

Chapter 3

A forgiven Sinner? Robert Mugabe and the strained Catholic Relations

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Introduction

In November 2017, a statement by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) thanked Robert Mugabe for the “good work” he had done as the President of Zimbabwe for 37 years but was quick to point out: “We forgive him for any shortcomings during his long tenure of office” (ZCBC, cited in *Catholic Herald*, 27 November 2017). Such a statement by the Catholic bishops summarises the controversy that surrounds Robert Mugabe. While he, at times, had good relations with the church, as seen in him receiving holy communion on a regular basis, as well as attending important church functions such as the burial of the late Pope John Paul II in 2005, there were darker moments as well when he came out vicious through word and action towards the same church he purported to be a member.

Employing a socio-historical analysis, this chapter seeks to make a follow-up on Mugabe’s relations with the Catholic Church, highlighting in particular the strained moments. The chapter is propelled by the hand of forgiveness that was stretched towards Mugabe at the end of an era of his battle with the same church he claimed to be a member. The chapter argues that by extending a hand of forgiveness to Mugabe, the Catholic Church demonstrated what ‘true Christianity’ is all about as expatiated by C.S. Lewis (1949:182) who said: “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”

Mugabe, the Catholic

Born at the Catholic Mission Station of Kutama on 21 February 1924, Robert Mugabe grew up a product of the missionary system (Meredith, 2007). The moment his mother Bona started taking him with her to mass, Robert is said to have become almost as pious as his mother (*Independent Online*, 2008). Her mother, who belonged to the Shonhiwa family of Kutama (Mushohwe, 2016), was fanatically religious and had arrived at Chishawasha Mission Station with hopes of becoming a nun. She, however, saw herself getting married to Gabriel Chatunga Mugabe at Chishawasha, where Mugabe and his siblings grew up and herself becoming a teacher at Chishawasha before they relocated to Kutama (*Ibid*).

The founder of the mission station at Kutama, Fr Jean-Baptiste Loubière, a French national, taught the local African people to regard the entire outside world as an evil place that would engulf them unless they sought guidance through constant prayer (*Independent Online*, 2008). Taking the

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teachings of the church to heart, Mugabe's mother is said to have been made to wear high-necked, ankle-length dresses. In an interview with Heidi Holland, Mugabe confirmed:

In those days, the Catholics were living saints, or at least the church thought it could make them living saints. We lived in Christian villages. We were not allowed to go out... You could go out on a mission to see your granny, but you had to be back by 5pm (Mugabe cited in Holland, 2008).

Mugabe was soon to outlive his brothers, Raphael and Michael. During an eulogy for his late sister, Bridgette, in Zvimba, Mugabe revealed that the death of his older brothers Raphael (six months) in 1922 and the poisoning of Michael (15), in 1934, really tore his mother up and may have led his father to abandon the family (Mugabe cited in Zaniest, 2014). Devastated not only by the death of his adored elder brother, Michael, but also the abandonment by his father, Robert Mugabe faced an impecunious, lonely, bitter and emotionally deprived childhood (Meredith, 2007). In regards to his father, a cousin to the family, James Chikerema during an interview in 2000 pointed out that "Mugabe has never forgiven him for that" (Chikerema cited in Meredith, 2007:21). His parental grandfather is said to have done his best to compensate for the absent father by introducing Robert to the basics of life like catching birds for consumption. While Robert appears to have appreciated the tender care that was given him by his grandfather, it was, however, to his austere mother that he looked forlornly for affection. In the years following the deaths of his siblings, he attended mass daily with his mother and twice on Sundays (*Independent Online*, 2008).

Having become his mother's oldest and favourite child, by default though, Robert is said to have become her pillar of support (Holland, 2008). Given that she could not cope with the grief of being abandoned by her husband, Bona is said to have become dependent on the sensitive and caring Robert. On his part, to cope with the situation, Robert buried himself in books while his siblings and classmates teased him as a mummy's boy and a coward who would not play and fight with the other boys (*Independent Online*, 2008).

In 1931, an Irish Jesuit priest, Father Jerome O'Hea, came to replace Fr Loubière at Kutama and it was in no time that he noticed the solemn, talented Robert Mugabe and began to nurture him. The priest, Father O'Hea is said to have gone out of his way to help the lonely and shy Robert whom he found to having an "unusual gravitas" in terms of his seriousness and "an exceptional mind and an exceptional heart" (Holland, 2008). As a way to show attention towards him as well as to make him get used to other boys of his age, Fr O'Hea would often take him with other boys for a ride. In his interview with Holland, Mugabe recalls how Fr O'Hea acted as a father figure to him saying:

Yes, yes. And every Thursday he used to carry us on the lorry; drive to the river, to a pool, where he taught us how to swim. Some youngsters used to sit on him [gestures to his chest]

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as he did backstroke. He was a nice Irishman, yes. Only an Irishman could do that; an Englishman couldn't (Mugabe cited in *Independent Online*, 2008).

The imprint that the Irish Jesuit priest had on Robert was lasting. He instilled a love of learning in Mugabe, who later went on to earn seven degrees during the 14 years he spent whilst he was in incarceration for anti-colonial activities. It was the priest, as testified by Christopher Woolf (2017), who first introduced Robert Mugabe to revolutionary politics and techniques and later to learn Marxist ideas from white students while at Fort Hare College in South Africa. This explains why Mugabe remained grateful to the Jesuits and an admirer of the Catholic Church throughout his tenure in office. More like Adolf Hitler, Mugabe had this to say: "I was brought up by the Jesuits and I'm most grateful. I benefited from their teaching enormously" (Mugabe cited in Kirchick, 2007). In April 1980, the educated Robert Mugabe became the first Prime Minister of the new nation of Zimbabwe.

Timeline of key moments in Mugabe's relations with the Roman Catholic Church

1980: Independence of Zimbabwe

At the dawn of independence in 1980, it was inevitable that the new parameters of Church-State relations were to be informed and shaped by the church bodies' previous relations with Ian Smith's colonial regime that was in office and the two nationalist movements, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), that were soon to form a new government. Whilst at least three church bodies are worth to mention at this time; the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) – a collection of established churches, the ZCBC – purely Catholic and the Heads of Denominations – a conglomeration of Protestant and Catholic leaders, it was the ZCC and ZCBC which in particular had existed prior to independence (Maxwell, 1995).

