

Christianity in the Propaganda of ZANU and ZAPU, 1965–1980

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This article looks at how ZANU and ZAPU, the two main Zimbabwean nationalist groups in UDI-era Rhodesia, sought to present and engage with Christianity in their propaganda. Given that the Rhodesians cast themselves as defenders of ‘Christian civilisation’, it was inevitable that the media war would touch heavily upon ecclesiastical issues. It is contended here that the nationalists developed a powerful argument: that the Rhodesian government and the Churches of southern Africa were falling far short of the ideals of Christianity. This message then in turn served as an important part of their critique of the white minority regime.

The Rhodesian Bush War/Zimbabwe Liberation War was one of the most visible conflicts of Cold War Africa, certainly to the Western world. In 1965, faced with increased African nationalist activity in the 1950s and '60s, and with the British engaging in sweeping decolonisation across the continent, the white minority government of (Southern) Rhodesia decided to go it alone and declare their (illegal) independence.¹ They were immediately faced with opposition from abroad in the guise of international sanctions. At home they faced two militant opposition groups (the Zimbabwe African National Union and Zimbabwe African People's Union). The war for Zimbabwe started in the later 1960s, and rumbled on into the mid-1970s, before escalating from about 1976. In 1979 the whites tried to form an alliance with ‘moderate’ African nationalists, and created a new state, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, a project which almost succeeded in gaining legitimacy. In 1980, following the imposition of direct British

FBISDR= *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report*; *JSAS*= *Journal of Southern African Studies*; *TWT*= *The World Today*; ZANU = Zimbabwe African National Union; ZAPU = Zimbabwe African People's Union; ZN = *Zimbabwe News*; ZR = *Zimbabwe Review*

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¹ This was known as the ‘Unilateral Declaration of Independence’, or ‘UDI’.

colonial control, and fresh elections, the leader of ZANU-PF, Robert Mugabe, became the first prime minister of independent Zimbabwe.² Both sides in this conflict recognised the power of propaganda, and saw the need to fight both on the battlefield, and the war for information. ZANU and ZAPU were particularly attuned to this, making huge efforts to spread their message both domestically and internationally, using radio, magazines and effective use of television appearances to do so. The war was also deeply ideological, or at least steeped in the language of ideology. Neither side wanted to admit the obvious racial undertones to the conflict, but especially not the Rhodesian whites, who were concerned about accusations of racism. As a result, other themes were brought to the fore. The Rhodesian government retreated into two key types of rhetoric. First, they presented themselves as anti-Communists *par excellence*, Cold War warriors holding the line against the USSR and China.³

The other major part of the Rhodesians' narrative was that Rhodesia represented 'Christian civilisation', or sometimes simply 'civilisation', in Africa.⁴ The protection of 'civilisation' was given as justification in both the 1965 Declaration of Independence and the Rhodesian constitution of 1970.⁵ In 1965 Rhodesia's prime minister, Ian Smith, spoke of having 'struck a blow for the preservation of justice, civilisation and Christianity'.⁶ This sort of language was common to white settlers elsewhere in Africa, particularly South Africa, from the 1950s onward.⁷ It went down well with particular groups on the political right in Britain

² In 1976 ZANU and ZAPU joined together as the 'Patriotic Front'. The parties both added 'PF' to their names at the time of the 1980 election, competing as ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU respectively: W. C. Reed, 'International politics and national liberation: ZANU and the politics of contested sovereignty in Zimbabwe', *African Studies Review* xxxvi (1993), 31–59 at p. 55 n. 2.

³ See P. Godwin and I. Hancock, '*Rhodesians never die*': the impact of war and political change on white Rhodesia, c.1970–1980, Oxford 1993, 99; D. Kenrick, 'White Rhodesian society, ca. 1950s–1980s', in D. Kenrick, *Decolonisation, identity and nation in Rhodesia, 1964–1979: a race against time*, Cham 2019, 27–59; and D. Lowry, 'The impact of anti-Communism on white Rhodesian political culture, ca.1920s–1980', *Cold War History* vii (2007), 169–94.

⁴ On this see J. Frederikse, *None but ourselves: masses vs. media in the making of Zimbabwe*, London 1984, 48–51.

⁵ J. Halpern, 'Polarization in Rhodesia: State, Church, and peoples', *World Today* xxvii (1971), 1–8 at p. 2; J. R. T. Wood, *So far and no further! Rhodesia's bid for independence during the retreat from empire, 1959–1965*, Victoria, BC 2005, 472–3.

⁶ Quoted in M. Evans, 'The wretched of the empire: politics, ideology and counter-insurgency in Rhodesia, 1965–80', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* xviii (2007), 175–95 at p. 181.

⁷ A. Chapman, 'The international context of secularization in England: the end of empire, immigration, and the decline of Christian national identity, 1945–1970', *Journal of British Studies* liv (2015), 163–89, 178–9.

and the USA, especially the Conservative Monday Club.⁸ However, as Lloyd Nyarota has rightly pointed out, as soon as Smith engaged in this sort of rhetoric the Churches of Rhodesia were inevitably going to become involved in the struggle.⁹ The fusion between Christianity and politics in Rhodesia reached its apotheosis in the appointment of a Methodist bishop, Abel Muzorewa, as Zimbabwe-Rhodesia's first, and only ever, prime minister (1979). ZANU and ZAPU rapidly came to see that they had to offer some response to all of this.

It is perhaps worth providing here a brief history of nationalism in Rhodesia. The origins of ZAPU and ZANU lie in the foundation of the African National Congress of Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s. This party, led by Joshua Nkomo, was a focal point for African nationalism in the colony before it was banned in 1959. Almost concurrent with the end of the ANC was the foundation of the National Democratic Party, which was itself outlawed in 1961. That year saw the beginning of Nkomo's new venture, ZAPU, which, despite being banned in 1963, remained a key player in the nationalist scene until independence in 1980. 1963 also saw the 'Mother of All Splits', when those opposed to the way in which Nkomo was leading ZAPU left to form the ZANU. This party itself split in 1975 into two factions, one led by Robert Mugabe, and the other by Ndabaningi Sithole. ZAPU and ZANU joined forces (at least nominally) in 1976, forming the Patriotic Front.¹⁰ Both organisations had their own military wings, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANU), and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZAPU), which together fought a ferocious guerrilla campaign against the Rhodesian Security Forces. Both groups asserted a Socialist ideology, although ZANU were perhaps the more zealous in this regard, being particularly associated with Maoism-Marxism-Leninism.¹¹ They had a complex and varied relationship with the Christian Churches, often varying dramatically over small areas, and with limited consistency at a national or international level. The guerrillas themselves were inconsistent towards Christianity, but they were certainly often wary of it, and

⁸ For the Monday Club's association with Rhodesia see L. Mason, 'The development of the Monday Club and its contribution to the Conservative party and the modern British right, 1961–1990', unpubl. PhD diss. Wolverhampton 2004, ch. iii and D. McNeil, "The rivers of Zimbabwe will run red with blood": Enoch Powell and the post-imperial nostalgia of the Monday Club', *JSAS* xxxvii (2011), 731–45.

⁹ L. T. Nyarota, *Religious leadership in national political conflicts: Bishop Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa and the national struggle against colonial rule in Zimbabwe*, Eugene, OR 2013, 74.

¹⁰ For a brief history of ZANU and ZAPU see A. S. Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe*, Cambridge 2014, 144–8, 162–4.

¹¹ On ZANU and Maoism see P. Pradesh, *Mao Tse-tung and Chimurenga: an investigation into ZANU's struggles*, Johannesburg 1988.

sometimes tried to manoeuvre Africans away from it.¹² Much has been written by historians about the specific ideologies of each group, and about how they engaged in their independence struggle. There has also been some coverage of the ways in which they produced their propaganda, particularly *via* the medium of radio.¹³ Less, however, has been said about the actual content of that propaganda, and the ways that they used language to put across a message, both domestically and internationally.

