

## A ‘decolonisation project’ that went awry

### A Missio-Ecclesiological interrogation of the Anglican Diocese of Harare during Bishop Nolbert Kunonga’s episcopacy: 2001–2007

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#### Abstract

The appointment of Rt. Rev. Dr. Nolbert Kunonga to the office of Bishop of the Diocese of Harare left the diocese at the crossroads where two possibilities were beckoning. There was the possibility of decolonising a diocese that had been a racist bastion for over a century or leading the diocese along a new trajectory of transformation. The purpose of this article is to interrogate the role and contribution of Bishop Kunonga in bringing about transformation to the Anglican diocese of Harare. Our main contention is that Kunonga failed to bring transformation and decolonisation because of a lack of vision, flagrant disregard for process and procedure, and dismal failure to follow and apply ethical leadership. However, he was excommunicated from the Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA) because he had unilaterally withdrawn from it out of poor judgement.

**Key words:** Bishop Kunonga, Anglican Diocese of Harare, Church of Province of Central Africa (CPCA), Decolonisation, Transformation, Social Contract, Contractualism

The appointment of Rt. Rev. Dr. Nolbert Kunonga to the office of Bishop of the Diocese of Harare left the diocese at the crossroads where two possibilities were beckoning. There was the possibility of decolonising and transforming a diocese founded on the racial prejudice and elitism, on the one hand, and maintaining the status quo, on the other. As the article will show, Kunonga chose to run the diocese like a personal fiefdom and the consequences were not only dire, but resulted in a schism.

Radner (2000:321) argues that “because of the revived public exposure... the character of bishops, broadly understood, has come in for renewed examination and often renewed disdain”. The controversial appointment of Dr. Nolbert Kunonga as Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Harare in November 2001, followed

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by an equally controversial and unprecedented withdrawal from the Church of the Province of Central Africa (CPCA) in October 2007, begs interrogation from both missiological and ecclesiological perspectives. The purpose of this article is to subject the history that they tell under rigorous scrutiny from the viewpoint of an outsider. In doing so, however, we will endeavour to close the gaps so as to proffer a more objective, balanced, and nuanced history of the factors and dynamics that led to the final withdrawal of Bishop Nolbert Kunonga from the CPCA. Throughout the essay, we will infuse missiological and ecclesiological perspectives into history because the investigation being conducted is that of a church leader who should have been guided by the gospel values and the principle of *missio Dei*. The main interest of the article is to understand (i) the background of Nolbert Kunonga before being appointed bishop, (ii) circumstances surrounding his appointment and consecration, (iii) his record as bishop, and (iv) reason/s for withdrawal from the CPCA.

## **1. The social contract and the history of the Anglican Diocese of Harare**

Scanlon argues that the concept of the social contract “provides for an account of that central part of morality which deals with ‘what we owe each other.’” He further argues that reason rather than desire is fundamental to moral decision-making (Scanlon, 2000). In further unpacking contractualism, Scanlon contends that it is “a voluntary network of mutual dependence” and, therefore, a “distinctive approach to interpersonal morality” that involves being able to justify one’s conduct to others, i.e., giving others their due.

However, Shafik (2018) calls for ‘a new social contract’ based on three principles, i.e., (i) security for all through investing in one another’s capabilities, (ii) efficient and fair sharing of risk, and (iii) opportunity creation (Shafik 2018).

Although we will not deal with the three principles in detail, our analysis of Bishop Kunonga’s decolonisation project will engage the values at the heart of these three principles. The underlying assumption in our argument is that the church is the milieu and locus for leaders to demonstrate principles/values of justice, equity, inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency, among others.

## **2. Rev. Kunonga, before being consecrated bishop**

One recurring issue in the literature on Bishop Kunonga is the lack of information on his life and work before he became a bishop. Duncan and Mutamiri (2018:2) and Mutamiri (2018:50) describe Kunonga as “little-known”. Mutamiri (2018:50) argues further that before being appointed bishop, Rev. Kunonga had done “a brief stint in the Diocese”. Below, we present a brief life history based on disparate sources.