Back in the 1970s, the Rhodesian Catholic Bishops Conference had begun giving its support to the Patriotic Front, a collective term to refer to both ZANU and ZAPU, and became so vocal, through its Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), against the atrocities which were being perpetrated by the Smith regime against Africans (McLaughlin, 1996; Maxwell, 1995). This is further supported by Timothy Scarnecchia (2017) who notes that a book commissioned by CCJP in 1975 entitled *Man in the Middle* chronicled not only the brutality of the counter-insurgency tactics used by the Rhodesian forces but also the terror which was used by African nationalists which made life so tough for the ordinary rural populations who were caught in the middle. The ZCC, which by then was known as the Christian Council, tended not to support the Patriotic Front but rather chose to throw its weight behind the African National Congress which was headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa. In 1978 it went on to support the Internal Settlement which was negotiated between Ian Smith and Abel Muzorewa himself but was shunned by the Patriotic Front (Maxwell, 1995).

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It is not surprising, therefore, that when Robert Mugabe won the general elections in 1980 and took office, memories of the roles that had been played by church bodies during the war were fresh in his mind. He and his government tended to align themselves more with the Catholic Church. The new government's dealings with the Christian Council which now had come to be renamed ZCC was rather casual. As David Maxwell (1995:112) succinctly puts it, "As a consequence for backing the wrong horse, the new ZCC was immediately suspect in the eyes of the ZANU (PF) government." The aligning of the new government with the Catholic Church at the time it took power was well pronounced during the night of 18 April 1980 when Prince Charles took down the Union Jack flag and raised the Zimbabwean flag for the first time. To bless the occasion was the Catholic Archbishop of Harare, Patrick Chakaipa (Chifera, 2016; Taylor, 2003). As testified in Chirongoma (2008), the morning after the Independence night events, Mugabe and his wife, Sally, together with most senior members of the party, attended a special independence mass at the Sacred Heart Catholic Cathedral. This was not the only event which saw the Catholic Church working closely with the government of Robert Mugabe.

It should be noted, however, that while the Catholic Church worked closely with Mugabe's government, it made it clear from the beginning that it was independent from the State. In their independence message to the nation in 1980, the Catholic Bishops said:

In a plural society like Zimbabwe, it is important to have a clear view of the relationship between the Church and the State. The Church is not identified with any political community, nor is she bound to any political system. Rather, her function is to be the moral conscience of the nation, the sign and safeguard of the supreme value of the human person (ZCBC, 1980).

On the part of the government itself, while the first President of the country, Canaan Banana, argued that he conceptualised Church-State relations in terms of a 'symbiosis' (Banana, 1991), hardly was there anything in his attitude towards the Church to prove that this meant anything in practice. As rightly pointed out by Maxwell (1995: 111), "during the first decade of independence, the Zimbabwe government was to love the Church only for its body and proved positively uninterested in its prophetic qualities."

1982 – 1987: The Gukurahundi Massacre

While the Catholic Church's relations with the new Zimbabwean government had been fairly moving on well, a twist to the relations came when Mugabe and his cronies in 1982 embarked on a campaign against the Ndebele ethnic group. In the pretext of trying to suppress a dissident uprising which threatened to undermine the elected government through various acts of sabotage (*Nehanda Radio*, 23 November 2012), Mugabe, in December 1982, commissioned the Fifth Brigade which had been trained by the North Koreans and it descended in Matabeleland North at the end of January 1983 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003; Meredith, 2003). The real issue that had led to the 'dissident problem' in the eyes of Ndlovu-Gatsheni (*Ibid*), lay in the new government's security obsession which led to the defection of large numbers of ex-ZIPRA (Nkomo's army) combatants

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and the forced demobilisation of many others from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). Ex-ZIPRA combatants complained of being sidelined, being harassed and of threats to their lives. Thus as a result of this failed army integration process, those who later turned out to be dissidents had been forced to lead the lives of fugitives. Though government-controlled media tried to portray the dissident problem as a hatched plan of ZAPU to overthrow the new government, hardly have researchers found any strong evidence linking it to the ZAPU party. The dissidents were actually comprised of various elements; in the group were deserters from the new ZNA, Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), former Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR), criminals from Bulawayo and Lupane as well as destabilisation groups which were sponsored by South Africans (Moorcraft and Chitiyo 2011). Being so diverse, the group hardly operated in a coordinated way and there was no clear leader as such of the group save for a notorious figure by the name Richard Gwesela who is said to have wreaked havoc in the Midlands Province shortly after independence and before the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 (Kawadza, 2015).

Though the Fifth Brigade managed to suppress the rebellion, it committed more atrocities perhaps than those committed by the dissidents themselves, by mercilessly killing and raping innocent souls. As covered in the report on massacres, the government used the offensive to launch a ‘double-edged war’ in Matabeleland. While it initially was directed towards dissidents, the government used it to attack ordinary civilians of Matabeleland (*Ibid*). In a spate of just six weeks, according to Meredith (2003), at least 2 000 civilian lives had perished, hundreds of homes destroyed and tens of thousands of civilians tortured. In total, the campaign is estimated to have killed around 20, 000 innocent lives (Doran, 2015), but according to the estimates of Ian Smith, the figure was as high as 30, 000 and the CIO’s estimate was 18, 000 (Moorcraft & Chitiyo, 2011).

It was just soon after the initial killings and torture had commenced that a Catholic delegation including two bishops and the chairperson of CCJP on March 16, 1983 presented Mugabe with a comprehensive dossier as well as a pastoral statement which incriminated the army of gross mayhem and reign of terror in Matabeleland (Meredith, 2003). While deep inside him he knew that the dossier was quite correct, the only response Mugabe could provide at this time was a refusal of all allegations of the atrocities. He rather chose to label the Bishops as “sanctimonious prelates” who “were playing to the international gallery” (Mugabe cited in Meredith, 2003:68). Not only did he question their being independent from external influence but he queried also their allegiance and loyalty to Zimbabwe. It was on these grounds that he concluded to say:

The Church of Zimbabwe, whatever the denomination, must abandon forever the tendency or temptation to play marionette for foreign so-called parent churches whose interests and perspectives may, and often will be, at variance with the best interests of our country (*Ibid*).

