That was the problem with text based knowledge. For him, the Bible was a tainted sign. In colonial Africa, the Bible carried an indelible essence of white might (Angelke 2007: 245). The Bible’s materiality was a sign of its limitations for it was viewed as a barrier to the presence of the divine. The Bible took the focus away from what Christianity was really about, a live and direct relationship with God. For Masowe, the Bible was written two thousand years ago in a Palestinian culture which was different from Zimbabwean culture. The Bible addressed Palestinian existential problems which were different from Zimbabwe’s – hence irrelevant to the needs of contemporary Zimbabweans. When Masowe said that the Bible was a ‘record of what the colonialists wanted Zimbabweans to know’ or ‘the Bible was stale,’ he was expressing the terror of the text. For Masowe, the Bible produced trepidation because it was a sign of colonial authority and administration, which forced Zimbabweans to carry pass books wherever they went (Angelke 2007: 5). That terror was felt both politically and theologically, and it threatened the immediacy of what they understood as a live and direct faith.
The contradiction did not exist in the JMAC and the AAC. They used the Bible. For the JMAC, the Bible was not fully adequate and hence they supplemented it with their own Bible. In the JMAC and the AAC, the authority of the Bible was understood to be independent of missionaries and was appropriated through active embrace of it. The Marange church would not deny that the written word was a powerful tool for political manipulation, or that the missionaries had sometimes used the Bible in dishonest ways. (Angelke 2007: 6). They believed that the Bible was frequently used to colonise, oppress and exploit Zimbabweans.

After the demise of colonialism, the JMCAC members were allowed to go to school. Throughout colonial Zimbabwe, education was vital in creating and maintaining the symbolic power of mission and state and the Bible was a key source of that power and it bore ‘the essence of white might’(Angelke 2007: 5). The JMCAC had political and theological objections to scripture. The Bible and other religious texts were used as reading manuals (Angelke 2007: 52). There was an association between literacy and Christian faith. Schools were built by missionaries where religious education was of paramount importance. The promotion of education, literacy, and the vision of Christianity, which was to oppress and exploit Zimbabweans went hand in hand (Angelke 2007: 53).

Historically the Bible was used in colonial and postcolonial Africa as a tool of subjection and liberation (Bornstein 2009:1). The JMCAC did not read the Bible and saw itself as following unfettered doctrines of Christianity (Bornstein 2009:1). The Bible was forsaken, but its members believed that they were participating in a truer version of Christian theology. The faith of the JMCAC was not mediated by materiality of the printed word of God.
Valentin Y Mudimbe argued that missionaries were ‘the best symbol of colonial enterprise (Angelke 2007: 72). That agreed with Thomas O Beidelman, who maintained that ‘missionaries may be considered the most ambitious and culturally persuasive of all colonialists, attempting social changes and domination in their most radical form’ (Angelke 2007: 77). The majority of white church leaders saw themselves as mutual partners with white settlers in the so-called civilizing mission among the pagan natives of colonial lands, as if to suggest that Africans had no history, no culture, and no destiny (Lapsley 1986:6). In Zimbabwe there was a complex relationship between both the church and the colonizers, and those colonized without the support of the missionary church.

The great economic and political challenges which Zimbabweans faced, gave rise to an aggressive form of worldly theology among AICs. When a society is under deep economic and political challenges, as was witnessed in Zimbabwe after 1990, fundamentalist thinking and answers, including the religious, have huge appeal. It was very difficult to see how the purportedly ultra-religious post 1990 AICs which preached more worldly gospel were in any way better off spiritually and materially than they were when they preached the other worldly gospel before 1990.

The Problem

In this paper AICs were studied and understood in a distinct time – post 1990, and during a particular socio-political dispensation, an economically poor and politically violent Zimbabwe. After 1990 Zimbabweans were poorer than they were before because of ZANU- PF’s government corruption and bad economic policies. Before 1990, the JMAC, JMCAC and AAC
were not very much concerned about material wealth. Their focus was a spiritual life in heaven. With the coming of greater poverty from 1990, when Zimbabwe introduced the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (Maxwell 2006:134), the theologies of AICs changed from other worldly to worldly. The worldly theology appealed to most Zimbabweans who flocked to AICs in search of spiritual solutions to quick financial and material wealth. Zimbabweans were suffering economically, socially and politically due the actions of both political and AIC leaders. The real problem was how to get rid of the current AIC and political leaders – or others just like them, and to replace them with people who better served the well-being of Zimbabwe’s population.

Methodology

I focused on AICs’ and political parties’ relations in Zimbabwe post 1990. This paper provided an opportunity to analyse AIC leaders’ present role in the political and socio-economic dynamics of Zimbabwe. To what degree did the AICs reflect the dominant political ideology of ZANU-PF, and to what extent were they co-opted into that ideology? Because Zimbabwe had been governed by ZANU-PF from 1980 to 2013, it was ZANU-PF which figured most prominently in the Zimbabwean political scene and in this paper. My research was done in Zimbabwe from 2000-20011. Most of the interviews and participant observations were done in Harare, Chitungwiza, Kadoma, Marange, Bocha and Buhera. I participated in the Passover celebrations of the JMAC, AAC, and JMCAC at Mafarikwa Village, Marange in Manicaland Province, Guvambwa near Sadza Growth Point; and Juranifiri Santa in Chitungwiza, respectively. I accompanied my relatives who were members of the three churches to the Passover celebrations and to the various church services. I attended seven church services for each
church. When not at the church services, I met members at their homes, places of work, and social gatherings such as weddings and funerals. I did not use tape-recorders for they were viewed as unholy objects to be carried into the worshipping sites. I was asked to remove all metallic objects which I carried - that included my wrist watch and shoes. No recordings, not even writing notes during services were allowed. I was only allowed to see what was done during worship and to listen to the sermons and public prophesies. I was also not allowed to use tape recorders and videos because the church leadership was afraid that I might give the information to the media and that was going to damage their relationship with political parties. I wrote down whatever I had seen and heard as soon as I reached my place of residence.