Bishop Nolbert Kunonga was born on 31 December 1950 in Wedza district, Southern Rhodesia (renamed Zimbabwe in 1980). He studied at St Anne's Goto mission in Wedza after which he worked as a gardener for a white couple in Avondale, then Salisbury (renamed Harare after Zimbabwe's Independence). He also worked as a catechist at St Barnabas in Westwood (Musodza, 2020:25). He later became a catechist at St Mary Magdalene, Avondale. In the mid-seventies, Kunonga joined the United Theological College (UTC), a Protestant Interdenominational seminary at Epworth, outside Salisbury, to train as a priest (Musodza, 2020:26-27). Kunonga could not join other seminarians at St John's Seminary in Zambia due to President Kenneth Kaunda's closure of the border between Zambia and Rhodesia (Operation Cheese). The Anglican Church sent its students for ministerial training to the UTC in the mid-seventies and only later opened the Bishop Gaul Seminary Salisbury (now Harare) in 1978 (Matikiti, 2009). Kunonga was one of the students that Bishop Burrough sent to the UTC for training. Rev. David Manyau was his classmate at the UTC (Mutamiri, 2017:84). Musodza (2020) claims, "The fact that he went to study theology at a Methodist Theological Seminary when some clergy in the Anglican Diocese of Harare were either trained in Zambia, South Africa or United Kingdom is a cause for concern", is either disingenuous or simply an expression of ignorance of the political reasons behind the move taken by Bishop Burrough. Moreover, as implied by Musodza, the training that Kunonga got from the UTC was not fit for the Anglican Church, which would not have been of his own making. What matters is the theological and ministerial support he was provided by his church while at UTC. He could have emerged as a strong minister by virtue of the ecumenical context in where he trained. Kunonga's political outlook was most likely radicalised from the time he joined the UTC. This is confirmed by the fact that the UTC was a "hotbed of political consciousness" during the seventies (Matikiti, 2016).

On completion of his training at the United Theological College, Kunonga served as a deacon for a year at St Francis, Glen Norah under Rev. Daniel Nhema (Mutamiri, 2017:83; Musiyambiri, 2016:72). Kunonga was denied ordination by Bishop Paul Burrough "because of his radical approach to ministry (Mutamiri, 2017:165)". However, according to Musiyambiri (2016:72), Bishop Burrough had "refused to ordain him because he was not convinced of his calling". After having been given a second chance due to the pleading of Rev. Nhema, Nolbert Kunonga was finally ordained by Bishop Burrough's successor, Bishop P.R. Hatendi (Musodza, 2020:26). This should have been in the 1980s, considering that Bishop Peter Hatendi became Bishop of Harare in 1981 following the retirement of Bishop Paul Burrough. However, little is said about which parishes Rev. Kunonga served between his ordination till his departure to the United States of America (USA) for further studies.

As for his academic career, the writer can fill in the gaps left by the available literature on Kunonga. The writer studied with Kunonga at university from 1981 to

1983, and became familiar with his academic interests up to the late 90's when took up lecturership in the Faculty of Theology at Africa University, Zimbabwe. Kunonga acquired a B.Sc. Sociology degree (1983) and a B.A. (Hons) degree in Religious Studies (1987) from the University of Zimbabwe. According to Musodza (2020:21), Rev. Kunonga “left the diocese (of Harare) under difficult circumstances. He was a controversial figure. He was suspended several times and left for overseas for further studies”. In September 1990, he registered for a Master's degree in Theological Studies (M. TS.) at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, in the State of Illinois, USA. He completed his M.TS. in May 1992. In September 1992, he was accepted for the joint Ph. D. programme between Garrett-Evangelical Seminary and Northwestern University. On completion in December 1996, he was awarded a Ph. D. by Northwestern University. In a letter dated 2 July 2022, Rev. Vince McGlothlin-Eller, Director of Registration Services at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, informed this researcher that, “During the Ph. D. programme his studies focused on Christian History, on the African Continent. His dissertation was titled, ‘Roots in Zimbabwean revolution: A biographical study of the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole’”. Soon after, he got an academic appointment as a lecturer in Church History at the Faculty of Theology, Africa University.

Rev. McConkey (Musodza, 2020), a former senior member of the Diocese of Harare, states that Rev. Kunonga was “active at St Luke's, Evanston Illinois, which is a large and well-known modernist' parish”. After completing his studies at Northwestern University, Dr. Kunonga was offered a job at Africa University as a lecturer in Church History. Besides his lecturership job, Dr. Kunonga also served as Priest-in-charge at St Agnes parish in Chikanga, Mutare, in the Diocese of Manicaland (Musodza, 2020:25). He resigned from his academic job in 2001 to assume the office of Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Harare.

Those who knew him well observed that from a young age, Kunonga was politically inclined. Some say he started to engage in politics in Upper Primary school at St Anne's Goto (Musodza, 2020). Others say he became increasingly politically conscious after having worked as a gardener in Salisbury. According to Emeritus Bishop Chad Gandiya, Nolbert Kunonga's brothers “were involved in the political struggle for the country” (Musodza, 2020:23). It was on account of his political consciousness that Bishop Paul Burrough refused to ordain him. He was only ordained after a fellow black priest, Rev. Nhema appealed to the first black bishop in the Harare Diocese, Bishop Hatendi (Musodza, 2020:26). A fellow priest in the Diocese of Mutare claims, “He came across as a pan-Africanist, and always had conflicts with white clergy in (the diocese of) Manicaland” (Musodza, 2020:25).