In Mugabe’s eyes, the Church was supposed to attune itself to the realities of the new dispensation that was obtaining in Zimbabwe.

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In 1997, when the campaign was over, the CCJP and the Legal Resources Foundation jointly published a damning report which implicated Mugabe's government of crimes against humanity and in particular against the minority Ndebele ethnic group. The Commission accused Mugabe's government of following a 'genocidal course' against the Ndebele people (CCJP, 1997). The report could not enjoy wide circulation in the country as the Mugabe government took a hard stance to suppress it, curtailing thus its spread in the public fora. Just as he had rubbished in 1983 a dossier by a Catholic delegation, Mugabe once again showed he had no time for such a report. He castigated it as merely the work of "mischief makers wearing religious garb" (Mugabe cited in Meredith, 2003:74).

The sharp dig at the Church by Mugabe spelt nothing other than disaster in his future relations with the Church. What it simply meant was that Mugabe was trying to deny the Church of its moral voice, yet that was practically impossible if the Church was to stand in the footsteps of its Master and Founder Jesus Christ. All he dreamt about was an endorsing Church, a Church that would sing his praises no matter what and mum if he chose to exterminate or banish at will whoever he considered a political foe. As shall be reflected in the ongoing discussion, it was this 'yes Sir' disposition that the Catholic Bishops refused to give Mugabe leading him to feel disgusted by the behaviour of these men of the cloth.

1998-1999: Zimbabwe's economic meltdown

According to Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya (2002), the precise moment when the Zimbabwean economy began to tumble was the late morning of 14 November 1997 when, in just over a four-hour period, the Zimbabwean dollar lost 74% of its value. The chief catalyst behind the fall was Mugabe's decision to reward each registered war veteran Z\$50.000 pension payout plus Z\$2.000 per month to quieten their protest over his failure to provide them with decent jobs and other survival needs. In 1998, Mugabe's government took another ill calculated decision to deploy troops in support of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government that was fighting rebels. This decision was well in accord with other member states within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). The regional block had taken this bold move to bring about peace to the DRC, where rebels of the M23 Movement were fighting against the government of Laurent Kabila. In sending the troops, the Zimbabwean government at that time had the opinion that SADC, the African Union as well as the United Nations were going to foot the bill of this expensive adventure. As confirmed by the then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Joey Bimha, the Zimbabwean troops were only going to be deployed for peacekeeping and the cash-strapped Zimbabwean government was not going to foot the bill. He explained the mission saying:

This is what is called a neutral international force and SADC will have to source out funding for it... Zimbabwe will contribute troops and of course at some expense to it but most of the expenses are going to be sourced from outside, from the African Union and even the United Nations (Bimha cited in *Voice of America*, 12 December 2012, para.9).

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While all appeared rosy at the beginning, it later turned to be a costly mission that costed the Zimbabwean economy back home. Several economic analysts and political commentators would agree that this was a costly war that played a big part in the meltdown of the Zimbabwean economy. Among the vocal critics of the deployment of Zimbabwean troops to DRC was Rejoice Ngwenya who averred:

Even if we are part of the SADC family that has helped broker a lot of misunderstandings in Zimbabwe, the case of déjà vu and our experience in the DRC – a war that has no cause, and even considering our national resources, there is nothing that justifies our intervention in the DRC... We lost millions of dollars every day and that war was responsible for taking our economy down (Ngwenya cited in *Voice of America*, 12 December 2012, para.12).

When local Zimbabweans felt pressed by the biting economy and high interest rates as well as inflation, many took to the streets rioting. Earlier to the tumbling economy, there had been general discontent among the masses which had been triggered by both the 1995 parliamentary and 1996 presidential elections which many saw as non-events. Following the elections, relations between government and trade unions grew bitter and Harare was rocked by workers' demonstrations which saw property getting damaged as well as being looted by the rioters. The bitterness of the labour movement affected even commercial farms. According to *The Herald* (1 January 1998), 1997 saw farm workers collectively going on strike for the first time in the history of Zimbabwe (Laakso, 2004).

It was amidst all these challenges that were buffeting the nation of Zimbabwe that the Catholic Bishops in May 1998 released a Pastoral Letter: *Working for the Common Good*. The opening lines of that Pastoral letter summarized the prevailing situation that had engulfed the nation. The Bishops noted:

Fellow Zimbabwean citizens, there is no doubt that we live in a time of crisis for our beloved country and its people. The recent food riots and the two national stay-away days are indications of a deep discontent and resentment (ZCBC, 1998:115).

In a veiled attack on the cronies around Mugabe, the Bishops went on to say: "There is resentment that a fortunate few can accumulate and flaunt such extremes of wealth in a display of power, oblivious to the serious poverty that is experienced by many" (ZCBC, 1998). Further criticising the failed government's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), the Bishops were not shy to point out that the programme had been introduced with little or no consultation or due explanation done. Instead of it mitigating the needs of the poor, it turned out to satisfy the wants of the rich with large amounts of public money which were being spent on luxuries and funding military expenditures at the expense of health and education (*Ibid*). Having a solid foundation in the Scriptures and in particular with the book of Amos which castigates the sinful ill-treatment of the poor by the rich in Israel, the Bishops must have felt their duty to stand in the shoes of Amos to castigate what they saw as a recurrence of the Israelite sinful situation in Zimbabwe.

