

ESSAY REVIEW

CHURCH ADAPTATION TO THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER  
IN ZIMBABWE

THE EMERGENCE OF Zimbabwe from the colonial past found the Church in need of transformation. While the essence of the gospel it preaches remains basically the same, the form of its delivery, the imagery it uses and the mission it proposes have to adapt to the new social order. The authors of the books reviewed here<sup>1</sup> have given some practical suggestions which could form guidelines in the Church's search for a smooth process of adaptation.

Bishop Hubert Bucher challenges the Church to come face to face with Shona cosmology and the spirit world—a challenge that the Church in Zimbabwe should immediately confront. Bucher wrote this book to fill the gaps left by social anthropologists in their study of the Bantu religious experience. His main aim, however, is to make available information which would 'contribute eventually to the better understanding of African cosmologies in South Africa itself', especially by mission evangelists. Since the Shona religious assumptions compare favourably with those of the Xhosa of South Africa among whom the author had worked for ten years, it was therefore not difficult for him to complete his investigations of the Shona concept of spirits and power in only one sabbatical year. It is quite plain that his choice of the Shona people was influenced by the availability of what the author terms 'reliable anthropological literature'. Moreover, the Independent Churches among the Shona people are fewer than those in South Africa, a factor which facilitated the study. Though they are few, Bishop Bucher selected for his study only the Churches of the Spirit, which he assumes to have sprung up as a result of the influence of similar churches in South Africa.

The book is laid out in nine chapters. The first five deal with power as the root concept of Shona traditional religion. Here the author strongly believes that spirit mediums, chiefs, ancestral spirits, witches, divining healers and the rest, all represent a notion of power. In the remaining chapters, the book attempts to show that the Shona conceptualization of spirit plays a central role in the independent Churches of the Spirit. For a truly African Christian Theology to emerge, the author recommends both a thorough study of the African traditional religions and a confrontation between the Christian gospel and African cosmological concepts. He further argues that to depend on *négritude* literature, with its superficial knowledge of the real African, is to do injustice to the study. The only sound methodology is to study thoroughly the cosmologies of a particular society and then to confront it with the Christian gospel. Without this approach, Bucher warns, the Churches of the Spirit will superficially display a number of Christian semblances, but intrinsically they will remain tied to traditional cosmology.

<sup>1</sup> H. Bucher, *Spirits and Power: An Analysis of Shona Cosmology* (Cape Town, Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), 231 pp., R8.95; C.S. Banana, *The Gospel according to the Ghetto* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, revd edn, 1981), 156 pp., Z\$2.50; O. Hirmer, *Marx? Money? Christ?: An illustrated Introduction into Capitalism, Marxism and African Socialism, Examined in the Light of the Gospel* (Gwelo, Mambo Press, Christianity and Socialism 1, 1981), 139 pp., Z\$3.60; R.A.B. Ewbank, *Christian Liberty/Rusununguko rwechiKristo: Commentary on Galatians*, trs J. Gabi (Gwelo, Mambo Press, 1981), 94 pp., Z\$1.50.

Bucher, contrary to popular Western views of African traditional religion, refrains from calling it superstition because he sees it as a complete system of religious assumptions, a veritable *Weltanschauung*, that is, man's attempt to answer his most existential questions (p.14). The only way that the Christian gospel can make sense to the African is when it is shown to be a fulfilment and not a negation of traditional worship. Otherwise, the African will affirm Christianity while at the same time remaining firmly entrenched in his traditional religion, which gives him the power to counter the manifold spirits which threaten him. On this point, the author makes his strongest point, that 'mission work which neglects to address itself to the central tenets of a particular people's religion and to judge these tenets in the light of the Christian Gospel, is bound to fail'. He adds a warning that before the traditional tenets can be confronted with the Gospel and judged by it, they should be culled from their cultural wrappings in order to grasp their theological relevance. Secondly, there should be developed a strategy for integrating them in the life of the local church, and also for the liquidation of those tenets which are pure superstition.

In spite of these great aims, the book is, on the whole, very hypothetical on important points. It is also very contradictory at times. While on the one hand the author criticizes social anthropologists for linking the symbols with the people's history, ecology, and mode of survival, disregarding the fact that the individual who lives in any given society acquires his grasp of symbols from subconscious processes, he on the other hand approves their studies by depending solely on their research and assumptions (p.18). For example, it has not been established that a Ndau person hosts a number of secret stranger-spirits who give him his personal talents and whom he honours in private (p.96). Furthermore, the author's understanding of the *shavi* possession is superficial because he argues that possession is a construct of the human mind (p.97). By believing this, Bucher misses the central point in the African concept of 'spirit'. To the African, spirits are real and not imaginary and have to be encountered as invisible beings. The author's understanding of witches and ancestral spirits is also quite erroneous. To the Africans, witchcraft may be a weapon against enemies who deserve punishment: if one bewitched an innocent person out of jealousy, envy, and so forth, the result is counter-effective because witchcraft does not 'stick' on innocent people. The author also errs on divination by bones, which he calls a dice, following Gelfand's erroneous conclusion on the subject (p.116). The author should have noticed that some *n'anga* are more popular than others, a fact which cannot be attributed to their manipulation of the diagnostic bones. The whole discussion on witchcraft is rather superficial. Moreover, it portrays the African mentality as weak (p.122).