Many of his former colleagues claim that Rev. Dr. Kunonga was “generally a very ambitious person about church leadership...” (Musodza, 2020:22). His ambition

became manifest in 1996 when Bishop Peter Hatendi's term ended. Rev. Kunonga phoned from the USA, where he was studying, wishing to speak to the late Rev. Chatukuta. However, he managed to speak to Rev. Simukai Mutamangira, Dean of the Anglican Cathedral in Harare. In the phone call, he pleaded to Rev. Mutamangira to campaign for him for the office of Bishop (Mutamiri, 2018:62). The fact that Rev. Kunonga eyed the post of the bishop as far back as 1995 when Bishop Hatendi retired is a clear sign that he was ambitious. The writer is aware that Rev. Kunonga travelled from the USA back home to persuade senior lay members to campaign for him or to nominate him for bishop. During his trip back home, he had a meeting with his former lecturer of Sociology, Prof Gordon Chavhunduka, who was the then Vice Chancellor of the University of Zimbabwe.

An article in the Religion in Zimbabwe Online periodical (RelZim.org) states that before he went for his Ph. D. studies in the USA, "he was always long-winded and didactic at clergy conferences...". This implies that Kunonga attended many clergy conferences before leaving for further studies in the USA and became known for his "long-winded and didactic" speaking style puts paid to the claim that he was "little-known" (Duncan & Mutamiri, 2018; Mutamiri, 2018:50) in the diocese. Considering the fact that Kunonga had served in the diocese since the mid-seventies as a catechist, seminarian, deacon, and priest before leaving for the USA for further studies, it is inconceivable that "not many people knew Nolbert Kunonga when he was elected to the See of Harare" as Musodza (2020:28) claims. Musodza's conclusion is based on hindsight rather than the knowledge of Rev. Dr. Nolbert Kunonga before consecration as bishop of the Harare Diocese. Such logic is deductive and is not helpful in understanding who Rev. Fr. Nolbert Kunonga was before consecration as bishop.

### **3. How Kunonga got elected Bishop of the Diocese of Harare**

The Diocese of Harare became vacant in October 2000 following the retirement of Bishop Jonathan Siyachitema (Musodza, 2006:6; Duncan & Mutamiri, 2018). In compliance with Canon law (Canon 14:1), Rev. Tim Neil, the Vicar General of the diocese, declared the See vacant. He "took charge [of the diocese] ...and oversaw the process of electing a new bishop... (Duncan & Mutamiri, 2018). "Names of prospective candidates were sent to the Diocesan Standing Committee, which went through the CVs, leaving three names on the list for the Electoral College" (Musodza, 2006:6). The election took place on 22 December 2001 in the city of Gweru located in the Central Diocese of Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, the three candidates on the list of nominees failed to muster the three-thirds threshold required for appointment. As a result, Archbishop Malango, the Chairman of the Electoral College, asked for another name for the electors to consider (Musiyambiri, 2016:70). At

this juncture, Rev. Godfrey Taonezvi, a member of the Electoral college, proposed Rev. Dr. Kunonga. Musodza (2006:7) adds, “The election was run and in the last round Bishop Kunonga (sic) got the two thirds majority that are required (sic) and he was pronounced as the bishop elect (sic)”.

The fact that Rev. Dr. Kunonga’s name was not on the primary list of nominees that served at the Diocesan Standing Committee aggrieved Rev. Neil, who lodged a formal objection to the election, arguing that procedures were violated (Musiyambiri, 2016:71). Gunda (2008), Musiyambiri (2016), Mutamiri (2018), and Musodza (2020) concur that Bishop Kunonga was elected in controversial and cloudy circumstances. According to Musiyambiri, the nomination of Rev. Dr. Kunonga was at the behest of Bishop Sebastian Bakare of Manicaland and his Dean, Rev. Eric Ruwona. The latter wanted to counter Rev. Timothy Neil, who was leading other candidates in the vote. Musiyambiri (2016:70-71) further argues that “they felt [that Kunonga] had a nationalistic stance to counter Neil, a white man. A deal is said to have been set (sic) promising that Tawonezvi be Kunonga’s dean at Harare (sic) once the outcome was achieved....”.

Despite the objection raised by Rev. Neil, Rev. Dr. Kunonga was confirmed as duly elected Bishop of the Diocese of Harare at the Confirmation Court held on 29 January 2001 at Kitwe, Zambia (Musiyambiri, 2016:71). The Confirmation Court was chaired by Bishop Sebastian Bakare of the Diocese of Manicaland, Zimbabwe who was acting as commissary of Archbishop Bernard Malango. The latter could not attend the court due to other commitments” (Mutamiri, 2017:52-53). The court “unanimously confirmed Bishop Nolbert Kunonga setting aside Rev. Timothy Neil’s objection and others which had been leveled against Bishop Kunonga” (Mutamiri, 2017:52). However, Musodza (2020:40), citing Ashworth (2006) controversially claims that Rev. Dr. Kunonga was “elected at a secret court of confirmation held in Zambia under the Archbishop of Central Africa, Bernard Malango, on January 29, 2001”. He goes on to claim that Kunonga was Archbishop Malango’s friend (2020:40). It is a contradiction in terms and ironical to claim that Rev. Dr. Kunonga was “not all that well known” (Musodza, 2020:17, 21) at the electors’ meeting in Gweru but was confirmed based on being a friend of the archbishop. Such unsubstantiated allegations have the potential of reducing the whole electoral procedure and process to nothing but fraud and put the name of the Church of the Province of Central Africa in disrepute.