2000 - 2002: Land seizures, parliamentary and presidential elections

The year 2000 came with a lot of anticipations as well as surprises. In the technological world, the general talk was of being Y2K compliant. While the numeronym Y2K was a common abbreviation for the 2000 software problem, in popular usage it literally got to mean a general preparedness for the new millennium (Fao, 1999). While there was much hyperbole of being Y2K compliant, there were hardly any noticeable changes in the country. The only area that saw real changes was land ownership in Zimbabwe. A number of White farmers in Zimbabwe saw their land seized from them in a violent campaign by thousands of landless Blacks backed by the Mugabe regime (Mamdani, 2008). Though the idea behind the exercise was a noble one in that it was an instrument of distributive justice and economic growth, the manner in which it was carried out was so chaotic hence, the often use of the term *jambanja* ('chaos') in reference to it (Alexander, 2006). Instead of pursuing the exercise in a courteous manner, Mugabe was forced to take it up as a matter of political expediency as he wanted to calm the war veterans who were now clamoring for the land they said they had fought for. According to Mubako, "land was one of the principal objectives of the war of liberation, through which Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980. Yet, 19 years after independence, that land was still in the hands of British settlers" (Mubako cited in Gowland, 2002:10). While at first Mugabe differed with war veterans who were clamouring for land, calling them 'armchair critics' at the inaugural conference of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) in 1992 (Mamdani, 2008), two decades down the line, Mugabe's position had changed. As observed by Mahmood Mamdani, the issue of praise as a 'conciliator' by the international community for ensuring the security and property of those whites who remained in Zimbabwe was of no longer importance to him. With so much to gain from putting his weight behind the land invasions by the war veterans, he announced that the government was not going to evict the war veterans who had taken land for themselves. One can also say that Mugabe put his weight behind the violent land seizures by the war veterans as a way to pre-empt the opposition party MDC which had started calling for land redistribution. In its election manifesto in 2000, the MDC party promised to stand for democracy, political pluralism, accountable governance, equitable development policies and economic growth. It promised to promote "people driven land reform" (Laakso, 2004).

Earlier in 1997, the Catholic Bishops had released a Pastoral Letter: *ZCBC Statement on Land Reform* after they had taken note of the government's intention to solve the problem of equitable land distribution once and for all. In the Pastoral Letter, the Bishops had provided moral principles that were to guide the government and the people of Zimbabwe in the process of land distribution. Among the key principles they had raised was a suitable mechanism to ensure that justice, equity and fairness in the distribution process prevailed. The State was also to ensure that farm workers who would lose their employment as a result of the redistribution exercise had alternative employment or land on which to settle (ZCBC, 1997).

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When the Church realised that all these moral principles and proposals were being ignored when the actual land seizures had begun, the Bishops on 17 April 2000 released an *Easter Message* in which they reiterated their call for the sharing of land and its resources equitably. They implored the citizens of Zimbabwe to shun violence and corruption during the process of land redistribution (ZCBC, 17 April 2000). Since the year 2000 was marked also by Parliamentary elections which were marred by political violence and abductions during the campaign period, the Bishops were forced to release another statement on 7 June 2000: *Use your Vote, it is your Right*. In this statement the Bishops noted that [political] violence in Zimbabwe by then had already claimed more than 26 lives and injured many more and property worth millions of dollars had been destroyed. In a clear attack on the government of Robert Mugabe, the Bishops said: “We call upon the government to ensure that its organs like the police and the media revisit their national obligation of service to the nation and all its citizens and not be partisan” (ZCBC, 7 June 2000).

The intimidation and violence that had characterised the Parliamentary elections had hardly been a thing of the past when preparations for the 2002 Presidential elections were set in motion. War veterans were seen on the forefront leading a violent campaign and their harassment of the electorate was extended even to urban and industrial areas (Laakso, 2004). When the ballot was eventually cast in March, Mugabe emerged as the winner despite the calls by the opposition as well as international observers that the elections were flawed and unfair (Nkiwane, 2002). Coincidentally, as the political atmosphere was marked by a hunger for level playground, there was drought which caused a severe food shortage not only in Zimbabwe but also in most of the Southern African region and the government was forced to embark on a food distribution programme. The manner in which the food was distributed became a politicised issue and there was so much cronyism along political party lines and corruption.

Noticing the ill that had bedeviled the country, the Catholic Bishops were once again on the throat of the Mugabe government, accusing it of partisanship and corrupt practices. In August 2002 they issued a statement: *Appeal for Food in Zimbabwe* in which they openly told the government that it was becoming more and more difficult for the ordinary poor citizens to make ends meet as exploitation of man by man had risen to unprecedented levels. The Bishops thus urged the government to quickly depoliticise the procurement and distribution of food and put in place measures to minimize the acquisition of food by threats, corruption or exploitation (ZCBC, August 2002). This was followed by yet another Pastoral Letter in March 2003: *A Call to Metanoia: Listen to the Inner Voice* in which the Bishops, with great concern, noted that there was no sign that corruption was being dealt with effectively by the government. They courageously told the government of Robert Mugabe that it had failed to provide leadership that enabled the creation of an environment that enhanced truth, justice, love and freedom (ZCBC, March 2003). While the Bishops talked, Mugabe appeared to take less care of whatever they were saying.

Looking at the events from 1997 when Mugabe warned the Church of Zimbabwe to abandon the tendency of being puppets of Western churches after the CCJP reported on the

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disturbances in Matabeleland and the repeated attacks on Mugabe's government by the Bishops, one can easily tell that the relations between Mugabe and the Church were increasingly turning bad. While Mugabe appeared to block his ears from whatever the Bishops were saying, if his inner voice of conscience was still alive, he could have been deeply aware that he was going off compass but the sweetness of power that lay his hands made him have none of whatever the Bishops were advising him.

2005: Operation Murambatsvina

As the country witnessed a biting economy and a general exodus of the rural folk into towns, those who owned houses in the suburbs took this as an opportunity to boost their meagre income by extending their houses or building extra rooms on their property. The move eased the accommodation crisis that had hit the towns and also enabled an entrepreneurship spirit which resulted in many being able at least to put food on their tables through durawall tuck-shops as well as production of multi-faceted goods in places like Siyaso ('bother not') in Harare. While an enabling environment had been created to mitigate the harsh forces of the economy, the government of Robert Mugabe in 2005 introduced an operation called *Murambatsvina* (remove dirt). The operation was completely a reversal of the little gains that people had made in a biting economic environment. Instead of acknowledging these gains, the government at that time saw spirited entrepreneurship as a sign of retrogression of the economy. Such a mentality is reflected well in the words of Mugabe's then Police Commissioner, Augustine Chihuri, who demeaned the entrepreneurs saying: "We must clean the country of the crawling mass of maggots bent on destroying the economy" (Chihuri cited in Meredith, 2007:235). This operation saw most residents of high density suburbs getting their houses destroyed and many were left homeless. The argument proffered by the government was that such houses had been built or extended without the approval of the city councils. Though the government hid behind issues of approval as noted by Marongwe (2003), it was actually a way to reduce the masses that had swelled towns. The move was actually a political tactic in that during the Parliamentary and Presidential elections of 2000 and 2002, the majority of urbanites had voted for Morgan Tsvangirai. There was thus a latent fear within government circles that these urbanites could lead a revolution that could eventually lead result in the removal of the incumbent government.