Qualitative methodologies were employed to understand co-optation of AICs into ZANU- PF political ideology, as well as what church leaders and political parties did to get religious people to vote for them. The research revealed a symbiotic relationship between some church leaders and politicians at the expense of the laity and Zimbabwe.

Unholy Alliance: Political Parties and AICs

AICs were successful in keeping religion and politics separate during colonialism and the 1980s. That was more difficult from the 1990s on (Angelke 2007: 44). Regardless of any commitments to immateriality, it has been difficult for the JMCAC to keep their ‘empty spaces’ empty (Angelke 2007: 34). My participant observation has led me to argue that some AICs were forcibly co-opted into ZANU- PF’s political ideology and that made them an indispensable constituency for winning national elections. Co-option was achieved through the combined use of violence and bribery on church members and leaders. AIC leaders were susceptible to forced
co-option because they deliberately disregarded social justice and human rights issues and opted for material and financial benefits from politicians. I further maintain that the JMAC, JMCAC, and AAC were co-opted into ZANU- PF political ideology and became a very important and fertile constituency for any Zimbabwean politician aspiring to the presidency of Zimbabwe. ZANU- PF used corruption, bribery, and violence to co-opt AIC leaders and turn them against the laity. The job of the AIC leaders became to get their congregations to vote for a party which was not governing in the popular interest.

During the colonial period and the postcolonial period, from 1980 to 1990, AICs were silent about politics and not visible in national politics because poverty in Zimbabwe was not as wide spread and deep-rooted. Before AICs were forced to join ZANU- PF, their argument was that the church should steer clear of politics, religion and politics do not mix, and it was ungodly for a true Christian to be involved in politics, for politics belonged in the devil’s domain (Ranger 1967: 381). The AICs maintained that they did not talk about politics and the socio-political environment in Zimbabwe, but in reality most AIC leaders were ZANU- PF apologists who never criticized ZANU- PF for its gross human rights abuses. AICs said they were more concerned with evangelization and had nothing to do with carnal things like politics. In reality, the propping up of ZANU- PF was one of their agendas at their gatherings. Before 2000, AIC devotees were not forced to attend political rallies by their bishops and pastors and politicians. AICs were not viewed as a potential constituency from which to get votes during elections. That was because Zimbabwe was economically doing well, poverty was not wide spread and unemployment was below ten per cent. Although AICs were a big section of one of the few organised forces of Zimbabwean civil society that could offer alternative leadership - the church, they appear to
have been both co-opted and corrupted by politicians. Instead of giving moral, social, political, and economic direction to Zimbabwe during difficult times, some AICs have been co-opted into the ideologies of political parties. AIC leaders who were supposed to be critical of both ZANU-PF and MDC wrongdoings were co-opted and muzzled.

I contend that a strong relationship between AICs and party politics started in 1990. What was not known was the extent of the relationship between AICs and party politics in Zimbabwe. It was a totally new phenomenon in which religion was used to openly support a violent political party. It resulted in some AICs inviting politicians to address their church gatherings. A major strategy of ZANU-PF after losing the 2000 elections was to co-opt into its political ideology AICs because they had remained silent during colonial rule and had never publicly criticized it. ZANU-PF co-opted AICs, distorting Christian truths about social justice issues, mixing some Christian truths with ZANU-PF doctrine. Godfrey Nzira of the JMCAC, Noah Taguta of the JMAC, and Paul Mwazha of AAC, allowed themselves to be drawn into this deal with ZANU-PF and designated themselves as political constituencies, sources of votes. The leaders who were forcibly co-opted were ‘politically reliable’ and accepted the superiority of Mugabe and ZANU-PF. If they condemned ZANU-PF wrongdoings, they were reminded of their ‘complicity’ with colonialism through silence.

ZANU-PF took AIC devotees for granted, thinking that they were political imbeciles and illiterates whom they could violently and physically abuse, beat and maim; and kill their relatives, and then beguile them into voting for them during national elections. Violent political parties, such as, ZANU-PF, expected Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s cheap grace (1959: 35) from the very
Zimbabweans whose relatives they killed, whom they abused and beat during every election after 2000. By ‘cheap grace’ Bonheoffer meant that grace which the sinner expects without the sinner undergoing a process of true repentance and real transformation. (Bonhoeffer 1959: 35). Political violence and hoodwinking during election time did not make religious people in Zimbabwe vote for violent politicians and political parties. Adherents of AICs were so politically seasoned that they did not accept political violence - whether physical, spiritual, or mental - to determine the outcomes of national elections. While they did not give cheap grace to perpetrators of political violence, chicanery, demagoguery, and rhetoric, adherents of AIC’s did not vote for them.

The church was a “constituency” for politicians who did not need to call for political rallies. There was nothing amiss for Zimbabwean politicians to go to the church to seek votes because they have a right of freedom of association, assembly, and worship. The problem arose when politicians forced religious people to buy party cards or when they prevented other politicians from addressing congregations, as was the case then in Zimbabwe. It was common for political leaders to turn to the church at election times and join church congregations to secure votes before an election. The religious constituency was crucial as it constituted the biggest percentage of voters in the country. The majority of Zimbabweans were Christians, so ignoring that constituency was political suicide.

AICs in Zimbabwe were a new political playground and a fertile one, too. Both ZANU- PF leader, Robert Mugabe, and MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, visited AIC shrines seeking votes. At the AIC gatherings, ZANU-PF and MDC leaders embraced conservative doctrines on divorce
and sexuality, using them to bolster their ‘indigenous authoritarianism’ against the growing rights–based discourses of the civil society. This is despite the fact that the MDC claimed to be a liberal political party. Political leaders openly backed AICs which endorsed teenage marriages, polygamy, and refused to have their children immunised, or taken to hospitals for treatment, and which did not send their children to school (Gambanga 2010). Polygamy, which was practised by some in the AICs, was accepted by the politicians in their quest to woo voters (Gambanga 2010). Despite all those negative traits, as far as modern culture was concerned, the AICs became a constituency that politicians could ignore at their own political peril.