The question remains whether the election and confirmation constitute ‘fraud’. Musiyambiri (2016:71) believes so and supports Rev. Neil’s view on Canon 7:4-6, which provides that in case of objection to the election of a bishop, the objector is required to present his/her objection/s in writing and to appear in person before the Confirmation Court. Instead of inviting Rev. Neil to the Confirmation

Court, "it is alleged that Rev. Steve Chilubi of Zambia represented Harare at the court in question". Furthermore, according to Rev. Neil, the procedure required the Provincial Registrar to attend the Confirmation Court. To Rev. Neil's surprise, Mr. Robert Stumbles, the then Provincial Registrar, only heard about the Court two days after it met (Mutamiri, 2017:52). Commenting on the decision by the Confirmation Court, Rev. Timothy Neil argues, "The moral and legal problem here is, who is Rev. Steve Chilubi, and who appointed him to represent the Diocese of Harare at the court of confirmation? Surely, to act as a commissary you should be authorized to do so" (Musiyambiri, 2016:71). Rev. Timothy Neil did not only complain, but approached his lawyers claiming that the election was 'fixed'. He wrote to Archbishop Malango claiming that the process was 'a disgrace'. Furthermore, he argued that "The church has to set a moral tone for the nation" (Musodza, 2020:28). In a clear and unambiguous warning to the church leadership in the CPCA, he prophetically stated; "If the church conducts its business in the same way that ZANU-PF does, then there is no hope" (Musodza, 2020:28). Despite his protestations, the decision made at the Confirmation Court was upheld.

According to Mutamiri (2017:54), the "racial veil" overshadowed the whole process of the election and confirmation of Dr. Nolbert Kunonga. However, "nobody was prepared to listen to a white man's objection to the election of a Bishop who was promising to be a Messiah to the Anglican Diocese of Harare (Mutamiri, 2017:54). The die was cast. However, the question is, would he be able to achieve his vision of transforming the diocese without the support of Rev. Neil and this powerful group and its acolytes? The answers to this question were to unfold during the episcopacy of Bishop Kunonga.

#### **4. Dislodging racism in the diocese of Harare: Kunonga's nemesis**

Rev. Dr. Kunonga was consecrated Bishop of the Diocese of Harare on 29 April 2001 and enthroned at the Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints on 30 April 2001 (Musodza, 2006:7). His sermon was based on the theme, 'When and where we stand'.<sup>2</sup> True to the 'nationalist' ideological predilection, Bishop Kunonga's charge borrowed his theme from Julia A. Cooper's book (1892).<sup>3</sup> The centrepiece of his sermon was the

<sup>2</sup> The author has not been able to lay his hands on the sermon presented by Bishop Kunonga. It is not clear whether is extant or not. What is only available are commentaries on it, most of them based on the interpretation of the writer.

<sup>3</sup> Cooper was "an African- American historian and black liberation activist who contributed to the establishment and advancement of the Afrocentric discourse". She fought for "African-American equality, women's equality and their rights in education, and for African American women's right to vote". In the book she wrote, "Only the black woman can say 'When and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with us' (Cooper, 1892) (<https://peoplesworld.org/>).

Diocese's racial architecture, which was divided along race and colour lines. His appeal was, "We are not two churches. We are one with one Bishop. It is a disgrace and shame to Christ and the world for the children of God to subsist in twoness" (Duncan & Mutamiri, 2018). Kunonga went on to declare, "God is calling us to possess this Anglican Church, to own it on behalf of Christ" (Duncan & Mutamiri, 2018).

There is consensus in the available literature on the correctness of Kunonga's diagnosis of the key problem in the diocese. Our view is that Kunonga's identification of and commitment to fighting racism would be his nemesis throughout his episcopacy. Tackling racism in the Diocese of Harare would be the lynchpin of his mission to form one united diocese. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to track the record of Bishop Kunonga in the Diocese of Harare with a view to evaluating the credibility and sustainability of his vision and strategies.

