

Title for the Thesis: The Mission of Reconciliation: The Church's Message in Zimbabwe 2000-2009

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Abstract

This study focuses on statements from the Christian church leaders in Zimbabwe during the political conflict of 2000-2009. The aim of the study is to answer this question: What message of reconciliation came from Christian church leaders to the people of Zimbabwe during the 2000-2009 period?

To answer this question, I analysed several documents (pastoral statements, pastoral letters, communiqués, public statements, and press statements), from ecumenical movements such as Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination, and Churches in Manicaland.

Perspectives from scholars like Robert J. Schreiter, a North American missiology scholar and two South African scholars, Charles Villa-Vicencio and John W. De Gruchy, who were both close to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in different roles, were used as analytical tools in a content analysis of the documents.

Chapter one is the introduction and provides a background of the study, a statement of the problem to be discussed, and objectives for the study. Chapter two presents a literature review. This chapter explains how the present study is different from other studies on reconciliation in Zimbabwe.

Chapter three mainly presents the methodology used in the study which is a hermeneutical cycle involving a content analysis of the documents.

Chapter four presents the theories and analytical tools used in the analysis of the documents. This chapter focuses on how other scholars have written about reconciliation as this study is looking at reconciliation. Therefore, concepts that build towards a reconciliation process are presented and discussed. According to the selected scholars, these four concepts are truth telling, forgiveness, justice, and healing.

Chapter five presents the historical setting of the study. The background of the political conflict in Zimbabwe is discussed. Also, the historical role of the church leaders in Zimbabwean politics is examined. In chapter six I discuss the statements from the church leaders. The four concepts building toward reconciliation are discussed as to how they contribute to reconciliation and how they are interrelated. With the literature discussed in chapter four showing that these four aspects are what makes reconciliation. Therefore, in order to explore the message of reconciliation one need to look for these four concepts.

In chapter seven I do a further analysis and discuss the challenges faced by the churches as they attempt to practice their call to the ministry and mission of reconciliation in a volatile political environment. The other concepts, themes, and principles unveiled through the analysis of the church leaders' statements are discussed and I establish how they feed into the reconciliation process. The church leaders' presentation on the role of the church in politics as part of the mission of the church is discussed. Specific attention to the land question as part of reconciliation is discussed and how the work of reconciliation is both a goal and a process.

In chapter eight I revisit the research question and summarize the findings from the analysis and present my conclusions. I also present some recommendations that would help the reconciliation process and the churches' mission of reconciliation, and end by suggesting probable future research areas.