Their media output was (mostly) produced in Mozambique (ZANU) and Zambia (ZAPU) by dedicated publicity departments. The people who managed these departments were often highly educated. For example, ZANU's erstwhile Deputy Secretary for Information and Publicity, Eddison Zvobgo, possessed a PhD in law from Harvard, and had lectured at Lewis University in Illinois.¹⁴ George T. Silundika, ZAPU's sometime Publicity and Information Secretary, had attended university in South Africa and Lesotho (being expelled on both occasions on account of his politics).¹⁵ Other propagandists included well-connected nationalists, such as ZAPU's Jane Ngwenya, who had been active politically for many years, imprisoned by the Rhodesians, and was a member of the party's national executive committee.¹⁶ So the propaganda produced by ZANU and ZAPU was intelligently written by committed party members. The audience for the published nationalist magazines was probably educated, and almost certainly based abroad. They were, after all, wordy, written in exile, printed in East Germany, and emphasised international solidarity. They were also written almost entirely in English. It is also hard to imagine that the Rhodesian authorities would not have confiscated any copies they found circulating in the colony. Indeed, as Frederikse and Ranger have discovered, most Africans in Rhodesia were not well-versed

¹² N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's guerrilla war: peasant voices*, Cambridge 1992, 96, 157.

¹³ On nationalist propaganda see M. Chikowero, 'Broadcasting *Chimurenga* – engineering a postcolonial Zimbabwe', M. Mushonga, L. Hazvineyi and M. Nyakudya, 'Zapu's "voice of the revolution" and the radicalisation of the nationalist struggle', and 'Reminiscences of Zimbabwe's war radio broadcasters' in S. P. Lekgoathi, T. Moloji and A. R. Saïde (eds), *Guerrilla radios in southern Africa: broadcasters, technology, propaganda wars, and the armed struggle*, London 2020, 65–83, 105–20, 121–35; and E. Ndlovu, 'Radio as a recruiting medium in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle', *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* xii (2017), 52–8. A brief overview of *Chimurenga* music can be found in Mlambo, *A history of Zimbabwe*, 170–4.

¹⁴ R. A. Gumbo and E. J. M. Zvobgo, 'Letter from the editors', *ZN* ix (July–Dec. 1977), 3; A. Meldrum, 'Eddison Zvobgo', *Guardian*, 24 Aug. 2004, at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/aug/24/guardianobituaries.zimbabwe>, accessed 2 Oct. 2022.

¹⁵ *Interviews in depth: Zimbabwe: ZAPU: George Silundika*, Richmond, BC 1974, 2.

¹⁶ Mushonga, Hazvineyi and Nyakudya, 'Reminiscences', 126–8.

in the details of the ideology emanating from the leadership abroad.¹⁷ Radio programmes were, however, directed at Africans in Rhodesia, engaging them with popular songs, and direct political messaging. Although broadcast from abroad, they aimed at winning over ordinary people to the nationalist cause. However, given the willingness of nationalist politicians to shift positions for different audiences, it is wise to treat all media messaging as propaganda.

It is also important to note at this stage that Christianity in Rhodesia was not homogeneous. There were some African clerics, such as Canaan Banana, who sought to generate a theology of liberation, as well as others who became nationalist leaders, for example Abel Muzorewa and Ndabaningi Sithole.¹⁸ They were joined by some white clerics, such as Hugh Prosser, of St Augustine's Mission, Penhalonga, who were friendly towards the nationalists.¹⁹ Yet there were other clergy, like John da Costa, dean of Salisbury, who tried to tread a narrow path between the two sides, an approach which included not directly opposing the Rhodesian regime. In da Costa's case, not challenging the authorities led to significant reputational damage. So too did the Rhodesians' propagandistic use of a (politically-charged) sermon he gave in 1978.²⁰ The white episcopate was also split at times: at the time of the new constitution in 1970, Paul Burrough, bishop of Mashonaland, took a more conservative position than did his colleague Kenneth Skelton, bishop of Matabeleland, for example.²¹ One cannot then talk of the clergy representing a single viewpoint. The complexity of the situation can be extended by consideration of the laity, with distinctions to be made between rural peasant Christianity, and that of urbanites in the cities. Nor were all areas of Rhodesia equally receptive to evangelism: Matabeleland, for example, seems to have been less Christian than Manicaland.²² And, of course, the Churches in rural Rhodesia did not remain static. David

¹⁷ Frederikse, *None but ourselves*, 60–1; T. Ranger, *Peasant consciousness and guerrilla war in Zimbabwe*, London 1985, 178–9.

¹⁸ C. Banana, *Politics of repression and resistance: face to face with combat theology*, Gweru 1996; J. Urbaniak and B. M. Manobo, 'Canaan Banana, Churches and the land issue: revisiting theology of Zimbabwe's vilified prophet', *Political Theology* xxi (2020), 225–46; A. Muzorewa, *Rise up and walk: an autobiography*, London 1979; S. Uys, 'The Rev Ndabaningi Sithole', *Guardian*, 15 Dec. 2000, at <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/dec/15/guardianobituaries1>, accessed 3 Oct. 2022. For others see N. E. Thomas, 'Church and State in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Church and State* xxvii (1985), 113–33 at p. 130.

¹⁹ J. Hampton, 'Hugh Prosser', *Guardian*, 27 Nov. 2015, at <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/nov/27/hugh-prosser>, accessed 3 Oct. 2022.

²⁰ 'Obituaries: John da Costa', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Apr. 1991, 19.

²¹ 'The Right Rev Paul Burrough', *The Times*, 31 Jan. 2003, 39.

²² T. Ranger and N. Bhebe, 'Volume introduction: society in Zimbabwe's liberation war', and T. Ranger and M. Ncube, 'Religion in the guerrilla war: the case of southern

Maxwell has shown how, in Manicaland, the emphasis of their teaching shifted during the course of the war in response to the challenges facing the African population.²³ Indeed, he suggests that a vibrant African Christian leadership developed in Eastern Rhodesia to replace missionaries who left because of the war.²⁴ Likewise, Terence Ranger pointed out that rural Catholicism became Africanised during the war years.²⁵ Norman Thomas argues that, over time, African clerics also privately developed a theology which applied just war theory to the guerrillas' fight in Rhodesia.²⁶

The role of the Christian Churches in the decolonisation of Rhodesia has received a fair amount of coverage in the historiography of the region. A number of different denominations were active in the colony during the war years, often developing extensive relations with the guerrillas. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia also produced important, powerful critiques of the actions of the Rhodesian government during the 1970s, texts which were seized upon by the guerrillas as evidence of the minority regime's moral bankruptcy.²⁷ The deaths of missionaries, such as those at Elim Mission in 1978, were events which shocked the world, with each side trying to pin the blame on the other.²⁸ The United Methodist Church was also significant in that it was the only one to have an African, Bishop Abel Muzorewa, as its denominational head in the colony.²⁹ The most significant writings on religion in liberation struggles, and in UDI-era Rhodesia, are those by Adrian Hastings, Ian Linden, David Maxwell, Fabulous Moyo, Terence Ranger and Chengetai Zvobgo.³⁰ Professor Zvobgo in particular did excellent work explaining the complex relationship between the different Churches and the

Matabeleland' in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger (eds), *Society in Zimbabwe's liberation war*, Oxford 1996, 6–34 at p. 16, 35–57.

²³ D. Maxwell, 'Christianity and the war in eastern Zimbabwe: the case of Elim mission', in Bhebe and Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's liberation war*, 88–9. ²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ T. Ranger, 'The Church and war: holy men and rural communities in Zimbabwe, 1970–1980', in William Sheils (ed.), *The Church at war* (Studies in Church History xx, 1983), 443–61 at p. 454. ²⁶ Thomas, 'Church and State in Zimbabwe', 131.

²⁷ D. Auret, *Reaching for justice: the Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice looks back at the past twenty years, 1972–1992*, Gweru 1992.

²⁸ S. Griffiths, *The axe and the tree: how bloody persecution sowed the seeds of new life in Zimbabwe*, Oxford 2017; Maxwell, 'Christianity and the war in eastern Zimbabwe', 58–90.