ZANU-PF Co-opting AIC Leaders

The MDC and ZANU-PF went to AIC gatherings to mingle and address captive audiences and potential voters offered by submissive church groups. Mugabe was robed in the JMAC’s white bishop’s (Labbah Hummah’s) cassock and had a wooden bishop’s crook in hand and sang along with members of the JMAC at a Passover ceremony at Mafarikwa Village where he was invited to address over 150 000 people (Chimhete 2010). Mugabe was ‘consecrated bishop’ of the JMAC. The JMAC leadership asked Mugabe to allow them to spearhead the ZANU-PF’s election campaigns for future national elections (Eagle 2010).

ZANU-PF control of state apparatus and politics was entrenched, so much so that even the most liberal AIC leader ended up a captive of ZANU-PF’s political ideology. ZANU-PF co-opted some AIC leaders to serve its ideological needs; the same cannot be said of the whole church. Some AIC leaders like Zebia Chitanda, of the JMAC lived up to their convictions. They did not allow themselves to be co-opted by the dominant ZANU-PF political ideology of
violence, corruption, greediness for money and material wealth. Chief Chiweshe was both a notable member of the JMCAC and a prominent ZANU- PF supporter who maintained that their church’s faith was politicized by a young prophet called Philip for prophets wanted power for themselves (Angelke 2007: 116). Lawrence Katsiru was a JMCAC prophet, a regional head of ZANU- PF, and a public relations manager of the city of Marondera (Angelke 2007: 124). Augustine Chihuri, a ZANU-PF card carrying member, and Commissioner General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police, was a staunch member of the JMCAC and he worshipped at Juranifiri Santa in Chitungwiza (Angelke 2007: 132). In early 2000, the late Border Gezi, a JMCAC prophet, was appointed ZANU- PF Political Commissar and Minister for Gender, Youth, and Employment. Gezi worshipped at Juranifiri Santa shrine which he turned into a political rally intended to mobilize would be voters each time he attended church services (Angelke 2007: 132 ). JMCAC members sang ZANU- PF liberation war songs instead of Christian songs and they held up ZANU- PF placards at a prayer rally at Juranifiri Santa shrine (Angelke 2007: 249). Godfey Nzira was a member of ZANU- PF who was a rich, influential, and controversial prophet, who caused tensions in the JMCAC (Angelke 2007: 34, 130). Nzira was charged with nine counts of rape in the Chitungwiza Magistrate’s Court. The charges were brought by members of his congregation who sought faith healing from him. The rapes took place at Juranifiri Santa shrine during the violent 2000 elections. Nzira was convicted and sentenced to thirty –two years in prison. The conviction angered some two thousand JMCAC members who rioted, beating up court officials, police on duty, destroying windows and doors of the Magistrate’s Court (Angelke 2007: 250). The people who rioted were brainwashed to the extent that they believed that Nzira was doing the work of God. Nzira was pardoned by Mugabe and was released from
prison. After his release, he was deployed by ZANU- PF to Muzarabani District, in what was expected to mark the start of a national campaign to coerce members of the JMCAC to support Mugabe and ZANU PF before any elections (Guma 2011 January 26). Nzira died a few months after his release from prison.

Dissatisfaction against ZANU- PF

The new economic and political frustrations of post independent Zimbabwe made many Zimbabweans more religious than before. That was because there was abject poverty, an over ninety-five per cent unemployment rate, and inflation was over a billion per cent. AIC membership increased drastically and that frightened ZANU- PF. AICs were plagued by negative stereotypes by politicians- stereotypes that they were backward and could be easily confused and manipulated (Angelke 2007: 128). ZANU- PF viewed AICs as becoming uncontrollable, useless, and potentially subversive. AIC members were regarded by ZANU- PF as too many and too confused in their leadership to be controlled or even effectively registered. ZANU-PF knew that most AIC members were too poor to cooperate in any way with the government’s plans. ZANU-PF viewed AICs as potential grounds for the articulation of subversive thoughts and as possible elements in fomenting internal strife in post- independent Zimbabwe. The majority of AIC members were unemployed and were frustrated with the government’s economic policies. They were a dissatisfied proletariat who would be subversive and involved in riots.

The fears of riots on the part of ZANU- PF were reinforced by the very successful industrial actions against high unemployment, low wages, and sky-rocketing prices of goods and services. These demonstrations were called by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
(ZCTU), which were organized by Tsvangirai when he was Secretary General of the ZCTU. Fear of subversive activities and riots from AICs caused ZANU- PF to devise a policy of divide and rule where by ZANU- PF was going to co-opt AIC leaders into its political ideology. It was also a way of dividing the civil society members like the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), a pro-democracy group which was joining the ZCTU-led industrial actions. Co-opted AIC leaders were used to neutralize the civil society which was anti- ZANU- PF government.

ZANU- PF knew that outlawing of AICs would be ineffectual, as was the case during the colonial and postcolonial time in Africa (Hastings 1979: 251), but co-option was seen as the best way of stemming the rising tide against ZANU- PF. Banning AICs could contribute to their survival in the long term. ZANU- PF did not ban the ZCTU, but infiltrated it with state agencies and divided it into ineffective different Trade Unions. The ZCTU was infiltrated, divided and rendered powerless to such an extent that since 2000 it has never called for a successful industrial action against the government. Co-opting AICs was a pre-emptive movement to diffuse a potentially volatile political situation.