Following the house demolitions, the government, unfortunately, did not provide enough houses for the affected people but it also encouraged those affected to go back to their villages and live there. Many people, including women with babies, children of school age, the old and the sick, were forced to sleep in the open air at winter temperatures (Meredith, 2007). The high rate of unemployment and the high rate of urban migration increased the rate of poverty as it resulted in house shortages and increased urban unemployment.

Empathising with the displaced and suffering peoples, the Catholic Bishops again felt that it was their obligation to stand with the people. In June 2005, they released a Pastoral Letter: *The*

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Cry of the Poor. In this letter, the Bishops castigated the move that the government had taken in arbitrarily disregarding people's rights to shelter, food, education, health care and employment without proper planning and timing. They protested: "No secular authority, no group, or individual should be allowed to violate such rights" (ZCBC, June 2005).

As a counter response to what the Bishops were saying, Mugabe unleashed a series of blistering attacks on the Church. During the official opening of the Zion Christian Church Headquarters at Mbungu Estates on 22 April 2005, Mugabe took this as an opportunity to praise the ZCC leadership and at the same time lambast the Catholic Church leaders. He ranted:

I am confused by my own Catholic bishops; they must learn from you (ZCC leaders). Often, Catholic bishops expose that they are not their own men; they are mere puppets of Western countries. I grew up in a Catholic Church but now I am totally frustrated by these so-called men of God who lie. All Catholic bishops are liars; they demonise my party every day (Mugabe cited in Ndou, 2011).

While somehow putting up with the Black clergy within the Catholic Church, he directed a sharp jibe at the White clergy saying: "I observed how they operate and my conclusion is that almost three quarters of them who are whites feed people with lies" (Mugabe cited in Ndou, 2011). Not willing to acknowledge what the Bishops were saying, he rather saw the reason for his attack as squarely falling on the heads of the white clergy who were busy pursuing Western interests and agendas. Over a week later, at another Indigenous African Parish, Mugabe again alleged that Catholic Bishops were liars and puppets of Western countries (Kirchick, 2007).

Despite his disappointment with the Catholic leadership, Mugabe never signaled any intention to leave the Catholic Church and to the surprise of many, he featured himself in Rome at the funeral of the late John Paul II. Kirchick (*Ibid*) was therefore right to say: "Despite his Marxist pretensions and passionate rhetoric against the West, Robert Mugabe has long been an admirer of the Catholic Church."

Later in September 2006, the Catholic Bishops joined with other Christian bodies: the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), to produce a document: *The Zimbabwe We Want*. The document was the roadmap that the men of the cloth envisaged was ideal for peace-building and socio-economic development in Zimbabwe. What they implied, in other words, was that the Mugabe government had failed. Instead of putting in place progressive systems, the government was rather revoking the Ian Smith repressive pieces of legislation such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) (ZCBC, 2007; *The Zimbabwe We Want*, 2006).

Looking at Mugabe within the short space of time between his attacks on the Catholic Bishops calling them liars before the ZCC leadership and his immediate appearance in the Vatican, one cannot fail to stop and wonder what kind of a 'devout' Catholic adherent he showed himself to be. While he pretended to show himself very devout before the world and in particular before the Vatican officials, his double standards left a lot to be desired. His shenanigans only helped to

severe more his relations back home with the local Catholic Church. What he did truly confirms what Maxwell said earlier on that the Zimbabwean government was to love the Church only for its body and was totally uninterested in its prophetic qualities. Mugabe would only love a church if it added votes in his favour and this explains why he had the guts to denounce his own Catholic shepherds before a promising electorate of ZCC followers and also why later towards the harmonised election of 2013, he had the guts to put on Church regalia of the Johane Marange Apostolic Sect in Marange (Machingura, 2012). Alluding also to Mugabe's church manipulation tactics just for the sake of votes is Bishau's comment in which he says: "We know the president to be a Catholic and a staunch one, but to see him with an Apostolic Sect prophet's rod and staff has to be explained by some other theory other than he was converted into Johane Marange Sect" (Bishau, 2013:72).

2007 – 2008: Unprecedented socio-economic hardships

When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, the Z\$1 was equal to US\$1.50 and at that time the highest note in currency circulation was Z\$20 (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, 2011). Things were, however different by 2007 as basic goods started to disappear from the shelves of most shops around the county. By 2008, hyperinflation had reached unprecedented levels. As noted in *The Guardian* (2015), the Zimbabwean dollar was ruined by hyperinflation, which hit 500 billion per cent in 2008, and this was a time when prices of basic commodities in shops would change for more than 10 times a day at a rate of more than 500%. As people felt cornered by what was prevailing in the country, many got angry and the only way to vent the anger was through boycotts, strikes, demonstrations and uprisings. It was unfortunate that as they tried to express their feelings, the state's law-enforcement agents: the police and soldiers, assaulted and beat up the unarmed and peaceful demonstrators and some detainees were severely manhandled (ZCBC, 2007). The abduction and torture of Jestina Mukoko was one among such cases which shook many not only in Zimbabwe but the whole human rights world beyond the Zimbabwean borders (Howden, 2009). The health delivery system disintegrated as health professionals either went on industrial action or fled the country (ZCBC, 2007) for greener pastures. The education sector was not spared as several students abruptly terminated their studies after many teachers had sought greener pastures in neighbouring countries. A study by Duri (2010) in which he investigates into the survival strategies by people leaving near the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border reveals that the industrial strike by teachers in 2008 saw some teachers crossing into Mozambique where they got employed in various informal sectors and pupils as young as 11 years old who had dropped out of school due to the harsh socio-economic environment were employed as *matunges* 'potters of cross-border smugglers.'