²⁹ Nyarota, *Religious leadership in national political conflicts*, 74. For the history of the United Methodist Church see J. W. Z. Kurewa, *The Church in mission: a short history of the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, 1897–1997*, Nashville, TN 1997.

³⁰ A. Hastings, 'The Christian Churches and liberation movements in southern Africa', *African Affairs* lxxx (1981), 345–54; I. Linden, *Church and State in Rhodesia, 1959–1979*, Munich 1979; D. Maxwell, *Christians and chiefs in Zimbabwe: a social history of the Heusa people, c.1890s–1990s*, Edinburgh 1999; F. Moyo, *The Bible, the bullet, and the ballot: Zimbabwe: the impact of Christian protest in sociopolitical transformation, ca.1900–ca.2000*, Eugene, OR 2015; Ranger, 'The Church and war'; C. J. Zvobgo, 'Church

Rhodesian government during the first decade of UDI. One early denominational study was Ian Linden's *The Catholic Church and the struggle for Zimbabwe* (1980).³¹ There have also been significant works written on the Anglican Church, the Salvation Army and on the guerrillas' relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church.³² Maxwell has additionally authored an important local study, which looks at the relationship between the guerrillas and the people in Eastern Rhodesia.³³ Southern Matabeleland has also been studied, by Terence Ranger and Mark Ncube.³⁴ The Avila mission has been written on by Sr Janice McLaughlin.³⁵ There has also been some comparative work and similar research on South Africa published.³⁶ Two main thrusts of existing scholarship are as follows. First, it has been argued that religion was used to bolster political ideology as used in the field, which was not strong enough on its own to build support amongst rural Africans.³⁷ Fundamentally, these historians ask: were the Churches a help or hindrance to the guerrillas?³⁸ This ties into important research that has been done into the broader relationship between African independence

and State in Rhodesia: from the Unilateral Declaration of Independence to the Pearce Commission, 1965–72', *JSAS* xxxi (2005), 381–402.

³¹ I. Linden, *The Catholic Church and the struggle for Zimbabwe*, London 1980. On the Catholic Church in Rhodesia see also N. M. Creary, *Domesticating a religious import: the Jesuits and the inculturation of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe, 1879–1980*, New York 2011; J. McLaughlin, *On the frontline: Catholic missions in Zimbabwe's liberation war*, Harare 1996.

³² N. Bhebe, *The ZANU and ZAPU guerrilla warfare and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe*, Gweru 1999; N. Murdoch, *Christian warfare in Rhodesia-Zimbabwe: the Salvation Army and African liberation, 1891–1991*, Eugene, OR 2015; M. Lapsey, *Neutrality or co-option? The Anglican Church and State from 1964 until the independence of Zimbabwe*, Gweru 1986.

³³ Maxwell, 'Christianity and the war in eastern Zimbabwe'.

³⁴ Ranger and Ncube, 'Religion in the guerrilla war'.

³⁵ J. McLaughlin, 'Avila mission: a turning point in church relations with the state and with the liberation forces', in Bhebe and Ranger, *Society in Zimbabwe's liberation war*, 91–101.

³⁶ Hastings, 'The Christian Churches and liberation movements in southern Africa', 345–54; K. Lalloo, 'The Church and the State in Apartheid South Africa', *Contemporary Politics* iv (1998), 39–55; N. Taliep, 'The role of religious leaders in anti-Apartheid mobilisation: implications for violence prevention in contemporary South Africa', *Religion, State and Society* xlv (2016), 331–48; P. Walshe, 'South Africa: prophetic Christianity and the liberation movement', *Journal of Modern African Studies* xxix (1997), 27–60.

³⁷ See, for example, Maxwell, *Christians and chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 125, and 'Local politics and the war of liberation in north-east Zimbabwe', *JSAS* xix (1993), 361–86 at pp. 363–4.

³⁸ This is discussed well in Moyo, *The Bible, the bullet, and the ballot*, 1–11.

movements and religion.³⁹ The second area of discussion has been the ways in which African Christianity developed during the war years, and how this led to fundamental change in the nature of the Churches in Rhodesia and, later, Zimbabwe.⁴⁰

However, the detail of what ZANU and ZAPU said about Christianity in their published propaganda has not yet been fully explored. In particular, what image did they want to project to their audience? Although not all Africans in Rhodesia were Christian, an overwhelming majority of whites were. Since a main plank of their ideology was explicitly religious, it was necessary for the nationalists to engage with Christianity in their media output. The images created in propaganda create a reality of their own for public consumption. Given the importance of media in the Rhodesian war, the lack of studies on this topic represents a significant omission, especially since it was an important battleground in the struggle for vindication between the two sides. This article seeks to redress this imbalance in the historiography by looking at the propaganda output of ZANU and ZAPU to reconstruct their public ideas about Christians and Christianity. It argues that both groups sought to undermine the expressed Christianity of the Rhodesian government, and to counter Christian challenges to their own ideology and actions. It further shows that, despite this, they were (in their announcements) very wary of the Churches, of whose anti-colonial commitment they did not feel sure, and only tentatively identified with them. In particular, they recognised the extent to which Christian ideas underpinned white Rhodesian ideology, and worked to undermine this as a way to destroy the minority regime's self-justifications for existence. Yet it will also be shown here that they trod a very careful path between attacking and supporting Christianity, recognising both the challenge that it could pose to them and the benefits to be gained by linking themselves to it. Fundamentally, they sought to use the lessons, morals and theology of Christianity as a mechanism to put pressure on Churches to take a firmer stand in the conflict, as well as to shame the Rhodesian state and those who enabled its continued existence.

ZAPU were quick to dismiss Rhodesian claims to represent 'Christian civilisation', arguing that instead the white regime was merely fighting 'to

³⁹ T. Ranger, 'Religious movements and politics in sub-Saharan Africa', *African Studies Review* xxix (1986), 1–69. One study of the relationship between decolonisation and a single denomination is E. A. Foster, *African Catholic: decolonization and the transformation of the Church*, Cambridge, MA 2019.

⁴⁰ Maxwell, 'Christianity and the war in Eastern Zimbabwe', 70–88. For a discussion of African Christianity more generally see E. Isichei, *A history of Christianity in Africa: from antiquity to the present*, Grand Rapids, MI 1995, chs xi–xii; and L. Sanneh, *Whose religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*, Grand Rapids, MI 2003; L. Sanneh and J. A. Carpenter (eds), *The changing face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, Oxford 2005.

maintain privilege by power'.⁴¹ Indeed, they argued that, in the past, imperialists had used the 'goggles' of Christianity to view their colonial conflicts.⁴² They further argued at Christmas 1977 that the whites, whilst claiming to be 'apostles of the Prince of Peace', were in fact the perpetrators of violence in Rhodesia. They were said to be 'praying for the present oppressive regime'.⁴³ A year later ZAPU attacked the Rhodesian government for, they said, the fact that they would be killing nationalists on Christmas day. These killings, they said, would be committed 'in the name of Christian values and the defence of Western civilisation'.⁴⁴ As these comments demonstrate, ZANU and ZAPU sought to deliberately turn the Christian rhetoric of the Rhodesian regime against it. They did this as a mechanism by which to undermine the legitimacy of the white minority government, and to deny it the moral high ground. Here they were able to build on statements made by some religious groups, such as the Catholic Church, that rejected the idea that UDI was protecting 'Christian civilisation'.⁴⁵ The nationalists explained how claims made by the Rhodesian (and South African) regimes were merely a façade, an excuse for their appalling activities: '[T]he evils of racism, colonialism, imperialism, exploitation and repression ... are practised in Africa under the guise of "Christian civilization"', asserted ZANU in 1974.⁴⁶ In particular, the Rhodesian government's 'protected villages' scheme, whereby villagers were concentrated into fortified settlements, was also held up as an example of how they were failing to live up to their own claims to be representing 'Christian and civilized standards'.⁴⁷ It is interesting, however, that the nationalists should have broadly accepted the rhetoric of 'Christian civilisation'. Although the idea could have been attacked for being, as indeed it was, essentially a synonym for 'European standards', ZANU and ZAPU seem to have resisted doing so. Instead they found it more effective to use it to admonish what they presented as Rhodesian hypocrisy. This was not unique to Rhodesia: Jean and John Comaroff have also observed this European narrative having had currency in South Africa.⁴⁸

⁴¹ 'Introduction', *ZR* vi (?Sept. 1977), 30–4 at p. 32.