Ecclesiastical, political, and economic independence were the major causes and impulses for the formation of AICs. The theme of independence ran through AICs from the period of colonialism to the present. It was, by its basic internal logic, a step towards separation, multiplicity, and diversity (Hastings 1979:253). The churches did not want ZUNU- PF to interfere in their ecclesiastical freedom as enshrined in the Zimbabwean constitution. The wave of independence, which the AICs sought from 1990 on, reflected not only religious and ecclesiastical factors, but also socio- economic and political tensions. The thirst for freedom and
independence as it affected AICs, was a spiritual and cultural phenomenon as much as a political one. It took varied and even contradictory forms. The pursuit of the political kingdom by some AIC leaders undermined the religious freedom of AICs. ZANU- PF wanted to destroy that independence by co-opting AICs. ZANU- PF was autocratic and did not entertain the concept of independence which ran through AICs. Criticizing ZANU- PF by the laity and some church leaders was an attempt to regain their independence.

Some members of the JMCAC complied a dossier of violence perpetrated on their members by ZANU- PF, titled, ‘ZANU- PF Terrorism Against Our Church’ which described how some senior JMCAC members were assaulted or killed, for not supporting ZANU- PF (Guma 2011 January 31). The dossier stated,

The whole church has been infiltrated and assimilated into ZANU-PF. It has been turned into a ZANU PF district with all structures manned by church membership. All church members seen not to be cooperative are intimidated and tortured to comply. The intimidation continues and the whole church is now in the hands of ZANU-PF. Ours is a struggle for freedom of our church from the draconian oppression of this Mugabe regime. We realise it’s a dragon beast that’s dragging our church with it to extinction. So we want to fight, and fight it we will. (Guma 2011 January 31).

The JMCAC laity in Chitungwiza was not happy with Gezi and other church leaders for converting church services into political rallies and for dragging the church into the press. They demanded an apology from Gezi but he refused (Angelke 2007: 132). One elderly member of the JMCAC maintained that as a church, they felt offended because Gezi and Nzira used their church for their own political ambitions (Angelke 2007: 132). In the churches, people were taught not to fear another human being, so intimidation and violence could not work.
Some senior members of the JMAC did not invite Mugabe to attend their annual Passover meeting at Mafarikwa Village, but Mugabe imposed himself into the proceedings after ZANU-PF intimidated the church hierarchy (Saxon 2010). Some JMAC members who were courageous enough to defend the church’s doctrine of staying clear of politics were labelled as sell-outs and MDC supporters and, unfortunately, the church hierarchy accepted financial favours from ZANU-PF (Mbanga: August 23, 2010). That resulted in leaders becoming more susceptible to pressure and even amenable to ZANU-PF wishes. The majority of church members of the JMAC were of the opinion that they knew their true church’s position as far as their religious group and party politics were concerned. The majority of the members made it clear that they were not aligned with ZANU-PF. Their church members were grown-up individuals and they knew what was good for the country. As a church, they did not participate in partisan political activities. The issue of voting was personal and one was entitled to his or her right to vote for a person he or she wanted without fear (Saxon 2010).

Zebia Chitanda, bishop of the JMCAC and president of the Union for Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), was assassinated by ZANU-PF because he insisted that apostolic churches should be apolitical (Mbanga: September 9, 2010). He encouraged members of the apostolic churches to continue holding meetings with Tsvangirai as Prime Minister, to improve the welfare of church members and Zimbabweans at large. Chitanda’s position regarding the role of apostolic churches in politics created enemies in ZANU-PF. Chitanda maintained that no political party should manipulate apostolic churches, as that was un-Godly.
MDC Joined ZANU-PF in Seeking AICs’ Votes

The MDC also joined ZANU-PF in using AICs as an indispensable constituency for winning national elections. The difference was that the MDC did not use violence. The MDC used economic and social development, justice and peace as their trump cards to win the presidency. Tsvangirai addressed a JMAC gathering in Mutare in 2009. The MDC leader had two missions: was campaigning for votes, and encouraging members of the church who had been discouraged by their leadership from using modern medicine, to have their children immunised against tetanus, polio, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis and whooping cough (Guma: August 2, 2010). Samuel Muzerengwa, a bishop of the JMAC, was an MDC Senator for Buhera South, and a member of the MDC central committee.

Socialism, Liberalism and Prophetic Nature

Do Christians in Zimbabwe know the political ideologies of the two political parties? Generally speaking, Zimbabwean Christians were ethically conservatives for they were Bible believing Christians. The liberal agenda, which penetrated and divided the western church, had not yet penetrated Zimbabwe as far as Christianity was concerned. The political agendas of the two main political parties in Zimbabwe, MDC and ZANU-PF, were nowhere near the expectations of Zimbabwean Christians. The MDC was a liberal political party which had its base and origin in the Trade Union movement and it advocated a progressive agenda. The liberal agenda generally supported same sex marriages, abortion, gay and lesbian priests, euthanasia and divorce, which were viewed by Zimbabwean Christians as unbiblical from their own interpretation of the Bible. ZANU-PF was a socialist party with its base in authoritarian
nationalism and socialism. It advocated socialism which in its communist-materialistic sense was antireligious. Neither political party advocated the wishes of Zimbabwean Christians as far as their spirituality was concerned. Were Zimbabwean Christians aware of the agendas of the two major political parties? If they were aware of them, why did they vote for them? If they did not know the agendas, then why vote for something which they did not know? There were no liberal and no socialist religious people in Zimbabwe. If they were there; they were a very tiny drop in the ocean.

Demagogy, Disregard for Social Justice Issues and Lack of International Connections

Some of the leaders of all the three AICs- JMCAC, JMAC and AAC became more worldly and materially oriented post 1990. Material greediness by AIC leaders in an environment of poverty enabled ZANU-PF to easily co-opt the church leadership into its political ideology by giving them money and material wealth. Some JMCAC members, like the late Nzira, had economic and political power. They lived lives of affluence. Nzirai was a reflection of the leadership in the AICs. While the leadership lived in affluence, the laity lived in abject poverty.

According to Erica Bornstein, Engelke maintained that JMCAC leaders lived a life filled with material desires and ethical contradictions for personal fame and material greediness were the orders of the day (Bornstein 2009:2). As with the colonial era in which the JMCAC emerged, the economic and political difficulties of material life in Zimbabwe of the late 1990s seem to have urged believers to shed the shackles of the spiritual world for they faced acute poverty.