On schisms in the Zion Christian Church, the author assumes, following Daneel, that these are caused by a desire for authority and not by doctrinal differences. This creates the impression that church splits take place only in the Zion and similar churches where the craving for power is great (p.142). If this is so, how does he explain the schisms in 'mainstream' churches?

Though the book sets out a great challenge to the mission church, it is greatly weakened by its superficiality, a fact which the author himself does not conceal throughout the book. For example, he twice uses the phrases 'would seem' and 'it may well be' (p.201), while he terms his 'findings' arguments (p.182), and not observations. The author admits (p.151) that in Chapter 3 he only attempted to show that members of 'Churches of the Spirit would seem to regard the Holy Spirit

in the light of the Shona traditional territorial spirits'. With these few examples among many, the author's conclusions on the Shona tradition and the 'spirit churches' are more conjectural than factual. Consequently, the book, which is far from being an analysis of Shona cosmology, does not offer to missionaries working among the Shona—let alone in South Africa—some concrete information on 'spirits' and 'power'.

While Bucher challenges the Church to confront Shona cosmology and the spirit world, President Banana urges the Church to join the masses who are politically and socially disadvantaged, those who, in other words, are physically or emotionally in the ghettos, in order to inspire hope in them. In its first edition (1974-7), the booklet contained only *chimurenga* poems, but the anthology has now been expanded to include sermons and speeches on liberation. Though no single theme seems to have been followed, essentially the book relates to the plight of the oppressed: their hopes and aspirations, the struggle for liberation, and, finally, what true liberation means. In his 1980 sermon in the University Chapel (p.83), President Banana makes it plain that liberation is an on-going process and not a once-and-for-all event (p.87). As liberated people, our mission is to serve others. The sermon concludes by paying tribute to the fallen heroes, for their sacrificial part in liberating Zimbabwe. Whether Christian or not, the onus is now upon us to rebuild the ruined country of Zimbabwe (p.92).

In 'A Message for the Churches' (p.94), the author calls upon the churches to formulate a new theology for a new social order in Zimbabwe. The colonial content and character of the Church is now out-dated. The Church should realize that it is operating in a political structure guided by a people-orientated philosophy (p.96). The Church must concoct a theology which is socialistic. It should also encourage co-operative agriculture on its mission farms, and should promote the position of women in all the fields under its jurisdiction.

Though the poetic message is, on the whole, one of fine sentiments, on close examination it creates a number of theological problems. Some adaptations of biblical passages sound obnoxious and somewhat sacrilegious. The so-called 'Lord's Prayer' (p.1) sounds rather odd, especially if it were to be used in churches. Reading the first line: if God the Father is in the ghetto, it would automatically transform the ghetto into heaven. It would have been better to leave God in heaven and let the suffering masses call unto Him for liberation from the ghetto. The third line, 'Thy Servitude abounds' is as odd as the first one. After all, what is wrong with the Lord's prayer in its biblical form? Well interpreted, it conveys the same message, but in a more comprehensive way. However, 'The People's Creed' (p.2) is, on the whole, good, and so is the 'Statement of Belief' (p.3).

It would have been helpful if the booklet had been clearly divided into three sections: the original poetic section conscientizing the masses to the revolution; a second section dealing with the aftermath of the struggle—reconciliation, reconstruction, the process of 'rebuilding the ancient ruins'; and finally, a third section addressing itself to post-independence injustices of nepotism, tribalism, bureaucracy, neo-colonialism, institutionalism, greed and the like. This would have made the booklet more comprehensive and useful for the Church and the general public. Nonetheless, the author deserves great credit for boldly pioneering in showing the Church and similar institutions the way to adapt its message, Scriptures and creeds to the new social order in Zimbabwe.

Oswald Hirmer discusses socialism in relation, respectively, to Christianity

and capitalism. He has approached a complex problem in a factual, interesting and original way: his style of presentation is simple, and the illustrations apt. In the introduction (p.1), Hirmer demonstrates quite clearly how people who clamour for a change in the social order are often vague in their definition of the terms of the ideologies they follow. To the same group of people, the terms 'socialism', 'Marxist-Leninism', 'Capitalism' mean different things. It is only when documented statistical data is given on the distribution of natural resources, the imbalance in the distribution of goods, the state of the poor, and so forth, that these different groups will begin to unite on a common front against socio-economic evils. But even then a problem arises when they try to discuss the programme of action to eradicate the evils.

To give the subject a firm setting, Hirmer begins with a summary of the origin of capitalism with its principle of *laissez-faire*. In a capitalist economy, there is a dichotomy between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. This means that the producer wants to sell his goods at the highest possible price while the consumer wants to buy at the lowest possible price (p.18). Moreover, the free market system, with its demands for private ownership of the means of production, gives rise to competition among producers. Capitalists argue that it is the profit-making incentive which drives people to work (p.15). The author shows how, in this system, the consumer is trapped, manipulated and exploited by factory cartels, or by advertising media which create an artificial need of goods and services (p.21).