⁴² 'Real enemy unmasked', *ZN* iii (26 Oct. 1968), 1–2 at p. 1.

⁴³ 'Secretary General's Xmas message to all Zimbabweans', *ZR* vi (?Dec. 1977), 2–4 at p. 2.

⁴⁴ 'Work on Christmas', reprint of an editorial from *Zimbabwe People's Voice*, 23 Dec. 1978, 2, reproduced in *Translations on sub-Saharan Africa no. 2063*, Arlington, VA 1979, 96–7 at p. 96.

⁴⁵ Zvobgo, 'Church and State in Rhodesia', 383.

⁴⁶ 'African Churches condemn racism', *ZN* viii (May 1974), 24.

⁴⁷ 'Protected villages: a new form of detention camps', *ZR* iii (quarterly edition) (?Oct.–Dec. 1974), 13–14 at p. 14.

⁴⁸ J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa*, i, Chicago 1991.

One definite area of concern to Christians was ZANU's Marxist-Leninist ideology. ZANU were well aware of this issue, and sought to downplay it in their media output.⁴⁹ The question of whether ZANU might 'attempt to stamp out religion' was explicitly raised by Sr Janice McLaughlin during a published interview she had with Robert Mugabe in 1978.⁵⁰ Mugabe was certainly acutely aware of the perception that ZANU were anti-Christian. One can see this in claims that he made during the 1980 election campaign which centred around the idea that the Rhodesians were conducting false flag operations against Churches with the intention of making people believe claims that ZANU were opposed to Christianity.⁵¹ Less than a year before South African radio had been waxing lyrical about the danger that the Marxists of ZAPU posed to the Churches of Zambia.⁵² So too did some clerics attack Marxism. Following the downing of an Air Rhodesia aircraft in 1978, the Revd John da Costa preached that, for Marxists, 'human life is cheap, expendable, of less importance than the well-being of the State'.⁵³ He was not alone in his fears: Ranger and Ncube note that missionaries in Matabeleland also saw the failure of their work as due to guerrilla ideology.⁵⁴ Indeed, David Maxwell has noted how many guerrillas with political training actively rejected Christianity.⁵⁵ ZANU also challenged Christianity head-on. For instance, they claimed that Christianity needed to 'start addressing the pressing issues of our time', something which they felt Marxism did better.⁵⁶ They thus set their Marxist ideas as a direct competitor to Christianity. They were very blunt: 'Marxism presents your Christianity with a challenge' was their view.⁵⁷ Christianity, they said, would only survive if it worked to solve the problems of Africa.⁵⁸ On other occasions, however, Mugabe also sought to placate Christian audiences. For example, in 1978 he told the French press that he thought

⁴⁹ On ZANU, the Catholic Church and Marxism see J. C. McKenna, *Finding a social voice: the Church and Marxism in Africa*, New York 1997, ch. vii.

⁵⁰ 'Smith's Selous Scouts assassinate missionaries', *ZNx* (July/Aug. 1978), 10–11 at p. 11.

⁵¹ 'Rhodesia: Zanu leader Robert Mugabe urges British governor Lord Soames to disband Selous Scouts army unit', Reuters video, 20 Feb. 1980, 1:50, film ID VLVAES1AAR2GWU4VV85ITX64S2AQ9, available from British Pathé, at <<https://www.britishpathe.com/video/VLVAES1AAR2GWU4VV85ITX64S2AQ9-RHODESIA-ZANU-LEADER-ROBERT-MUGABE-URGES-BRITISH-GOVERNOR-LORD-SOAMES/>>, accessed 10 Mar. 2022.

⁵² 'Commentary warns Zambia Against Marxism', Johannesburg International Service, 19 Sept. 1979, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 20 Sept. 1979, FBIS-SSA-79-184, E2.

⁵³ Reproduced in R. W. J. Ellis, *Without honour*, n.p. 2006, 19.

⁵⁴ Ranger and Ncube, 'Religion in the guerrilla war', 52.

⁵⁵ Maxwell, *Christians and chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 125.

⁵⁶ 'How much does Muzorewa know of American justice?', *ZNx* (May/June 1978), 44–8 at p. 47.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Marxist-Leninist ‘principles’ good as long as they ‘[did] not vitiate the Christian notion’.⁵⁹ His expressed view was that the two sets of ideas were entirely compatible.⁶⁰ In his own words: ‘[although] Socialist philosophy is my religion now ... I’ve found in it some acceptance of the teachings I have had in Christianity’.⁶¹ Such an argument shows an understanding on his part of the need to tread carefully on this issue.

Indeed, the nationalists sought to embrace the idea of Jesus Christ as a radical ‘revolutionary’ against an oppressive system, martyred for opposing the *status quo*. In their view he was aligned with the people, just as they claimed to be.⁶² In this, they were in accord with the nationalists in South Africa, people like Kaborane Sedibe, who invoked Christian principles against the Apartheid state when he was put on trial in 1974.⁶³ However, there was also a reticence to ascribe changes in African nationalism to the influence of Christianity. ZAPU argued in 1968 that the Christian message of equality was not what had spurred Africans to reject the existing state of affairs since the early 1950s. Such a view they described as being the result of ‘passionate naivete and bias’. This was because to suggest that European missionaries were helping Africans overcome any sort of ‘inferiority sickness’ was to insinuate that Africans had been ‘inferior’ before the arrival of white Europeans.⁶⁴ Rather, they developed a critique of organised Christianity in Rhodesia as representing ‘the intellectual and cultural wing of the colonial crusade’.⁶⁵ It was said to be a mechanism by which Europeans could assert their cultural dominance whilst also undermining that of the African.⁶⁶ To quote ZAPU, ‘[r]eligion is used in colonial African countries as a kind of mental anaesthetic whose effect renders the colonised docile’.⁶⁷ This was because, they argued, in true Nietzschean fashion, if Africans focused their attentions on the afterlife, they might not worry enough about the ways in which they were being oppressed on Earth in the present.⁶⁸ Such views were very much in alignment with how other independence movements in Africa saw the central Christian message as having been perverted to support colonial

⁵⁹ ‘Mugabe insists on transfer of full powers’, Paris AFP, 27 July 1978, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 28 July 1978, FBIS-SSA-78-146, E7.

⁶⁰ M. Meredith, ‘Mugabe returns to finish the revolution’, *Sunday Times*, 27 Jan. 1980, 8. ⁶¹ *Ibid.* ⁶² ‘Role of the Churches’, *ZR*, 24 May 1969, 2.

⁶³ D. R. Magaziner, *The law and the prophets: black consciousness in South Africa, 1968–1977*, Athens, OH 2010, 1–2.

⁶⁴ ‘The Church and revolution’, *ZR*, 5 Jan. 1968, 5–6 at p. 5. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ ‘The Christian Church and the liberation struggle: ZAPU’, in A. de Bragança and I. Wallerstein (eds), *The African liberation reader, I: The anatomy of colonialism*, London 1982, 183–6 at p. 184. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

regimes.⁶⁹ ZANU and ZAPU certainly saw the potential for aligning themselves with this image of Christianity as anti-establishment; however they were unwilling to develop this fully. Instead, they defaulted to presenting it as rather the opposite: a tool of the colonial system. It was, essentially, a development of Marx's 'opium of the masses', with a racial element added to the class struggle. Even if there was potential for the development of a revolutionary message, they felt that Christianity was too strongly associated with imperialism and European culture.