AICs produced oligarchic church governments whose leaders retained power for decades before passing it on to their children or close relatives. Because of the JMCAC, JMAC,
and AAC leaders’ quests for power and material wealth, they turned themselves into cults which promoted their family members, relatives, and friends, to leadership roles in the churches, while eliminating any leadership threats from within. There was recurrent tension within the AICs between the claims derived directly from personal charisma and loyalty of the local congregation to its immediate prophet or pastor upon the one hand, the attempt to maintain authority, succession, and a wider unity, upon the other. The former prevailed over the latter, but personal authority of the founder was usually sufficient to limit succession within his own life time (Hastings: 1979:76). There were obvious parallels to Robert Mugabe’s style of state leadership, although the consequences might not be as dire as they were for threats to Mugabe’s power (Bornstein 2009:2). There was a growing leadership cult in AICs in which the sacerdotal hierarchy and the founding fathers like Mwazha, Marange and Masowe were heralded as voices of God and visions of angels, and who merged their own persons with the person of Christ. It was a cult sustained by a heavily edited sacred history in which the founding fathers and their successors stood out as the sole agents of the church’s past, where they alone were responsible for the construction of the mother church. This cult thrived on sycophancy and created fear (Maxwell 2006:3). In their contemporary concern for respectability and recognition, AIC leaders had come to resemble the type of missionary white Christianity which they initially disparaged.

From my interviews and participant observations, I found that AIC leaders were viewed as prophetic, courageous, creative individuals, great resistance figures and pioneering indigenous Christians. The interviewees maintained that the founding fathers of their churches were called by God. They told me the history of the founding fathers and their churches.
versions overlooked the abuse of power inside their churches. If AIC prophetic leaders were missionaries to their own people – Zimbabweans; then their practices and morals could be interrogated with the same rigour as those of the white missionaries who supported colonialism and the oppression and exploitation of Africans. Some of the AIC leaders, such as Mwazha, have formed cosy alliances with equally authoritarian secular politicians in ZANU- PF. Mwazha told his AAC devotees to chant ZANU- PF political slogans and to sign, without questioning, the ZANU- PF anti- sanctions petition against the travel restrictions imposed on Mugabe and top ZANU-PF members by the western countries because they used violence in elections (Nkala 2011). Mugabe reciprocated by giving Mwazha the Order of Merit Award for his outstanding service to the development of Christianity in Zimbabwe and establishing and for sustaining a five-star indigenous church (Sunday Mail Reporter 2012). Many AIC members did not give much consideration to the excesses of their leaders. The growth of AICs in Zimbabwe was similar to the growth of Zimbabwean nationalism with the same motives- to get more power for the leadership and more financial and material wealth for the leaders at the expense of the people. AIC leaders aligned themselves with either ZANU-PF or the MDC for financial and material purposes. That alignment took place in a culture of patrimonialism and prebendalism. AIC leaders co-option into ZANU- PF political ideology had a good deal of ideological sympathy with ZANU- PF’s agenda of cultural nationalism, particularly the notions of indigenization, self-reliance and Black autonomy (Maxwell 2006: 219).

My interviewee, Zorodzai Chisango, a bishop of the AAC in Kadoma, told me that he preached neutrality. His church did not talk about politics in Zimbabwe; it concentrated only on preaching the gospel and was not involved in politics, but maintained neutrality without
supporting any political party. The AAC regarded politics as carnal and it was only interested in spiritual matters and left politics to politicians. AICs believed that it was always better not to confront politicians on socio-economic issues, because it only got in the way of serving God. They decided it was prudent to be silent on political and socio-economic issues. Keeping quiet combined political expediency with a theological dimension. Christianity was a serious matter. If it cannot be reduced to scripture, it certainly cannot be reduced to a newspaper article or a segment on the television news (Angelke 2007: 128). The late Canaan Banana argued that there was no such animal as neutrality. He maintained that:

There is no such animal as neutrality; neutrality at best means deafening silence and indifference, and at worst smiling at and admiring the status quo. I refuse to accept the notion that Jesus assumed the role of honoured guest in the theatre of human slaughter and misery. He intervened in human affairs and challenged the principalities and powers that denied God’s children their right to life and to fundamental human liberties (Lapsley 1986:7).

That was quite evident in his inaugural address in Galilee. ‘The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed’ (Luke 4:18).

These words by Banana provided an apt summary of what I saw during my participant observation of AICs and what I was told by the leaders. The church leaders claimed to be neutral and were only concerned with spiritual matters and not carnal matters. Yet in Christianity, God is not neutral and God is not silent when there is poverty, oppression and exploitation of the poor. The church of God cannot be neutral and silent in an environment of poverty, unemployment and political violence. When AICs thought they were neutral, they were simply sliding into ZANU-PF’s ideological captivity. ZANU- PF’s political ideology was to use
people as a means to an end, allowing absolute power for ZANU-PF for eternity. ZANU-PF justified the use of any means possible to retain political power. In the run-up to the 2000 parliamentary elections, the late Vice President, Simon Muzenda, declared that Zanu-PF would continue to rule till donkeys and mules have horns (ZANU-PF ichtonga kusvikira madhongi amera nyanga). He went further and said that if ZANU-PF gives you a baboon as a candidate, you vote for the baboon (kana ZANU-PF ikakupai gudo, munotorivhotera) (Bizabani 2011, November 4). AICs became captives of reactionary forces. My research revealed that AIC leaders were as autocratic as Mugabe in running their churches. They became ‘blind’ to the poverty and suffering of Zimbabweans because ZANU-PF used money and material wealth to seduce them into adopting its political ideology.