Bishop Kunonga's sermon at consecration received mixed feelings among the various members in the diocese. However, it struck the right chord for the young members of the black clergy who for so long had been pushed to the margins of decision-making in the racially divided diocese. Bishop Kunonga was coming to lead a diocese with a long and deep-seated history of racial discrimination. At the time of his entry as its bishop, racism was rife. In the city of Harare, northern suburbs were "the preserve of white clergy" (Musodza, 2020:69), even though there was a significant influx of black members in the parishes since 1980, at independence. The previous black bishops, such as Bishop Peter Hatendi and Jonathan Siyachitema, "failed to make inroads on the matter of racism" (Musodza, 2020:71). According to Mutamiri (2018), Emeritus Bishop Peter Hatendi noted that there was "outright resistance of leadership from the European (sic) parishes as well as European (sic) staff working in the diocesan offices" He went on to cite some white parishes that "continued to insist on engaging European expatriates as their rectors. They resisted the appointment of black priests by the bishop". As a result of this resistance to transformation in the diocese, black priests remained assistants to white priests. This situation became a source of frustration to young members of the black clergy. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bishop Kunonga was nominated by a member of this group who viewed Kunonga as a Messiah because he was fearless and was prepared to confront problems head-on.

Reminiscing on the racism in the diocese at the time that Kunonga became bishop, Rev. Fr. James Mukunga had this to say:

"The prejudice that Black priests suffered is that they were Black and therefore they can't (sic) be appointed Rectors to the predominantly white parishes because whites being superior can't be led by those who were kowtowing barely twenty years ago. At the time of his (Bishop Kunonga) sermon 99% of white parishes



were under the Rectorship of white priests in a diocese where 99% were Black congregations. In parishes where there was a fair representation of races, it would upset some whites if you (Black person) went to receive Holy Eucharist before them" (Musodza, 2020:70).

Rev. Dr. David McConkey concurred with Kunonga on the need to address the scourge of racism in the diocese. In his reflections on the bishop's charge, he observed:

"I shared with him the sense that too little had been done to address the legacy of racism in the Anglican diocese" (Musodza, 2020:32).

While some viewed Bishop Kunonga's sermon as positive, others thought otherwise. Some felt that his sermon was not only anticolonial but harboured an anti-white sentiment. For others, however, it carried a clear "racist accent" (Musodza, 2020:34) meant to alienate whites. The following is a telling comment from one senior member of the black clergy who was on the original list of nominees for the bishop of the diocese:

"In the sermon it is clear that there was a tendency to alienate others. Remember, as a bishop one should embrace all and not alienate others. The moment you identify with one group, in my opinion, you have lost it" (Musodza, 2020:34).

A senior white clergy member sensed the same anti-white sentiment and commented, "But I was discomfited by his overt expression of antagonism towards white people" (Musodza, 2020:32).

Despite this fact, Bishop Kunonga's vision of uniting black and white and restoring the diocese to Christ's authority was noble. However, the question remained, was the right diagnosis and a noble vision enough without a clear strategy? In our view, all three components were required for the success of the 'project'. To the extent that the strategies were misplaced, it is a matter of course that the correct diagnosis and a noble vision would become nothing but a mirage.

In the next section, we examine Bishop Kunonga's strategies to achieve his vision as articulated in his sermon at consecration.

#### **4.1 Empowering young black clergy at all costs**

When Bishop Kunonga was consecrated to lead the Diocese of Harare, black priests were the main assistants to white priests (Duncan & Mutamiri, 2018). This matter became a priority for Bishop Kunonga as he embarked on a programme to appoint black clergy in parishes previously dominated by white clergy (Musodza, 2020:85). He also stopped granting wholesale support for the issuance of visas for expatriate

clergy. Soon after his appointment, Bishop Kunonga appointed Fr. Godfrey Taonezvi as dean. The latter was his ‘campaign manager’ and nominator for the post of bishop. Fr. Taonezvi was also the leader of the ‘Young Turks’ in the Diocese of Harare. Clearly, such an appointment was meant to assure the younger clergy members of his commitment to empowering a sector that had felt neglected by previous bishops. Moreover, by appointing the Association’s leader and other members to high positions in the church, Bishop Kunonga was securing a support base that he needed for his vision to decolonise, transform, and indigenise the diocese.

However, before long, the support of young black priests he initially enjoyed started to diminish. The young members of the clergy, such as Fr. James Mukunga, Fr. Archford Musodza, among others, started to distance themselves from him because of his over-zealousness and penchant to preach hate against white members of the church and white citizens, in general (RelZim.org). Alienation by his former allies, the young black clergy, pushed Bishop Kunonga to recruit former priests who had been expelled from the Catholic Church or had left the church under unclear circumstances.<sup>4</sup> The latter group became an important pillar of support regarding his position on decolonisation and his homophobic stance.<sup>5</sup>