In 1977–8, with international negotiations unsuccessful, the Rhodesian government sought to create an 'internal settlement' with their preferred African nationalist leaders. This led to the creation of the appointment of a majority African cabinet in 1978, followed by the new state of 'Zimbabwe-Rhodesia' in 1979, and universal-suffrage elections which were won by Abel Muzorewa's United African National Council. One of the key elements to the new government was its ecclesiastical leadership. Muzorewa was bishop of Rhodesia in the United Methodist Church.⁷⁰ The internal settlement posed a major threat to ZANU and ZAPU, since there was a very real danger that it might lead to international recognition of Rhodesian independence. In particular, by having one-man-one-vote elections it removed one of the central complaints against the white minority regime. As such they sought to attack the settlement and the politicians who signed it in an aggressive manner. A major part of this was to try to turn Muzorewa's Christian credentials against him. Muzorewa had presented himself as 'a straightforward Christian gentleman', and made it a central plank of his electoral offering, so it was important for ZANU and ZAPU to neutralise this.⁷¹ ZAPU presented him as a 'wicked' man who had been 'recruited ... from his bishophood' by Ian Smith.⁷² The implication was clear: to join hands with the Rhodesians was to reject Christianity. Muzorewa was said to be carrying 'the Bible in his left hand and a bottle of the blood of the African people in his right hand'.⁷³ The nationalists

⁶⁹ W. M. Maina, *Historical and social dimensions of African Christian theology: a contemporary approach*, Eugene, OR 2009, 70.

⁷⁰ On Muzorewa see D. A. Mungazi, *In the footsteps of the masters: Desmond M. Tutu and Abel T. Muzorewa*, Westport, CT 2000 and Nyarota, *Religious leadership in national political conflicts*. Muzorewa's (contemporary) autobiography is also illuminating: *Rise up and walk*.

⁷¹ 'Muzorewa interviewed on attitude toward talks', London, BBC Domestic Television Service, 1 Feb. 1978, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 2 Feb. 1978, FBIS-SSA-78-023, E3-E4 at E4.

⁷² 'Voice of Zimbabwe discusses Bishop Muzorewa', Lusaka, Revolutionary Voice of Zimbabwe People, 26 Nov. 1979, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 27 Nov. 1979, FBIS-SSA-79-229, E3-E4 at E3.

⁷³ 'Patriotic Front commentary criticizes Muzorewa', Addis Ababa, Revolutionary Voice of Zimbabwe, 24 Oct. 1979, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 26 Oct. 1979, FBIS-SSA-79-209, E1-E2 at E2.

further argued that, if ‘Muzorewa is civilized and maintains Christianity in our country as he claims’, then the Africans of Rhodesia would reject Communism as wrong. The fact that many people did support the Patriotic Front rather suggested the opposite, in the view of ZAPU.⁷⁴ Indeed, said ZANU, it was in fact Muzorewa and Sithole who were ‘using God’s name in vain in order to camouflage their selfish lust for power and money’.⁷⁵ ZAPU had actually praised Muzorewa for his work opposing the Rhodesian government at the end of the 1960s, so their opposition to him was all the more striking.⁷⁶

Sithole posed a similar conundrum for ZANU. A former leader of their organisation, he had led a breakaway group following Robert Mugabe’s seizure of power in the original ZANU in 1975. Invited to take part in the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia project, his party won twelve seats in the 1979 general election. Like Muzorewa he was a Methodist cleric. And, like Muzorewa, he came under attack from the Patriotic Front on charges of failing to live up to Christian standards. In a particularly vicious character assassination of 1978 ZANU declared that Sithole ‘is definitely not a churchman at heart’, something they claimed that was obvious to other nationalist leaders he had shared a prison with for ten years.⁷⁷ ZANU did not stop at asserting that he had human failings, however. He was, they claimed, a heretic, who denied the virgin birth, the Trinity and the Resurrection.⁷⁸ Sithole, said ZANU, in fact ‘rejects much of the essence of Christ’s teaching’.⁷⁹ It was a remarkable assertion: ZANU were engaging themselves in a theological critique of a key political opponent. This was unusual for them, and suggests that they felt this was a powerful means by which to discredit him amongst their audience. Muzorewa and Sithole were denounced as ‘irreligious characters’ in a 1979 ZANU broadcast, which also claimed that they deified white people.⁸⁰ These were men, the Patriotic Front argued, who had ‘sold their souls and stilled their consciences’.⁸¹ ZANU further compared Sithole and Muzorewa unfavourably with St Paul. The African clerics’ conversion, ZANU claimed, was not caused by ‘a recent confrontation with God’ but rather the lure of

⁷⁴ ‘Voice of Zimbabwe discusses bishop Muzorewa’, E4.

⁷⁵ ‘Editorial: miracles *vs* realities’, ZN x (May/June 1978), 1.

⁷⁶ ‘Role of the Churches’, 2.

⁷⁷ ‘Profile of a traitor: Ndabaningi Sithole’, ZN x (Mar. 1978), 47–8 at p. 47.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 47.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ ‘Mugabe “Chitepo Day” message discusses elections’, Maputo, Voice of Zimbabwe, 18 Mar. 1979, FBISDR - sub-Saharan Africa, 20 Mar. 1979, FBIS-SSA-79-055, E3–E6 at E6.

⁸¹ UN Security Council, 34th session, 2119th meeting, 2 Mar. 1979, UN document S/PV.2119, UN Digital Library, at <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/30677?ln=en>>, accessed 27 Aug. 2021, 5.

worldly benefits, such as nice houses.⁸² What is more, argued ZANU, Muzorewa, Sithole *et al*, represented the extension of Smith's 'puppet clique' from the realm of politics into the areas of society and religion.⁸³ The two clergymen were also attacked for the activities of the African auxiliaries whom they commanded.⁸⁴ So, as one can see, ZANU and ZAPU accused these two key players in the internal settlement of un-Christian activities in order to undermine their credibility, attempting to neutralise any moral standing that they might have had as clerics.

Yet, despite appeals to Christian ideals in support of their liberation struggle, the nationalists stated that, in their view, certain Churches actually condoned colonialism. ZAPU explicitly stated in 1970 that '[s]ince the Church of England is headed by the British monarch it is obvious that British colonialism has the approval of the Anglican Church'.⁸⁵ It was their view that the Anglican Church in Rhodesia was on the side of the white government.⁸⁶ In one critical piece they argued that '[t]he Church as an institution in Rhodesia has created a history of self identification with western culture and western political tradition'.⁸⁷ To them, it was 'one of the instruments of western imperialism'.⁸⁸ This is not surprising given that the Anglican Church itself was divided over the issue of UDI.⁸⁹ Likewise, the Dutch Reformed Church, heavily supported by the Afrikaners of South Africa, was said to promote 'racialism and fascism'.⁹⁰ And the Catholic Church was said to be conniving with Portugal to oppress the people of the Portuguese colonies in Africa.⁹¹ In 1978 ZANU made clear their view that, '[i]n the 88 years of colonialism, the Missionaries and their Churches were instruments of imperialism, reinforcing the fascist and white supremacist ideas of the white settler'.⁹² As David Maxwell has pointed out, missionaries were often condemned by the ZANU and ZAPU leadership for participating in colonialism.⁹³ In their

⁸² 'Editorial: miracles *vs* realities', 1. This imagery was also used with reference to James Chikerema: 'National enemies: puppet show in Salisbury', *ZN* x (Mar./Apr. 1978), 45–6 at p. 46.

⁸³ 'Commentary on Muzorewa's political impotence', Maputo, Voice of Zimbabwe, 14 May 1979, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 16 May 1979, FBIS-SSA-79-096, E2–E4 at E4.

⁸⁴ 'Editorial: Sithole and Muzorewa's auxiliary bandits', *ZN* x (Sept./Oct. 1978), 1.

⁸⁵ 'The Anglican Church and the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe', *ZR*, 1 June 1974, 1–3 at p. 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 1–3. ⁸⁷ 'Lazarus awake!', *ZN* iv (9 May 1969), 5–6 at p. 5.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 6. ⁸⁹ Zvobgo, 'Church and State in Rhodesia', 383–4.

⁹⁰ 'The Rhodesian regime's constitution', *ZR* i (Aug. 1969), 3–4 at p. 4. On the Reformed Churches in South Africa see M. Plaatjies-Van Huffel and R. Vosloo (eds), *Reformed Churches in South Africa and the struggle for justice: remembering 1960–1990*, Stellenbosch 2013.