Muzenda’s ideas agreed with what some of my AAC bishop interviewees told me. They asserted that Mwazha was anointed to be a Messiah of Africa, just as Jesus was anointed to be a Messiah of the whites. Mwazha, through prophecy, spoke directly with God and nobody in the church disputed what Mwazha told them. Like the JMAC, the AAC bishops also believed that Mugabe was God given to Zimbabwe and Mwazha prayed and blessed Mugabe to be Zimbabwean state President until he dies. Bishop Tonderai Zivai of the AAC asserted that Mwazha was a Black Messiah sent by God for the spiritual salvation of Africans and Mugabe was sent by God for the political and economic liberation of Africa.

AIC leaders could have emulated some Christian leaders who worked in Zimbabwe. Anglican Bishop Kenneth Skelton; Bishop Donald Lamont of the Roman Catholic church; Bishop Ralph Edward Dodge of the Methodist church, Reverends John White (Methodist) and Arthur
Shearly Cripps (Anglican) were not co-opted and made captives of the dominant colonial ideology of oppression, exploitation, and racism against Black Zimbabweans. They were committed to their theology which informed their faith and action. Their faith was Biblical, but within the context of a white, racist, ideologically reactionary Zimbabwean Church headed by white officers. They were extremely radical because they were prepared to demystify the ‘truism’ which the colonialists had erected around themselves. Cripps wrote a play in 1951 entitled: *The Black Christ* (Hastings 1994:558). Matthew Angelke cited Desmond Tutu as telling the following story:

...When the white man came to Africa, he held a Bible in his hand and the Africans held the land. The white man said to Africans, ‘let us bow our heads in prayer.’ ‘When the African raised their heads, the white man had the land and the Africans had the Bible’ (Angelke 2007:72).

Tutu’s story resonated with Masowe’s rejection of the Bible as a tool used to subjugate Africans. Angelke cited Takatso Mofokeng and interpreted Tutu’s story to point to three related realities. ‘They showed the central position which the Bible occupied in the process of colonization, national oppression, and exploitation. They also confessed to the incomprehensible paradox of being colonized by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting their Bible, the ideological instrument of colonization, oppression and exploitation. Thirdly, they expressed a historic commitment that was accepted solemnly by one generation and passed on to the other – a commitment to terminate exploitation of humans by other humans’ (Angelke 2007: 72).

During colonialism Zimbabweans said, ‘----It seems as if we had been deceived by the exponents of Christianity, the missionaries. These have come here only to prepare the way for
the racist state where we shall remain permanently the hewers of wood and drawers of water, and where a favoured handful can control and delay our development indefinitely (Lapsley 1986:17).

AIC leaders could be committed to a Zimbabwean society based on human rights, social justice and the termination of oppression and exploitation. During colonialism, the Bible was used by the colonialists and missionaries to oppress and exploit Zimbabweans, but after the demise of colonialism, AIC leaders and Zimbabwean politicians used the Bible to oppress and exploit fellow Zimbabweans. The central theme of the Bible was liberation, not subjugation. As Christian institutions, AICs were not political bodies, but religious institutions. As such, they could be construed as ‘hunting grounds’ for votes by politicians, particularly by politicians who claimed to be Christians. The true gospel of Christ was subversive of all evil and injustice. AIC leaders could not be politically neutral when the standard against which AIC leaders should measure their ‘political’ activism was set by the Bible. Tutu stated that the Christian must always be critical of all political standards, testing them against the gospel standards (Angelke 2007: 73). AIC leaders could answer to God and not to political parties and be political only insofar as Christianity was a religion that supported social justice and racial equality. Canaan Banana argued that:

A Christian church history is a saga of exploitation in the name of Christ, from the subjugation of the European tribes, the crusades to redeem the Holy Land from the infidel, from the subjugation and exploitation of native people in the ‘new world’ to the colonization of Africa in the great missionary thrusts of western civilization. This history is long, sordid, and deeply sad: the result of the use of the Bible as subjugation for exploitation; the self-serving adoption of one group as ‘superior’ to another. In other words, it can be argued that the ideology of racism has its genesis in the Bible (Banana 1993:21-22).
Banana was not against the written word *per se*, as was the JMCAC, but rather against the ways in which a particular text had been abused throughout history. In Zimbabwe the Bible was used by AICs as a template for the oppression and exploitation of the laity. Banana wanted to transform the Bible into a document that could serve as ‘a unifying element that would help our world to set aside our differences and to learn to live together’ (Banana 1993: 17, 19). In contrast, AICs such as the JMAC and AAC used the bible to justify projects of political and economic domination.

I argue that, as a whole, the AICs’ most consistent response to such issues as the deepening crises of unemployment, corruption, and political violence was the entrenchment of the ZANU- PF regime and escalating poverty. The JMCAC leaders could have emulated the founder of their church, Masowe, who was interested in colonial labour politics. He attended the rallies of the Industrial Commercial Workers’ Union (ICWU) in Harare and Bulawayo which addressed a ‘call for unity among Africans, the disillusionment with the failure of the white man to live up to his ‘civilizing’ professions, and the demand for higher wages for Blacks’ (Angelke 2007: 88). At the start, Masowe’s preaching included a potentially more political dimension in its response to the oppressed state of his fellow Zimbabweans (Hastings 1979:77). Masowe criticized Europeans in colonial Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and was arrested and imprisoned three times for defying oppressive and exploitative colonial orders (Angelke 2007: 97). Many of the ICWU concerns were supported by Masowe who instructed his church members to adopt an explicitly anticolonial approach to wage labour through emphasis on economic self-sufficiency (Angelke 2007: 72). AIC leaders could enjoy a good relationship with the state without becoming sycophantic or prostituting their principles – or theology. The
Gospel of Christ confronts all that prevents Zimbabweans from developing their full human potential and all that offends against Zimbabwean human dignity and the pursuit of liberation in all its forms. However, I observed that the type of religion that seemed to be coming daily more popular among AIC leaders was a kind of ‘opium’, a kind of spirituality which soothed the poor Zimbabweans and kept them in a cocoon, but did not confront the issues of corruption, unemployment, poverty, disease, and political violence. AIC leaders seemed to believe that the fight for social justice, human rights, and the pursuit of liberation, were the preserve of the Zimbabwean mainline Christian denominations - the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches - and the anti-religious. That was a tragedy and travesty of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is based on the love of neighbour and which ended once and for all the division between the sacred and the secular. The test of true Christianity is not the frequency of our attending Church services, but how we treat the widows, orphans, the poor, the marginalized, and the down-trodden. The JMCAC had no national leader who united them and who was a spokesperson on national issues (Angelke 2007: 129). Each church has its own leaders. Even if some AIC leaders had wanted to criticize ZANU-PF for its human rights abuses, they did not have international connections that the mainstream churches had with fellow Christian denominations all over the world. Those connections enabled mainstream churches to withstand ZANU-PF brutality and violence because they knew that they had international support. That was not the case with AICs.