Faced with a weakening support base from young black clergy, Bishop Kunonga embarked on a programme to ordain loyalists. For instance, on 16 December 2005, Bishop Kunonga ordained four assistant priests who had not received formal training from Gaul House [College], the only training centre for the Anglican priesthood. One of the four, Morris Gwedegwe, was soon to become Vicar General of the Diocese. According to Gunda (2008), recruiting priests from the Roman Catholic Church and the ordination of loyalists was self-serving. It was “a deliberate strategy to counter the influence of those who, in passing through the Gaul House preparation for ministry, have acquired a measure of political objectivity and spiritual maturity” (The Zimbabwean, 2006/01). This was not only unprocedural but was a ploy meant to create a team of obsequious sycophants to sing songs in support of his policies<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.2 Political partisanship

Political partisanship seems to have informed Bishop Kunonga’s decisions and strategy throughout his tenure. This was clear from his consecration sermon. According to Musodza (2020:32), in his bishop’s charge, Bishop Kunonga was unapologetic about his support for ZANU-PF. An Anglican Church priest claims that “As Bishop Kunonga scaled up his support for ZANU-PF...he even declared that every Anglican member should join ZANU-PF. [That was notwithstanding the fact that] everyone knew that ZANU-PF had

<sup>4</sup> Fr. Berry Muchemwa, Fr. Barnabas Machingauta, Fr. Thomas Mhuriro, among others.

<sup>5</sup> Mhuriro Thomas, Interview, Pretoria, 20 April 2016.

<sup>6</sup> The four included Morris Gwedegwe and Caxton Mabhoi, among others.

perpetrated numerous atrocities following the disputed 2002 elections. . . .” (Musodza, 2020:112-2). Furthermore, an emeritus bishop of the Anglican Church claims, “I understand that he had promised to bring the whole church into one party, ZANU-PF. Any thinking person would know that you cannot do that” (Musodza, 2020:130). The same emeritus bishop observes, “The way he sided with a political party . . . created problems not only for him but the Anglican Church” (Musodza, 2020:111). A report from *The Zimbabwean* (13/11/2006) states that Kunonga “did not only sing praises to President Robert Mugabe but made life extremely uncomfortable for those within the church who would dare to raise a voice of dissent. . . . At least twelve priests have left the Harare diocese as a direct result of the bishop’s machinations”.

Responding to a journalist on the question of whether he was a ZANU-PF puppet or not, Kunonga retorted, “I am not a puppet of ZANU-PF and if I am a puppet (sic), then I am a proud and educated puppet” (RelZim.org). Such an ambivalent response did little but leave the questioner with the perception that Bishop Kunonga was indeed a ZANU-PF supporter, if not a member. It boggles the mind, however, why education was part of the equation. Musodza’s conclusion on this point is quite logical when he observes, “It would appear he came into the job with a preconceived political mindset of intimidation and using politics in his leadership” (Musodza, 2020:72). Manyukwe (2012) contends, “Many a times (sic) when he opened his mouth, it was for purposes of instilling public derision- at best at his Anglican rivals and at worst at Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) leaders”. It also boggles the mind why he allowed his personal beliefs to sway his ministry as a bishop.

Fr. Barnabas Machingauta (der Antore, 2011), an apologist of Bishop Kunonga’s policies and former Vicar General of the Harare Diocese, points to external western influences as the reason behind Bishop Kunonga’s dismal failure. He argues that:

“Our brothers and sisters. . . are after donations and handouts from England. They do not believe that Africans can effectively and efficiently lead themselves in religious, political, social, and economic spheres. . . . It is a pity that most of our local people shun the truth and allow themselves to be used by people with ulterior motives. The ‘Kunonga must go’ campaign started soon after the enthronement speech delivered in the Cathedral on the 5th May 2002 because of the pan-African views expressed in his charge. The British Crown viewed Dr Kunonga’s support of the land reform, his refusal to embrace and propagate the regime change agenda as a direct challenge to his ‘employer’. They started the campaign for his demise”.

It is on record that Bishop Kunonga had detractors and critics from the day he was elected bishop. For instance, Fr. Timothy Neil criticised the election process openly. Many, including church Counsellors, choir members, clergymen, ordinary parishion-

ers, among others, disagreed with his policies. However, to claim that they were all cast under the spell of a nefarious western ideology and influence would insinuate that Africans are by nature intellectually and spiritually inferior to westerners to whom they are beholden. Such a view is an insult to the intelligence, spiritual sensibility, and probity of African people. The fact of the matter is that Bishop Kunonga was his own worst enemy.