⁹¹ 'African Churches condemn racism', 24.

⁹² 'Education and culture: political commissariat lecture series: liberation war is a vast school for the masses', *ZN* x (May/June 1978), 57–61 at p. 58.

⁹³ Maxwell, *Christians and chiefs in Zimbabwe*, 125.

version of events, Victorian missionaries had originally been sent in 'to tame the population' before further oppressive forces could be introduced.⁹⁴ They were presented as the willing agents of Cecil Rhodes.⁹⁵ Nkomo claimed that 'they lulled us by their misinterpretations of the Bible'.⁹⁶ Missionary schools had undermined African resistance by creating a 'complex of inferiority' through their educational efforts.⁹⁷ This despite the fact that many nationalists felt positive about the schooling they had received at them.⁹⁸ It was members of the London Missionary Society, they said, who 'were the interpreters to effect the cheating deal' by which Lobengula, the Matabele king (c.1836–94), had signed away mining rights.⁹⁹ The nationalists seem to have had a strong sense that the Churches were integral to the white colonial establishment, or at least sought to present them as being so. This reinforces the findings of Jocelyn Alexander and Terence Ranger that, in the later years of the war, the Christianity espoused by missionaries and the ideology of the nationalists became incompatible.¹⁰⁰ An early view of ZANU was that the Churches needed to die, and, like Lazarus, rise again, reborn to serve the African community.¹⁰¹ It was also at odds with the activities of men such as Arthur Shearly Cripps (1869–1952) and, later, Guy Clutton-Brock (1906–95), who were both close to the Africans of Rhodesia.¹⁰²

This conception of missionaries as having undermined African society was expanded further by ZANU. It was their view that, not only had the missionaries assisted in the carving up of Ndebele and Shona territory in the nineteenth century, they had also been part of a deliberate attempt to drive a wedge between the Africans, undermining their solidarity. Their power to influence was said to be vast, since they ran almost all of the schools, and educated most of the leaders of African society.¹⁰³ One key

⁹⁴ 'A short history of Zimbabwe's struggle: the barrel of our gun is growing hotter every year', *ZR* (quarterly edition) (Oct.–Dec. 1973), 7–9 at p. 7.

⁹⁵ N. Shamuyarira, 'Education as an instrument of social transformation in Zimbabwe', *ZN* x (Mar./Apr. 1978), 61–4 at p. 62.

⁹⁶ J. Nkomo, 'Why is the West so worried?', in *Zimbabwe: the final advance*, Oakland, CA 1978, 43–8 at p. 43.

⁹⁷ 'The Church and revolution', 5–6 at p. 5.

⁹⁸ Maxwell, 'Christianity and the war in eastern Zimbabwe', 74; J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence & memory: one hundred years in the 'dark forests' of Matabeleland*, Oxford 2000, 169.

⁹⁹ 'Z.A.P.U.: its origins and direction produced by the publicity bureau of ZAPU (Patriotic Front)', *ZR* vi (?Sept. 1977), 35–42 at p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ J. Alexander and T. Ranger, 'Competition and integration in the religious history of north-western Zimbabwe', *Journal of Religion in Africa* xxviii (1998), 3–31 at p. 19.

¹⁰¹ 'Lazarus awake!', 6.

¹⁰² 'The Rev. A. S. Cripps', *The Times*, 8 Aug. 1952, 6; 'Guy Clutton-Brock', *The Times*, 2 Feb. 1995, 21.

¹⁰³ Shamuyarira, 'Education as an instrument of social transformation in Zimbabwe', 62.

part of this was that different denominations were responsible for delivering education in different parts of the country. Since for example, the Dutch Reformed Church led in the Southern Province, Africans there received a different religious upbringing to those in the Eastern Province, which was under the influence of the Anglicans and Methodists, or the north-eastern District, where the Salvation Army was in control.¹⁰⁴ ZANU argued that ‘the doctrinal divisions of the Church in Europe were imposed on the Africans, with the effect of accentuating any ethnic differences they may have had’.¹⁰⁵ Because African leaders were largely taught in these schools, ZANU said, some of their disagreements can be explained by denominational differences.¹⁰⁶ Missionaries also, they maintained, destroyed the traditional ‘non-formal’ system of education offered by African custom.¹⁰⁷ Ultimately, ZANU asserted their opposition to the sort of ‘colonial’ education offered by missionaries which was imposed at the cost of their culture.¹⁰⁸ The Churches were also censured by ZANU for supporting students studying abroad, young people who then became ‘hostile to the liberation cause in southern Africa’.¹⁰⁹

Despite showing significant hostility to Christian education on many occasions, ZANU and ZAPU also sought to defend church schools when they saw them as being endangered by the activities of the Rhodesian government. They published a number of articles which took the side of the Churches in these conflicts. In 1970 ZANU even went so far as to declare that, in their opinion, ‘this courageous stand by the Churches in Zimbabwe is commendable’.¹¹⁰ This was in response to the Churches’ warning that they would close down their primary schools if the 1969 Land Tenure Act were not repealed.¹¹¹ This act was highly controversial since it placed significant restrictions on where Africans might own property. As Chengetai Zvobgo has shown, the Catholics did indeed take a firm line against the act, which they said was against the beliefs of the Church.¹¹² The nationalists also separately reported the Catholic Church’s resistance to the act, and the general hostility of churchmen to the Rhodesian government.¹¹³ Yet, even here, they questioned whether the Churches were driven more by a fear of losing land and privileges than by a genuine change of heart with regard to the Rhodesian government.¹¹⁴ There were politics to this: in saying it they were trying to

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.¹⁰⁵ Ibid.¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 63.¹⁰⁷ Ibid.¹⁰⁸ Ibid.¹⁰⁹ ‘ZANU delegate’s address’, Dar es Salaam in English to East Africa, 12 May 1979, *FBISDR* - sub-Saharan Africa, 14 May 1979, FBIS-SSA-79-094, A2.¹¹⁰ ‘Over two thousand mission churches may close down’, *ZNV* (Apr. 1970), 5–8 at p. 5.¹¹¹ Ibid. 8.¹¹² Zvobgo, ‘Church and State in Rhodesia’, 387–90.¹¹³ ‘The real terrorists’, *ZNV* (Mar. 1970), 11; ‘Smith and Church’, *ZR* ii (May/June 1970), 7.¹¹⁴ ‘The Church and the State’, *ZR*, 2 May 1970, 3.

ensure that the Churches did not stop opposing the government. Some historians have suggested that this view may represent reality, and that the Churches for the most part really were more interested in the restrictions being placed on them than in the discrimination being brought against Africans.¹¹⁵ It demonstrates the lack of trust which existed between ZANU and ZAPU, and the clerics of Rhodesia. Even when the clergy stood up to the Rhodesian government the guerrillas were unwilling to give them full credit, unsure whether they were truly on their side.

At the same time, however, the Patriotic Front also received large amounts of money from the World Council of Churches in the late 1970s, donations that were not uncontroversial in Britain.¹¹⁶ The WCC was no friend of the Rhodesian government, and it was seen as a threat by some influential whites in Rhodesia.¹¹⁷ Already in 1970, following the WCC's decision to support independence movements in Africa, a ZAPU representative had declared them to be 'good people who act with courage'.¹¹⁸ The WCC was also held up as 'truly Christian', in contrast to the Anglican Church, which was, according to ZANU, on the side of the Rhodesians.¹¹⁹ Later on, however, sensing the difficulties of the situation, the Patriotic Front felt it necessary to defend their position in receiving money. This was in the face of criticism from groups such as Christian Aid, whose director asked '[w]hat *spiritual* authority is there for showing solidarity with Mr Mugabe and Mr Nkomo, and not with Bishop Muzorewa and the Reverend N. Sithole?'¹²⁰ The whole controversy, ZAPU argued, was in fact being generated by 'the barbaric political systems of Muzorewa, Sithole, Chirau and Smith'.¹²¹ They skilfully used this as evidence for the moral debasement of the established Churches in Rhodesia. Muzorewa *et al* were not, in their view, acting in a 'Christian' fashion, but had rather 'betrayed the fundamental principles of the Church' by engaging with Smith's plans for Zimbabwe-

¹¹⁵ Godwin and Hancock, "'We're all Rhodesians'", in Godwin and Hancock, *Rhodesians never die*, 45.