Bishop Dzingai Nyamupfumbi of JMAC, whom I interviewed, maintained that Mugabe was their political leader whom they were given by God for they had prayed for a long time during colonial times for a Black leader and God answered their prayers by giving Zimbabweans
Mugabe. Furthermore he said that Mugabe would die in power because he was anointed by God. For Nyamupfumbi, Marange prophesied and prayed for Mugabe hence nobody was going to replace Mugabe as leader of Zimbabwe as long as Mugabe was alive. Most of my JMAC interviewees cited passages from their “new Bible’- the *New Revelations of the Apostles* in defence of their support for ZANU- PF.

AICs were regarded by their founders and leaders as family businesses which should be inherited by their children and grandchildren when they die (Hastings 1994:81). What was fairly recent in Zimbabwe was the fervent type of worldly gospel which was a mixture of religion and economic business that had tremendous appeal to many Zimbabweans. From that also came the phenomena of religion as business and a personality cult for the founder or leader of an AIC. The founder claimed God told him/her to start or lead a church congregation. AIC leaders became a brand of religious business people. AICs seem to have attracted many converts, particularly youths and young adults who were frustrated, perhaps by the lack of employment, economic opportunities, and meaning in life in, a country where politicians and their families, friends and relatives were living in affluence. The fact that AICs believed in prophets, faith healing, speaking in tongues, cults of personalities, importance of charismatic leadership, and praying for their members to get jobs in government and the private sector led many Zimbabweans to convert to AICs. Despite praying for their unemployed members to get jobs, very few managed to get jobs, and those who did, were underemployed, which frustrated them more. AIC leaders struggled to mitigate the laity’s desires for hope in Zimbabwe, for guidance, and for relief from the struggles of poverty (Bornstein 2009:3).
People in-between Religious and Political Leaders

For the JMCAC, the bible is an artifact, a thing, and as such, it does not inspire them (Angelke 2007: 7). The JMCAC viewed true Christianity not as a religion of the book, for books could not be spiritual. The Bible represented the rationalization of religious authority (Angelke 2007: 7), for the JMCAC did not have hierarchy in its church. The JMCAC was wary that the written words were dangerous and had the potential to do harm by killing the faith and taking the Holy Spirit out of Christians (Angelke 2007: 7). They claimed that Jesus and his Apostles did not need a Bible. The Bible, as a material object, was not a sign of the divine, according to the live and direct semiotics for it did not represent God (Angelke 2007: 29). The rejection of the Bible and the acceptance of the live and direct concept made it very easy and possible for greedy ZANU-PF members who were ‘prophets’ in the church like Gezi and Nzira, to preach that the live and direct message from God was, that all church members should support and vote for ZANU-PF during national elections. What were preached were not words from God but political party ideology masked as live and direct from God. Nobody questioned the message because there was no Bible to use as a reference point. Every member of the JMCAC was in direct dialogue with God (Angelke 2007: 7). Each prophet and preacher professed whatever suited them under the guise of live and direct messages from God. The live and direct message from God led the JMCAC leaders to be eco-opted and captivated by the ZANU-PF political ideology.

AICs believed in the immediacy of the Holy Spirit and in prophecy, the concepts which were abused by church leaders to accumulate wealth for themselves. The notion of live and
direct faith was key to JMCAC understanding of Christianity. It was a concept through which the church made arguments about how Christianity should be practiced and how God lively and directly told them to support and vote for ZANU-PF. The Bible was not a sign of the divine and of God’s representation, but live and direct faith was an assertion at the theological level, that mediums in the form of prophets, were essential for the church (Angelke 207:11). There was the influence and impact of money and material possession in AICs (Angelke 2007: 160, 247). Mudyiwa was rich for he had a brick-making business; Chigwada ran a farm in Chiweshe and had a Mercedes Benz. Nzira had a hospital fenced with razor wire on top of the dura wall, and a children’s home (Angelke 2007: 250), Gezi and Chihuri had farms, businesses, and had high paying jobs in government. Sandros Namwebonde and Hwimbo had accumulated wealth. (Angelke 2007: 247). Financial and material wealth was antithetical to the JMCAC ideal. The AICs did not want to combine divine with earthly things. The JMCAC was concerned with the degradation of religion through a wayward emphasis on things. It was founded by shrewd political and economic entrepreneurs (Angelke 2007: 247).

Sermons were a way of trying to brainwash the laity. A new convert to the JMCAC cited the gospel according to Luke in his sermon. That infuriated Nzira who stood up and admonished the man saying: ‘We do not talk Bible-talk here. The Bible is like toilet paper. The congregation should listen to the word live and direct.’ (Angelke 2007: 181). Christianity and the Bible are inseparably related. For the JMCAC to reject the Bible and still claim to be a Christian church was unthinkable. Any political demagoguery which made ZANU-PF get more votes was viewed as the word live and direct from God. Prophets were viewed as vessels through which the Holy Spirit spoke. The prophet was the animator but not the author or the principal of the message.
Prophets did not know what was said through them, and they claimed no authority over their actions or accomplishments when filled by the Holy Spirit (Angelke 2007: 182). When Nzira was filled with the Holy Spirit he was known as Pageneck which was an ancient Hebrew name for an angel that spoke through him (Angelke 2007: 182). When Nzira a polarizing figure in the church was filled with the Holy Spirit, he often reminded his congregation that he was not a human being, he was not Nzira, but an angel of God and he was Jesus (Angelke 2007: 183, 189).