Looking at the dire situation that the country was in, the Catholic Bishops took it up again with the government of Robert Mugabe when they released a Pastoral Letter: *God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed* on 5 April 2007. Reflecting on the deep crisis that was facing the nation, they averred: "We have concluded that the crisis of our country is, in essence, a crisis of governance

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and a crisis of leadership apart from being a spiritual and moral crisis” (ZCBC, 5 April 2007). They identified the root cause of the crisis with the government’s reinforcement of the repressive POSA and AIPPA legislations (*Ibid*).

During the April 2007 independence celebrations, Mugabe in his address to the nation saw this as a perfect opportunity to respond to the Catholic Bishops’ letter of the same year. He criticised the letter as utter “nonsense” and regarded the Bishops as having become politicians which, for him, was a dangerous path because his government could start treating them as political foes (Dzirutwe, 2007). Cited verbatim, he fumed:

If I had gone to church and the priest had read that so-called pastoral letter, I would have stood up and said nonsense ... The bishops have decided to turn political. And once they turn political, we regard them as no longer being spiritual and our relations with them would be conducted as if we are dealing with political entities, and this is quite a dangerous path they have chosen for themselves (Mugabe cited in Dzirutwe, 2007).

Just two days after his denigrating speech towards the Catholic Bishops, Mugabe saw another opportunity to reiterate his strong words towards the clerics when he addressed his party’s Central Committee Meeting on 20 April 2007. He lashed out at the Bishops: “They have gone wrong, sadly, very sadly. This is an area we warn them not to tread. It was a sorry letter, a disgraceful piece of work, an error, a disastrous error and we shall tell them when we meet them” (*Ibid*).

Among the clerics who were a real bother to Mugabe was the former Archbishop Pius Ncube. Ncube emerged as a highly courageous and critical voice and was bold enough to call on people to rise up against Mugabe's rule. He even declared his readiness to go in front of blazing guns (Chitando, Taringa and Mapuranga, 2014). In response to Pius Ncube, Mugabe accused him of peddling falsehoods about the manner in which the government was being run. He then urged people not to pay attention to such misguided church leaders (*Ibid*). Through his network of intelligence, Mugabe orchestrated a plan to silence Ncube. When State television aired grainy pictures of Pius Ncube’s adulterous affair, Mugabe seized that opportunity to nail a final blow to his archrival. He teased Ncube saying that he would pray for him "so he has some good manners" (Mugabe cited in Kirchick, 2007). He went on to say, "I also know God; I am a Roman Catholic. I am a person who belongs to the Church, but I didn’t have an affair with anyone" (*Ibid*). Though Mugabe claimed himself to be much smarter, it is in the public domain that he sired two children with his then secretary, Grace Marufu (now his wife), while his first wife, Sally, was on her deathbed. Reckoning the period when the affair could have started and the part Grace played in Mugabe’s life, Yalibnan says: “It was the early 1990s when President Robert Mugabe’s eye fell upon one of his shy young typists. She would become his wife, a ferociously ambitious politician and, more than two decades later, a contributor to the downfall of her 93-year-old husband” (Yalibnan, 17 November 2017, para.2).

The year 2007 can possibly be regarded as the peak of the sour relations between Mugabe and the Catholic Church. Mugabe could not hide his anger towards the Church and worse towards his thorn in the flesh Pius Ncube. To show his lack of any iota of respect towards the Church at this time, he orchestrated through his intelligence network Ncube's downfall. The manner he allowed state television, ZBC TV, to repeatedly and shamelessly air pictures of Ncube's adulterous affair shows that he was prepared to destroy the Church he purported to belong on the altar of political power. What Mugabe had set out to do was tantamount to peeing in the very womb that bore him.

2008: Harmonised elections

Amidst the tension that was in the country, 2008 saw the nation conducting harmonised elections. While Morgan Tsvangirai claimed victory in the presidential elections, the Zimbabwean Electoral Commission (ZEC) argued that he had failed to garner the simple majority which was required to win the elections, hence it called for a re-run of the Presidential elections (The Guardian, 4 May 2008). In the fear of losing again to Tsvangirai, state agents pursued a violent campaign that left many maimed, some dead and others homeless and eventually Morgan Tsvangirai had to pull out of the run-off due to alleged intimidation and Mugabe won the presidency (Dzirutwe, 2018). The 2008 elections, especially the presidential run-off, as argued by Sipeyiye (2015), will go down in history as the election in which the worst violence was experienced and it claimed an estimated figure of 200 lives.

It was against this background of torture, intimidation and murder of some members of the opposition that the Catholic Bishops had to issue another statement on 12 June 2008: *A Call for an Immediate Stop to Violence*. In this letter, the Bishops again appealed to the security apparatus of Robert Mugabe's government that it needed to value and protect the life and human rights of every individual. They categorically stated: "We call for the de-politicisation of the armed and uniformed forces and traditional leaders. We call for an immediate cessation of violence and all provocative statements and actions" (ZCBC, 2008:322-323).

The orgy of violence, murder and intimidation committed with the full knowledge and blessings of Mugabe could surely have not exonerated him from a moral judgement that his acts were indeed sinful in themselves. Being the moral conscience of the society, there is no way the Bishops could have condoned such acts except to call for an immediate stop to them as it seriously severed relations not only between them and Mugabe's government but also left the country in a state of anarchy and gruesome pain. In the eyes of the Bishops, people of Zimbabwe were reacting against the 'structures of sin' in the society. To drive home the point to Mugabe and his cronies that their behaviour was rooted in sin, the Bishops cited the words of John Paul II who said: "structures of sin are rooted in personal sin, and always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove. And they grow stronger, spread, and become the source of other sins, and so influence people's behaviour" (ZCBC, 2007:3009).

2009 – 2017: Unity Government and beyond

Following the elections of June 2008 in which Mugabe declared himself the winner, the nation of Zimbabwe was once again caught up in political and economic stagnation. To see the country on its feet again, talks towards unity between the contending political parties were initiated and this eventually saw the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) in September 2008 and the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009 (Dziva, Dube and Manatsa, 2013). With the unity government in place, the economic woes of the country eased and there was general political stability. The inclusive government lasted until 2013 when harmonised elections were held (*Ibid*).