#### **4.3 Siding with the ruling party on its land policy**

Bishop Kunonga's political posturing must also be understood within the context of the birth of the MDC in 1999, which had demonstrated its mettle as an opposition party in the parliamentary elections held in June 2000, the presidential elections of 2002, and the parliamentary elections in 2005. The MDC played an influential role in the rejection of the ZANU-PF-driven Constitutional referendum in February 2000. One of the key provisions in the proposed new Constitution was land expropriation by the State without compensation. The MDC opposed the expropriation of land without compensation because, in their view, such action amounted to the violation of property rights and would drive away foreign direct investment (FDI) needed for the industrial growth of the country. As a supporter of the ZANU-PF government's land reform programme, Bishop Kunonga did not only deride the leadership of the MDC (Manyukwe, 2012), but went on to accept "St Marmock's farm, a once thriving commercial enterprise in Nyabira as a token of personal thanks from Robert Mugabe for his uncritical and unwavering support for ZANU-PF" (The Zimbabwean, 13/11/2006). St Marmock's farm belonged to a fellow Anglican white man, Marcus Hale (Musodza, 2020:81). According to Gunda (2008), Bishop Kunonga's relationship with ZANU-PF was based on a "warped land theology". Thus, he became one of the few religious leaders who "continued to give Mugabe some moral legitimacy".

Hero-worshipping former President Mugabe and openly supporting his land reform programme alienated some of the members of the diocese. According to Bishop Chad Gandiya (Musodza, 2020):

"A good church leader, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God and influenced by the spirit of social justice would have embraced an approach which would have helped to find a fair resolution to the land question in Zimbabwe. Sadly, Bishop Kunonga jumped into the chaotic arena of land grabs and benefited from it....".

#### **4.4 Homosexuality and the church**

On 4 August 2007, Bishop Kunonga called a synod at the Cathedral of St Mary and All Saints in preparation for the pending Provincial Synod scheduled to be held on 7 September 2007 in Malawi. Sexuality was one of the issues deliberated, among

other issues. A vote was proposed on the matter, and delegates agreed to draft a resolution to the effect that:

“This synod has unanimously agreed to make a Diocesan Act that from the 4th August 2007, the Diocese of Harare dissociates itself and servers’ relationship with any individual, group of people, organization, institution, Diocese, Province or otherwise, which indulges in, sympathises or compromises with homosexuality” (Mutamiri, 2017:124).

Although the Provincial Synod did not have homosexuality on the agenda, Bishop Kunonga based his withdrawal from the province on the latter supporting homosexuality. In his view, the resolution taken at 4 August synod empowered him to withdraw from the province.

On 21 September, Bishop Kunonga formally withdrew from the CPCA, claiming that the:

“Exclusion [was] minuted in the records of the Provincial Synod of September the 8th. . .” (Mutamiri, 2017:140). According to Kunonga, the decision to withdraw from the CPCA was “consistent . . .with our 61st Session Diocesan Synod on the 4th of August 2007, . . .[where] we were mandated by our Synod to dissociate and sever ties with any individual, group of people, organization, institution, diocese, province which sympathises or compromises with homosexuality. . .” (Mutamiri, 2017:142).

Based on the notice submitted to the CPCA, Bishop Kunonga withdrew because the latter sympathised or compromised with homosexuality.

The insinuation that the CPCA condoned and abetted homosexuality was a baneful pretext and excuse for Bishop Kunonga’s poor management of the Diocese of Harare. The real reason lay in his ‘vaulting ambition’ (Shakespeare, 1623). Bishop Kunonga saw himself as the future Archbishop of the Church of the Province of Zimbabwe (CPZ) (Mutamiri, 2017:117). Again, although there was no agenda item at the September 2007 Provincial Synod on dissolving the province, it is curious that Bishop Elson Jakazi (Manicaland) motioned to dissolve the province. Rev. Rinashe (Harare) seconded the motion. This was a calculated move, orchestrated by Bishop Kunonga, to create an environment for the formation of new provincial structures. In support of Rev. Jakazi and Rev. Henry Rinashe, Bishop Kunonga quipped, “There are five dioceses in Zimbabwe that can constitute according to the Constitution of the Province of Central Africa” (Mutamiri, 2017:138).

The withdrawal from the CPCA was based on a serious error of judgement and a fatal underestimation of his fellow Zimbabwean Anglican bishops, clergy, and the laity. The die was cast. On 16 October 2007, Bishop Kunonga received a letter from

Bishop Albert Chama, Dean of the CPSA, accepting and acknowledging that “you and some of your supporters have by notice of your letter severed relationship with the [Church of] Province of Central Africa” (Mutamiri, 2017:159). Following this acceptance, the Dean of the Province, therefore, declared the Diocese of Harare vacant. The announcement was followed by “disturbing reports of . . . harassment and violence from local police” (Davis, 2008) against Anglicans who wanted to worship under the banner of the CPSA. This forced the hand of the CPSA to excommunicate Bishop Kunonga “and all those who support him . . .” (Davis, 2008) on 12 May 2008.

## **5. Missio-Ecclesiological issues embedded in the Church of the Province of Central Africa**

Gunda (2008) contends that the reign of Kunonga is “an indictment on the current system of electing bishops in the Anglican Church”. This is not necessarily the case. Such a view implies one standard electoral system across the global Anglican Communion. The reality is that each province is self-governing and decides its electoral system. Instead, one should say that the electoral system in the CPSA is deeply flawed. However, more focus should be directed at the Diocese of Harare.