¹¹⁶ C. Longley, 'Church grant puts a strain on loyalty', *The Times*, 16 Oct. 1978, 17; A. Roy, 'Mugabe's army gets £45,000 from Churches', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Aug. 1978, 1, 28; 'Aid for terrorists', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 Aug. 1978, 14; M. E. Synon, 'World Churches give £16,000 to Patriotic Front', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 Sept. 1979, 6. See also P. Webb (ed.), *A long struggle: the involvement of the World Council of Churches in southern Africa*, Geneva 1994, 27–8.

¹¹⁷ R. Blake, *A history of Rhodesia*, London 1977, 366–7 at p. 374.

¹¹⁸ 'Tangwena fights on', *ZN v* (Nov. 1970), 5–6, 16 at p. 6.

¹¹⁹ 'The Anglican Church and the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe', 2.

¹²⁰ K. Slack, 'Granting aid to guerrilla groups', letter to the editor, *The Times*, 28 Aug. 1978, 9.

¹²¹ 'Puppets supported by reactionary Churches', *Zimbabwe People's Voice*, 20 Jan. 1979, 6, reproduced as 'Church support of Internal Settlement hit' in *Translations on sub-Saharan Africa no. 2079*, Arlington, VA 1979, 173.

Rhodesia.¹²² Indeed, they suggested that those who questioned the WCC's donation 'do not understand the politics and religion as inextricably linked with the emancipation of mankind'.¹²³ Thus the Patriotic Front used the WCC's engagement with their cause both as further evidence of their own righteousness, and as a way of discrediting their opponents. The fact that Muzorewa's United African National Council did not receive a donation in 1979, having previously been a recipient, was further evidence that ZANU and ZAPU could draw upon to support their cause.¹²⁴

A further cause of controversy was the killing of missionaries on several occasions during the later years of the war. These murders were widely viewed with disgust as needless brutality, and at odds with the stated objectives of both sides. Of particular brutality was the massacre at Elim Mission in 1978, which left twelve people dead.¹²⁵ The nationalists sought to pin the blame on the Rhodesian government, claiming that they were false flag operations. Such acts, they argued, were attempts to turn both public opinion and the African population against the Patriotic Front. Robert Mugabe focused on the deaths of missionaries during a speech that he made to the International Conference in Support of the Peoples of Zimbabwe and Namibia, hosted by the United Nations in 1977. He accused the Rhodesian government of 'starting a witch hunting campaign against Roman Catholic missionaries', listing a series of people whom he asserted lost their lives as part of it.¹²⁶ This was a 'deliberate and calculated campaign', he said, because of the 'stiff resistance' put up by the Catholic Church.¹²⁷ The deaths of missionaries at the hands of the Rhodesian security forces showed just how low the regime was prepared to go in order to undermine support for the African regime.¹²⁸ Missionaries thus represent something of a paradox in nationalist propaganda. Although ZANU and ZAPU sought to depict them as tools of imperialism, at the same time they made them victims of that same system. It seems somewhat incongruous to have made them both the agents of the colonial power as well as people martyred for their sympathy to the guerrillas' cause. What it does show is that the nationalists understood what the missionaries represented to the outside world, and the powerful message stories of their deaths would have on the international stage. Accusations that the Rhodesians were killing servants of God could only serve to vilify the white minority

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ K. F. Cviic, 'The politics of the World Council of Churches', *World Today* xxxv (1979), 369–76 at p. 369.

¹²⁵ This is discussed extensively in Maxwell, 'Christianity and the war in eastern Zimbabwe', and in Griffiths, *The axe and the tree*.

¹²⁶ 'Speech by Mr Robert Mugabe, co-leader of the Zimbabwe Patriotic Front', *Decolonization: A Publication of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization* viii (July 1977), 48–56 at pp. 52–3.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 53.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

regime further in the eyes of the world. It was also important to ZANU and ZAPU to assert to the international community that the guerrilla forces had no part in the killings, and to distance themselves from them as much as possible, in order to maintain their image as the saviours of Zimbabwe. They thus created a powerful narrative in which the Rhodesians were again shown to be at odds with the Churches, and then used violence both to silence them and to smear the nationalists.

The hesitation of Christian Churches to support the armed struggle waged by ZANU and ZAPU was attacked by both groups at various times. They were clearly dismayed by the reluctance of clerics to endorse violence and so dismissed Christians as being unwilling and unnecessary to liberate the Africans of Rhodesia. This despite the fact that several Churches had denounced UDI as illegal in 1965.¹²⁹ In 1968, for example, ZANU declared that '[i]f dying for democracy, justice and liberty for mankind is to be despised by Christians then we don't need Christianity or Christians in the struggle to free Zimbabwe'.¹³⁰ They argued that the guerrillas needed to fire their weapons more and pray less.¹³¹ One ANC representative made clear the view of the nationalists that 'any Christian will resort to any means to free himself when forced ... Christians have a right to defend themselves'.¹³² Such a statement reinforced the idea that to fight militarily for independence was entirely compatible with Christianity, and it was wrong for anyone to assert otherwise. ZAPU were happy to quote the Catholic archbishop of Salisbury, Francis Markall sj, in a 1974 publication. However, they also explained that 'leaders of all churches ... should understand that good words are not good deeds'.¹³³ In saying this they were again reinforcing their point that the Churches were happy to make bold statements, but these were ultimately futile. Mugabe drew a distinction between 'violence for violence's sake', and fighting for a cause, suggesting that the Churches were not fair to the guerrillas in this regard.¹³⁴ According to ZANU, the Anglican Church in particular failed to appreciate that, since Rhodesia was based on colonial violence, only warfare could bring it to an end.¹³⁵ That the Anglicans

¹²⁹ Zvobgo, 'Church and State in Rhodesia', 382.

¹³⁰ 'Inside Zimbabwe: from the death cells', *ZN* iii (13 Apr. 1968), 3.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* ¹³² 'Face to face', *ZR* iv (July/Aug. 1975), 10–11 at p. 10.

¹³³ 'Oppression and the Church', *ZR* (quarterly edition) (Jan./Mar. 1974), 2.

¹³⁴ 'Smith's Selous Scouts assassinate missionaries', 11.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, there were some clergy in the Church of England who endorsed a 'holy war' against Rhodesia, a point of view attacked by the Robert Gascoyne-Cecil, 5th marquis of Salisbury, and rejected by the dean of Bulawayo: 'Holy war to beat Smith "justified"', *The Times*, 23 June 1969, 1; Lord Salisbury, 'Call for holy war against Rhodesia', letter to the editor, *The Times*, 1 July 1969, 9; C. A. Shaw, 'Call for a holy war', letter to the editor, *The Times*, 9 July 1969, 11. Shortly before UDI, the archbishop of Canterbury, speaking for the British Council of Churches, had advised Harold Wilson

failed to acknowledge this was just further evidence of their support for the Rhodesian regime.¹³⁶ Only the armed struggle could win the freedom that the nationalists desired, and, whatever the Churches' intentions, to reject violence was an error. This was, of course, to justify the position of ZANU and ZAPU against others, such as Muzorewa, who rejected violence and were applauded by the Rhodesian government for doing so. Fundamentally, the Churches, in the view of ZANU, had either to become 'an active participant in the revolutionary movement of the people' or else their congregations would desert them.¹³⁷

What is more, for many years the nationalists condemned the Churches for, as they saw it, failing to strongly denounce the abuses of the Rhodesian government. In 1970, ZANU argued that the 'in the 1960s ... [the Christian Church] ... kept its mouth shut when fundamental human rights were being trampled and violated'.¹³⁸ This, they said, made their later calls 'sound hollow'.¹³⁹ A 1969 ZAPU piece opined that '[w]ith the exception of a very few courageous ones, we see very little in condemnation of Smith's oppressive laws, and practices, and constitutional suggestions from these missionaries'.¹⁴⁰ It was said that 'they conveniently close their eyes, their ears, and minds to the suffering of the Africans'.¹⁴¹ ZAPU took particular umbrage at the fact that some missionaries called them 'terrorists', and talked of the 'terrorist sin'.¹⁴² Yet again, when the Churches did offer criticism of the Rhodesian government it was interpreted as being a political move, rather than a moral one. ZANU argued in 1969 that the religious establishment had worked out that it would be best for their attendance figures if they were to distance themselves from the white regime.¹⁴³ Such attitudes started to shift over time, and as early as 1973 ZAPU spoke positively about a pair of clerics who had spoken out, one of whom was due to be deported for doing so.¹⁴⁴ This change became especially noticeable after the reports of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace came out, and after Bishop Donal Lamont openly attacked the Rhodesian government for its failure to live up to the Christian standards it espoused.¹⁴⁵ When the Rhodesians then

that Christians would not object to the use of force if it was deemed necessary to oppose UDI: Blake, *A history of Rhodesia*, 379–80.