During the period of the inclusive government, the Catholic Bishops remained concerned about the failure in the implementation of all tenets of the Global Political Agreement. In their address to the nation on 14 January 2011: *Let us Work for the Common Good*, the Bishops noted that failure in the implementation of all the tenets of the GPA was leading to continued isolation of the country from the greater part of the international community as well as the postponement of national healing, recovery, restoration and enjoyment of fundamental human rights by all (ZCBC, 14 January 2011).

Three months after the July 2013 elections were over, the Catholic Bishops tore into Robert Mugabe’s empty election manifesto in which he had promised to create more than a million jobs and improve welfare in all the key sectors of the people’s lives. In their publication: *Restoration and Peace in Zimbabwe*, they lamented: “We note with apprehension that three months after the dust from the elections began to settle down, there are no visible prospects for improvement in the spheres of life in Zimbabwe that cry for restoration to give people hope for a better life” (ZCBC, 2013:372). Further elaborating their point that no visible prospects of improvement were anywhere to be seen, they noted:

Our industrial sites carry the appearance of ghost towns because the once-vibrant manufacturing sector is now largely moribund. The dignity of our people has been severely eroded as they have become reduced to sellers of cheap goods and products at street corners in our cities in order to survive. Daily water and power cuts, shortage of medicines, equipment and professional personnel in our hospitals, chaos and carnage on our roads, raw sewage flowing in the streets of our towns and cities – the list of what reduces us as a people, our dignity and our hope for a better life is long (ZCBC, 2013:373).

Following on their message in *Restoration and Peace in Zimbabwe*, the Bishops in August 2014 took it up again with the government by releasing: *Work Together for the Common Good: ‘Watchman, how much longer the night?’* Seeing that Mugabe and his government were taking their time to deliver on the number of areas that the Bishops and the nation expected them to address, they wrote: “We have waited to see signs of these things and we are still waiting, and we are prompted to ask with Isaiah 21: 11: ‘Watchman, how much longer the night?’” (ZCBC, August

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2014). While they acknowledged the drafting of the 2013 Constitution and the economic blueprint, the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZIMASSET), as having the same vision enshrined in the document *The Zimbabwe We Want*, they felt the present crisis lay in the concern with the idols of power, profit and money, and not with the value of the human person (*Ibid*). Though they did not name Mugabe and his cronies by name, they decried a culture of selfishness and absence of concrete actions by the government to weed out corrupt activities when they said:

We have to admit that levels of selfishness, and a desire to accumulate personal wealth by any means, exist among us and we note the absence of decisive action to halt corruption. Corruption will not end unless and until culprits are brought to book (*Ibid*).

These very concerns that the Catholic Bishops raised were the very ones that formed the basis of the Operation Restore Legacy in November 2017 that saw Mugabe falling from power and the arrest of some of his corrupt cronies who had an insatiable appetite for personal wealth.

The Catholic Church’s ‘dilemma’ over Mugabe

Admittedly, Mugabe was a controversial figure within the Catholic Church during his reign. The controversy stems from the fact that while at home he had running battles with the local leadership of the Catholic Church, while on the international scene he presented himself a devout Catholic. On 8 April 2005, he got himself counted among the Catholic dignitaries who attended the late Pope John Paul II’s funeral (*The Irish Times*, 7 April 2005). During the Beatification Ceremony of John Paul II on 1 May 2011, Mugabe again found himself in Rome. When John Paul II was canonised on 27 April 2014, Robert Mugabe could not miss that occasion as well (*Telegraph*, 27 April 2014).

The question of double standards by the Roman Catholic Church when dealing with Mugabe can hardly escape one’s gaze. If the local Catholic Church, which knew the man quite well, had taken a condemnatory approach towards his leadership, one would naturally have expected the Vatican to speak and act in the same manner with the local Bishops of and thus put him under interdict. Instead, the Vatican was seen dinning with a Head of State who was often at loggerheads with the Roman Catholic Church in Zimbabwe. During the Beatification Ceremony of John Paul II, the Vatican evaded criticism for hosting Mugabe by stating that had not been personally invited but as a head of a state with which the Vatican had relations, he was entitled to attend (Vatican spokesperson cited in *BBC News*, 30 April 2011). The 1929 Lateran Treaty which saw the recognition of the Vatican/Holy See as sovereign state, as noted by Kirchick (2007), established a “diplomatic corridor” between the Vatican and the rest of the world, thus allowing people like Mugabe to be hosted by the Pope.

In the Pius Ncube case, instead of the Vatican standing with him, it rather chose to silence him regardless of all the courage, determination and resilience in calling a spade in relation to what

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Mugabe was doing. On being asked at that time why the Vatican had chosen to remove Pius from the political scene in Zimbabwe, the Vatican Deputy Spokesperson, Father Ciro Benedettini, speculated that his removal could simply have been the application of a church rule that bans priests and bishops from taking part in politics since Canon Law forbids members of the clergy from participating directly in politics (Benedettini cited in *Herald Scotland*, 2008).

Forgiving the ‘Sinner’

Apart from the Pastoral Letters, perhaps no individual in the Catholic Church was able to openly point out the transgressions of Mugabe as Pius Ncube did. In his interview with *Frontier Africa Television* just before his departure to Rome following his resignation from office, Ncube expressed his disappointment with Mugabe and his government saying:

I became outspoken because I got extremely hurt and broken by the way the Zimbabwean government has been treating people - treating them like things, killing them, depriving them of food, depriving them of voting rights, destroying their houses, harassing them, imprisoning them, torturing them, killing the economy... I've never desired to be a politician. I only began speaking up when human rights were abused. Mugabe is a megalomaniac. There is this big zest in him for power. He has committed crimes against humanity and it could land him in an unpleasant situation. He could find himself jailed (Pius Ncube cited in *Herald Scotland*, 22 March 2008: para.7).