In my view, deeper structural issues are embedded in the colonial history of the Diocese of Harare, formerly the Diocese of Mashonaland. Before 1980 when Zimbabwe attained independence, the appointment of the bishop of Mashonaland, which in 1981 became bishop of Harare, was made by the Queen of England through the Archbishop of Canterbury. Bishop Paul Burrough was the last colonial bishop of the diocese. At his retirement in 1981, Bishop Paul Burrough appointed Bishop Peter Ralph Hatendi, his Suffragan bishop. At that stage, there was no contest for the seat. However, when Bishop Hatendi retired, the election of his successor was heavily contested, and no candidate managed to muster the 66% required for appointment. The Archbishop of the CPSA appointed Bishop Jonathan Siyachitema from the Diocese of Lundi (later Central Zimbabwe) instead. When the latter retired, the successor’s election was equally fraught; similarly, no candidate among the three short-listed candidates managed to get the 66% for required appointment. Therefore, the archbishop called for a fourth candidate, who happened to be Rev. Dr. Kunonga.

On the question of why there has been perennial controversy over succession, Musiyambiri (2016) attributes “several reasons, including its wealth, developed infrastructure as well as its centrality and location with its offices in the capital city of the country”. Due to these factors, among others, Musodza (2020:17) observes that the election of bishops has been marred by what he calls “filthy contestation . . . including vote-buying as well as manipulation of the outcomes of the election . . .”.

In the 2001 election, particularly, Musodza refers to “active canvassing for support” by Rev. Dr. Kunonga. He goes on to describe the practice as “...an expression of an insatiable hunger for power. The fact that he was actively canvassing for support, for a church leadership position when Christians believe that leaders are “called” into their positions, is a cause for concern”. Gunda (2008) argues that “the reign of Kunonga can be seen as an indictment on the current system of electing bishops in the Anglican Church”.

Regarding the election of Kunonga, there are two contesting ideological approaches at work. The conservative and puritanical approach eschews canvassing or campaigning as opposed to a liberal approach that supports canvassing and campaigning. All four authors who have written about Kunonga’s election identify with the former approach. Their historiographic approach is, at best, too subjective and, at worst, sanctimonious. In their writings, they attempt to hide their conservative neo-colonial ideological leanings under the guise of uncompromising adherence to a hegemonic church whose survival is underpinned by ossified and traditional rules and canons. Rules and canons are weaponised to whip upstarts or radicals such as Kunonga in line.

## 6. Conclusion

Bishop Kunonga chastised Bishop Emeritus Peter Ralph Hatendi for providing spiritual care to victims of his poor leadership. In response, Bishop Emeritus Peter Hatendi spelt out what the church is all about. He wrote:

“Believers go to church every Sunday to pray, worship, learn about God and glorify Him together with heavenly hosts, saints, and martyrs. I am a Christian whether you like it or not. I prayed with and for the group you had just expelled from your church, and I invoked God’s blessings upon them” (Mutamiri, 2017:96).

Bishop Emeritus Hatendi’s comment was an indictment of Bishop Kunonga’s loss of spiritual campus. By the mere fact that Bishop Kunonga had failed to preach the kingdom of God and the gospel values of peace, love, forgiveness, repentance, and reconciliation, he had lost credibility as a bishop. The loss of respect of followers, in the Diocese of Harare, and of his peers in other dioceses in and out of Zimbabwe was unavoidable. Musodza (2020) aptly observes, “One of the questions many people have and continue to ask is, ‘How can such experiences happen in a Church of God at the behest of a prelate called to be a shepherd of God’s flock?’”

The church is defined by the *missio Dei* and the values of the kingdom of God, not by political interest and rent-seeking earthly power that was at the centre of Bishop Kunonga’s ‘project’. After dividing the church because of his tendency to spew hate against whites and his political opponents, promoting division and factionalism, pitting the young members of the clergy against their elders, among other misdeeds, Bishop

Kunonga had lost the battle for the soul of the Diocese of Harare. Moreover, he lost the support of his erstwhile allies, Bishop Elson Jakazi (Diocese of Manicaland) and Bishop Godfrey Taonezevi (Diocese of Masvingo), when he needed them most. They saw through his uppity leadership style and congenial penchant for power and therefore chose to remain members of the CPCA. Most of all, he had failed to build a team of disciples to make Christ's disciples as the chief priest in the Diocese of Harare. Considering that he failed to care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical health of the church members he headed, there is no way he could have attained his vision to decolonise the Anglican Diocese of Harare. Instead, he brought untold insecurity to members of the diocese. Kunonga became a threat to the security of the diocese. His failure to spread risk among the stakeholders of the Province of Central Africa undermined all forms of opportunity for spiritual transformation.

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