¹³⁶ 'The Anglican Church and the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe', 1.

¹³⁷ 'The Church and revolution', 6.

¹³⁸ 'African education threatened by Apartheid laws', *ZNv* (Sept. 1970), 10–13 at p. 12.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ 'The role of Churches', 2.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² 'The Church and revolution', 6.

¹⁴³ 'Lazarus awake!', 6.

¹⁴⁴ 'From inside Zimbabwe', *ZR*, 14 July 1973, 4–5 at p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ McLaughlin, 'Avila mission', 95; "'Rhodesian whites are closed from the truth': Sister McLaughlin tells the *Voice of Zimbabwe* in an exclusive interview', *ZNx* (July/Aug. 1978), 33–5 at p. 35; M. Meredith, 'The dilemma of bishop Lamont', *Sunday Times*, 6 Feb. 1977, 17.

sought to destroy Lamont as a guerrilla collaborator, it terminally damaged relations between Church and State, and led to a reassessment by the nationalists.¹⁴⁶

Instead of questioning the big issues in Rhodesian society, said ZANU and ZAPU, the Churches were merely hiding behind theology, retreating into abstract ideas about salvation. They questioned whether the message of suffering on earth for heavenly rewards was a meaningful one, or one that would appeal to the African populations of places under colonial rule. ZANU in particular explained that it was hard to believe that people would be willing to 'burn on this earth' in return for unproven rewards.¹⁴⁷ They strongly intimated that such attitudes served to support the white privileges of colonial Rhodesia.¹⁴⁸ The Churches would wither if they kept 'playing the safe game of abstract salvation', they said.¹⁴⁹ Instead, they were urged to engage in activities to support the struggle against the minority regime. This would be tough, they were told, but was not the basis of their religion suffering?¹⁵⁰ Indeed, there was a suggestion of hypocrisy here: exhorting others to look for heavenly rewards whilst remaining firmly grounded in their colonial advantages. Joshua Nkomo argued that the Churches needed to be seen to suffer in order to gain the 'respect' of the people.¹⁵¹

Indeed, the very fact that the white Rhodesians were churchgoers was used as evidence that Christianity, as practised in southern Africa, was not living up to the ideals it was supposed to represent. What ZANU and ZAPU did was to use the principles and morals in an attempt to push Churches into challenging and condemning the Rhodesian government and its allies. Why was it, ZAPU asked, that if the Rhodesians were guilty of sin they had not previously been condemned for this?¹⁵² The Churches had been ministering to them for decades and yet had singularly failed to get Rhodesian society to accept the Christian message. 'Nothing', they said, 'could be a sadder record of the failure of the Christian religion than the persistent existence of racist and minority regimes within its members.'¹⁵³ This was not surprising, they argued, since white clerics were completely integrated into the racial system. Worse still, the clerics of these Churches were accused of having actually 'blessed as good Christians' the members of the minority regime which was oppressing Africans.¹⁵⁴ They were happy to preach to Africans and then return to

¹⁴⁶ McLaughlin, 'Avila mission', 91, 98, 100–1.

¹⁴⁷ 'The Church and revolution', 6. ¹⁴⁸ 'Lazarus awake!', 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ 'Role of the Churches', 2.

¹⁵¹ 'The Christian Church and the liberation struggle: ZAPU', 185.

¹⁵² 'The Church and the State', 3.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ 'Oppression and the Church', 2.

their white enclaves and perpetuate the racist system, said ZANU.¹⁵⁵ Some historians have concluded that the Anglican Church ultimately did not seek significant change, and guerrilla attitudes may well reflect that.¹⁵⁶ Certainly it supports Ranger and Bhebe's view that the whites in Rhodesia failed to appreciate the possibility of a distinctly African Christianity.¹⁵⁷ The nationalists also depicted white clerics as being happy to receive all the privileges of being part of the white minority, whilst doing little to help the Africans. This was a powerful message, no doubt aimed at drawing the population away from the main denominations in Rhodesia. Mugabe himself professed that he had little time for religious worship, believing it better to use the time helping people in the community.¹⁵⁸ Thus, white Rhodesians were presented as hypocrites, who maintained the semblance of being Christian, whilst failing to live up to the core values of Christianity. ZANU and ZAPU described a white population who had been allowed to operate like this for years, not properly critiqued by the Churches. There had been negative statements from some clerics, but no member of the white community had actually been excommunicated. Whilst the Churches felt that minority rule was immoral they had done little to challenge it. Such a message was a powerful one both against the whites and against organised Christianity in Rhodesia.

ZANU and ZAPU excelled at political propaganda. They fully understood the need to wage a war of words and images against the white Rhodesian government, and did so with great enthusiasm. They also could see the weak points in the Rhodesians' own ideology, and exploited them to the full. The Rhodesians saw their position in strongly ideological terms, believing their war to be justified as a defence of 'Christian civilisation' in Africa. It was imperative for the Zimbabwean nationalists to completely demolish this idea in the eyes of both the people of Rhodesia and the wider world. They also knew that their own Socialist policies were seen by many to be fundamentally incompatible with Christian theology and practice. This too required a response. In order to do this they developed a multi-pronged approach. First, they attacked the Churches themselves for being agents of imperialism, and a source of the current crisis. In doing so, they sought to create distance between the African population and the ecclesiastical establishment. This was particularly noticeable in the earlier years of the conflict. To some extent this position did soften as the war went on, and more Churches came to support the nationalists'

¹⁵⁵ 'Role of the Churches', 2; 'Lazarus awake!', 5–6.

¹⁵⁶ Godwin and Hancock, '*Rhodesians never die*', 129.

¹⁵⁷ Ranger and Bhebe, 'Volume introduction', 19.

¹⁵⁸ "'Sharing common suffering, enjoying common benefits": an interview with ZANU president Mugabe', *Southern Africa* xii (Sept. 1979), 3–5 at p. 5.

position, most notably key elements within the Catholic Church in Rhodesia, as well as the World Council of Churches. The other strand to their message was the depiction of a white minority at odds with Christianity. Thus, they accused the Rhodesian military of killing missionaries, trying to put them at odds with the Churches. They also depicted the white Rhodesians and their clerics as modern Pharisees: hypocrites who attended church, but did not heed the Christian message. In doing this, ZANU and ZAPU were suggesting that the ideals of Christianity had been perverted in order to support white supremacism and all manner of other sins. In the final stage of the crisis they faced their most serious religious challenge in the form of an African-led state under the premiership of an actual bishop, and acted accordingly to discredit him (and Sithole), rejecting any claim that they might have had to be men of God. The effort put into propaganda by ZANU and ZAPU shows a number of things. First, the extent to which they, as nationalists, felt that they had to take Christian sensibilities into consideration. Second, that the Rhodesians' own ideology was built on sand and was easily undermined. In exposing the hypocritical nature of Rhodesian Christianity, the nationalists hoped to shame the Smith regime and its supporters. This in turn serves to emphasise the importance attached to moral and religious debates in one of the key conflicts of Cold War Africa.