In the nineteenth century, capitalism assumed a new face by pooling factory owners together into limited companies or trusts (p.23). Collective capitalism therefore gave rise to the demand for more and more markets, a need which gave birth to colonialism and imperialism. The capitalist argument that multinational capitalism promotes international peace through world trade, by eliminating social injustices, is nullified by the fact that the multinationals, once they develop their trade in a poor country, make profits while the masses remain poor (p.30). Moreover, multinationals may gain great political power and influence governments to their own advantage and not that of the needy.

Hirmer compares capitalism with socialism (p.32). While capitalism believes in free enterprise and competition, socialism affirms community enterprise, planned marketing and no competition. Both have advantages, and so some powerful political parties in the West try to forge a mixture of free market and planned market.

The author shows briefly (p.36) why Marxism has influenced over one third of the world. It is because Marx asked the right questions. He spotted the fundamental wrongs in a capitalistic society. In the forty books they wrote, including the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels gave practical answers to their enquiry. As long as there is a dichotomy between employers and employees, producers and consumers, the class system based on the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', class struggle is unavoidable (pp.38-9). Unless man realizes that he is alienated and has become a cog in the capitalist wheel, exploited and 'prostituted', he remains in his chains. Capitalism, according to Marx, breeds alienation, and will inevitably collapse. To expedite this process, a world revolution of workers should take place under the slogan: 'Workers of the World Unite'. Revolution should be in two stages: the socialist stage, during which all means of production would be socialized. The second and ultimate stage is communism—the classless society. Lenin emphasized a prolonged process of socialism before accomplishing com-

munism (p.47). Marx condemned Western democracy as a face-saver, for the proletariat had no choice but to follow the bourgeois propaganda. He also saw religion as 'the opium of the people' because it soothed the emotions of the sufferers to endure hardship and did not urge them to improve their lot. Religion, like capitalism, would therefore die a natural death once socialism came.

The last section of the books deals with Christ and what he can do for the world. In Luke 4:18 is summarized Christ's revolutionary mission to better the world. Christ's message was aiming at restoring the ideal world, the lost paradise, 'here and now'. This world was not made up of empty promises of future hope for heaven and comfort. The ideal world for which Christ died and which the communists crave cannot be forged without God (p.93). Man should be understood in relation to God's purpose of creation. Hirmer cites Psalm 72, which spells out God's programme for liberating man from oppression and exploitation, here and now.

Hirmer shows (p.98) that Marx and Christ have much in common. Both are concerned with the forging of an ideal world of peace. But unless God is acknowledged in this programme, the dignity of man is lost or ignored (p.99). No force can forge a brotherhood or encourage the sharing of goods. The only way that man may be released from greed is in having a personal revolution which gives him a new heart. Man (contrary to Marx's tenets) is basically evil. For this reason, Christ's revolution of love hits at the root cause of society's evils (p.106).

The remainder of the book shows how Marx is a reminder to Christians of the many social concerns that they ignore, and of the evils that they condone, such as unjust laws and structures, inequality of opportunity, and so on. Marx reminds Christians not to mind money but to be community-orientated. But Marxism without Christ, says Hirmer, is grossly misleading. In the same vein, capitalism ignores the dignity of man, ignores God, breeds selfishness and wastes goods. All the socialistic programmes in Africa are therefore fraught with failure. The reason, according to Hirmer, is that they miss the basic ingredient for success—God, revealed in his son, Jesus Christ. There are things which are good in both Marxism and capitalism which Christians should accept and implement in Christ's name for the good of man.

This book is well written, beautifully illustrated, brief and to the point. It helps to explain the many possible options that developing countries may follow in their development programmes. Hirmer shows how, in this process, many countries have either failed or have met with very limited success in some respects. It is only when Christ lights the way that the elements for good in Marxism, socialism, communism and capitalism become clear for the wellbeing of mankind.

Though the book is not 'academic' in its literary style and approach, it is indispensable for use in Church study groups or by individuals who are searching for an understanding of political ideologies and their effect on national development.

Ewbank's commentary on the book of Galatians elaborates the biblical concept of Christian freedom. Its subject makes it opportune in independent Zimbabwe, and being in both Shona and English it caters for two of the racial groups in Zimbabwe. The introduction is terse and yet comprehensively summarizes the main themes in the book of Galatians. The main body of the book is well written. The content of the comments helps to elucidate the biblical text for common readership in the Church.

The parallel Shona translation, though laboured in some parts to keep it brief, is well thought out. The booklet is therefore highly recommended to students of the Bible who want a simple exposition of Galatians, but more so to church people in their search for true liberty in the liberated Zimbabwe.

For the Church to thrive in Zimbabwe, it must adapt, and the authors of the books reviewed above offer some guidelines for this urgent process.

*University of Zimbabwe*

T.J. MAFICO