Masowe referred to himself as ‘Africa’s John the Baptist’ (Angelke 2007: 189). Mudyiwa said that he was Jesus and was equivalent to God (Angelke 2007: 183, 189); while Mwazha claimed that he was a Black Messiah.

The JMCAC did not like the Bible because it was going to be used by the laity to challenge the authority of the prophets (Angelke 2007: 245). Using the Bible was going to have members of the congregation referring to the Bible and thus leaving open an avenue of interpretive authority. The absence of the Bible was a way to focus attention of the laity on the presence of the prophet. ‘Focus’ forces us to see that the presence of the prophet was both theological and an element in the struggle for power. The JMCAC wanted a religion in which the material does not matter, but what people ‘want’ was not always borne out in practice.

Church leaders were involved in politics and the accumulation of money and material wealth. One cannot separate religion and politics. Kenneth Skelton argued that:

...I submit that to try to put religion and politics into separate compartments is impossible... For these truths, the Old Testament prophets stood and it is clear from their words and their experiences that no-one in their day was under any illusion about the tie-up between religion and politics. Amos was declared a prohibited immigrant, Isaiah became a Foreign Secretary and Jeremiah was detained under the law and order (maintenance) act of his day (Lapsley 1986:13).
The traditional teaching of the church was to critique the government of the day basing their pronouncements on political, economic, and social issues as they pertained to the poor, widows, and orphans. Many AIC leaders embraced the values and dominant ideology of ZANU-PF. There were no serious theological debates within AIC circles about structural issues such as the lack of social justice and human rights facing the society. That lack of critical theological thought left AIC leaders free to project ZANU-PF ideological prejudices and pre-occupations as representative of Christian leadership. Part of the tragedy of AIC leadership was that they lived under the illusion that they were politically neutral even if they were demonstrably taking sides. While some AIC leaders, including Mwazha and Taguta, were never overtly ZANU-PF, they played important ideological roles in preserving ZANU-PF supremacy and giving it religious legitimation.

The author agrees with Juan Rosales Sanchez (2006:25), who asserted that politics is a game of power. This applies to religion as well. Both Zimbabwean political and religious leaders were interested in the power to control and exploit the people of Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF was not interested in the welfare of the people, but in its own political superiority and aggrandizements (Catholic Commission 1999). There was a unity of purpose between the political and the religious leaders in ZANU-PF, because, if they were divided, each group would not be able to control and exploit the people on its own.

When politicians came to power, they wanted to exploit the people of Zimbabwe in the same way some AICs leaders did. Politicians knew that without the support of the religious leadership, they would not exploit the people without revolt. They knew that any government
which did not have the backing of the religious leadership did not last long and hence forced co-optation of the religious leadership was a necessity. Whatever exploitation was done to the people by Zimbabwean politicians, both religious leaders and politicians regarded it as Christian, and forced people to support it. Zimbabwean politicians needed some AIC leaders just as some AIC leaders needed politicians to exploit the people. There was a symbiotic relationship between political leadership and church leadership. Both politics and religion were based on a power matrix; their aim was to get power which often translates into material wealth. Power was used as a mechanism to control people. The same can be said of political parties. They were interested in getting political power to control the affairs of the state and the people.

The Way Forward

With great numbers of compromised persons - both in the political and religious spheres - and the degree to which those interests were entrenched, how to motivate and build a prophetic approach was a herculean task, which would take deep consideration all by itself. AICs could be a voice of moral reason. Their leaders could adhere to the biblical calling of being involved in a prophetic ministry- fight for social justice. As a result of co-optation, these AICs became overly loyal and uncritical of the actions, even wrongs, of ZANU- PF and MDC political leaders, to curry favour.

AIC leaders were supposed to be deeply influenced by the message of the gospel: social justice and individual ethical behaviour. The whole church leadership in Zimbabwe could turn the struggle against colonialism into an economic, social justice, and moral struggle. Genuine
AIC leaders would want the void filled by new democratic values, morals and cultures. They could reject being co-opted into the ideologies of political parties.

AIC leaders could lead a new revolution against corruption and for social justice by teaching Zimbabweans to be brave and go into the streets to demonstrate against tyrannical and corrupt leaders. Zimbabweans could be prepared to shed their blood in order to be free from despotic and corrupt leaders. Prayers alone have failed to remove them.

AICs could become more relevant to the changing society and its changing needs. AICs can at all times speak out firmly against injustices. They could actively hold government and political leaders accountable for their wrong-doing. AICs could refuse to defer to political leaders. AIC leaders could be more exemplary in their personal behaviour - to set an example of alternative ethnical, moral and value-based leadership and could internalise democratic values – fighting for human rights and social justice in order to be truly religious leaders worth their calling.

Conclusion

My research findings were that social justice issues were not considered by AIC leaders to be of much theological importance. I have observed that among AIC leaders there was little concern for structural matters which have caused poverty among Zimbabweans. The laity in AICs was wise enough to see the connections between such matters as poverty, unemployment, political violence, authoritarianism, and misgovernance in Zimbabwe. The findings indicate that relationships between political parties and some AIC leaders were based
on their mutual benefit, at the expense of religious devotees. Despite being given money and material benefits, no religious leader in Zimbabwe controlled the voting pattern of his followers. I conclude that AICs, political leaders, and others just like them, should be removed from power through peaceful demonstrations, and replaced with people who better served the well-being of Zimbabwe’s population. Also AICs should support morally legitimate political authority and at the same time fight for social justice and human rights.

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