

MF, Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society

Summary of the thesis for PhD

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

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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? And the sub-questions: How did the church leaders position reconciliation both theologically and politically, and how did these two interact and intertwine? How the church pronouncements on reconciliation function as its message, and as a message, what are its critical omissions or oversights?

To answer the questions, 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 and discourse 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 along with the examination of the historical role of the church leaders in Zimbabwean politics. In chapter six I present 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. In the process to answer the question: What message of reconciliation did Christian church leaders give to the people of Zimbabwe during the political conflict between 2000-2009? The literature discussed in chapter four indicates that these four aspects are what makes for reconciliation. Therefore, in order to explore the message of reconciliation one need to look for these four concepts.

In chapter seven I 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 theological grounding is unveiled through discussing the church leaders' statements 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 in the process answering the sub-question: How did the church leaders position reconciliation both theologically and politically, and how did these two interact and intertwine? The church's missiological purpose is discussed and how the work of reconciliation is both a goal and a process.

In chapter eight I carry out a discourse analysis as a critical tool to expose what was missed from the statements of the church leaders. I examine how the church leaders framed the conflict and examine how memory is a critical concept of reconciliation. In this process I then answered the second sub-question: How the church pronouncements on reconciliation function as its message, and as a message, what were its critical omissions or oversights?

In chapter nine I revisit the research question, 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.