If all what was said by Pius Ncube is anything to go by, then such were the wrongs and transgressions of Robert Mugabe that merited his indictment by the Church but no pronouncement of that nature was ever made. One wonders then whether the local Catholic Church feared to put Mugabe under censure or suspending him from full membership. Did other Catholic Bishops in Zimbabwe feel as heartbroken by the misdemeanors of Robert Mugabe as Pius Ncube? While answers to these questions appear tricky to find, one should not forget Mugabe's dining with the highest Roman Catholic authorities in the Vatican as well as Mugabe's invitation to some Church functions in some dioceses in Zimbabwe. At the burial of the late Archbishop Patrick Fani Chakaipa on 14 April 2003, Mugabe was among the mourners who gathered at Chishawasha Cemetery near Harare (Taylor, 2003). On 26 August 2006, Mugabe featured in Gweru's Mkoba Suburb at the Episcopal Ordination of Martin Munyanyi as the Roman Catholic Bishop of Gweru (Katsande, 2006). On 13 December 2014, Mugabe sent the then ZDF Commander General, Constantino Chiwenga, to deliver his speech on the Golden Jubilee of Fr Francis Ribeiro, a Catholic priest who vocally opposed colonial rule in Rhodesia (Karonga, 2014). Putting together these parallel situations, one can draw up at least three justifiable arguments that can help explain why Mugabe at the end appears to have got his way despite his fight with the local Catholic Church authorities in Zimbabwe.

In the first scenario, it is possible to talk about issues of politicking within the local Catholic Church itself. While all Bishops appeared signatories to the Pastoral Letters that were written to try and bring Mugabe to his senses, it cannot be ruled out that some of them personally supported

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Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party and could have even voted for him during elections. In as much as Bishops have never barred the laity from following the political party of their choice, they too can personally subscribe to a party of their choice. It is not a closed secret, for example, that the late Archbishop Patrick Chakaipa was a close associate of Mugabe (Taylor, 2003). It is even alleged that following the death of Chakaipa, Mugabe and his ZANU-PF stalwarts, who included Nathan Shamuyarira, were pushing for the proclamation of Chakaipa's National Hero Status through the Mashonaland West provincial executive which unfortunately was turned down by the Chakaipa family as well as fellow Catholic Bishops (Mathuthu, 2003). The Bishops are said to have argued that burying Chakaipa at the National Heroes' Acre in Harare would have suggested that he was a ZANU-PF party member and could have discredited the Roman Catholic Church (Ibid). Commenting on the move that had been taken by Mugabe and his cronies, Pius Ncube derided the gesture saying: "It was just a joke. Some people wanted to score cheap political mileage because the whole issue is irrelevant and even Mugabe himself never raised it at the funeral" (Ncube cited in *Independent Catholic News*, 1 January 2003: para.1). In yet another story which names out the late Archbishop Chakaipa by name, Paul Taylor (2003) writes that it was a disgraceful decision when Chakaipa, together with some other Catholic bishops decided not to endorse the publication of *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace*, a report which had been jointly prepared by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation on the Gukurahundi atrocities in Matabeleland and the Midlands. This move they took, as he further argues, "created a perception in the minds of many people that some of our bishops were the commissars of ZANU-PF at prayer who wished only to protect and promote the image of Mugabe, their fellow Catholic" (Taylor, 2003: para.11). When Mugabe was again sworn into office as the President of Zimbabwe after the 2002 Presidential elections, in attendance were Archbishop Chakaipa himself and the two Bishops from Mutare: Bishop Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa and Bishop Patrick Mutume (Taylor, 2003). If the Bishops Conference was polarised like this, it could be easier to understand why possibly Mugabe never got censured or refused communion by the local Roman Catholic clergy and why at the end he got exonerated for his crimes.

The mediatory role played by the Catholic clergyman, Fr Fidelis Mukonori, between Mugabe and the former ZDF Commander General, Constantino Guveya Chiwenga, should also not be underrated in the equation seeking to understand why Mugabe at the end was extended a hand of forgiveness by the Zimbabwean Catholic authorities he had been tussling with during his reign. The Bishops, in the first place, acknowledged Fr Mukonori as one of their own. Having trust in him, they knew God would have used him to bring Mugabe to his senses and acknowledge his shortcomings as well as understand that it was God's design that he should hand over the button stick to another to take over. As Fr Mukonori puts it himself:

It was something where we had to stand with the truth. What was important was to be frank with each other, telling each other the truth without emotions, but seeking the truth because that

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is what God wants. It is the work of God. There is a time when one has to rest while another person continues (Fr Mukonori cited in *The Chronicle*, 25 November 2017).

Under such circumstances not forgiving Mugabe would have been equal to reversing the gains made by Fr Mukonori as well as closing the doors of repentance in the Church.

The other justifiable argument one can make is that the Church has always advocated for motherly love even towards wayward children. One needs possibly to think about the words of the prophet Isaiah who said: “Can a mother forget her own baby? (Isaiah 49:15). Just like a patient and loving mother who does not cut ties with her baby despite all his/her mischief, the clergy should have felt that Mugabe was indeed a true but problem child of the Church. When his long reign finally came to an end in November 2017, it was indeed no irony to hear the Catholic Bishops say: “We thank the former President for the good work he did for Zimbabwe during the liberation struggle and as President for 37 years. We forgive him for any shortcomings during his long tenure of office” (ZCBC, cited in *Catholic Herald*, 27 November 2017, para.3).

While the Catholic Bishops did not want to be specific about the ‘shortcomings’ of Mugabe in their statement, as Pius Ncube had done, their use of the phrase ‘we forgive’ shows their conviction that Mugabe indeed had wronged the Church. Being men of the cloth, however, they took this as an opportunity to demonstrate to the world that we should not be bogged down by a person’s shortcomings even if they do not come back to us to say sorry; what is paramount is to forgive 77 times as Jesus would put it (Mathew 18:22). In forgiving Mugabe, the Bishops not only demonstrated obedience to the words of their Master, Jesus, but showed Zimbabweans the path to follow given that many still have unhealed wounds and memories from the terror of Mugabe’s reign.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that despite Mugabe’s claims of being a well brought-up Catholic adherent who benefited a lot from his Jesuit mentors, he was always a man of great controversy. While he had a traceable record of membership in the Catholic Church, the big zest for power in him, as Pius Ncube would put it (*Herald Scotland*, 2008), made him disregard the light the Church was trying to give him and went on to commit barbaric crimes against his fellow Zimbabwean citizens. When all was done and his reign had come to an end, the Church still had a heart to forgive him. The Roman Catholic Church provided a great lesson, especially in a country most of whose citizens are besieged by hurt and pain from a man who ruled them with an iron grip for 37 years.

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