

# THE BIBLE, THE BULLET AND THE BALLOT. ZIMBABWE: THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN PROTEST IN SOCIO- POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION, CA.1900 – CA.2000

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Apart from telling its own story, this book is a long-awaited partial critique of David Lan's *Guns and rain: Guerrillas and spirit mediums in Zimbabwe* (1985). Lan's argument set great store by the critical role of spirit media in the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe, in contrast to that of other forces. Moyo re-evaluates that premise on the basis of an investigation which suggests that the contribution of spirit media was at least in part restricted in its geographical influence to areas where traditional religion was more influential than Christianity.

After an introductory chapter, the book follows a chronological order beginning with a chapter on the early colonial period, although it actually goes back to an interesting excursus on the prehistoric era. This includes a discussion on the origins and role of Great Zimbabwe and the beginnings of Shona and Ndebele penetration of the land with their differing forms of socio-political organisation, which would play a role in later developments. This chapter guides us through the colonial invasion by the British South Africa Company, which cannot be recounted without reference to Cecil John Rhodes's nefarious intrusion into the relatively virgin land. It then tracks the path to 'responsible self-government'.

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Chapter three considers the development of radical African politics in Zimbabwe from around 1960-1964. The role of significant Christians like Rev. Fred Rea and Garfield and Judith Todd, is discussed along with that of African leaders like Ndabaningi Sithole. The quest for African political control began in earnest in the 1950s and was involved with white liberalism. However, the liberals failed to accumulate white support, even as the offer of partial political representation was proposed. Chapter four takes up the repercussions of growing nationalist frustration as the churches failed to demonstrate significant support. This now became a racial issue as church leadership remained in the hands of whites in both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, although some, like Bishop Donal Lamont, would become a sharp critic of white settler government. Bishop Abel Muzorewa, African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), believed that Christianity exercised a clear influence in nationalism. However, the threat to nationalism came from the virtual identity of government with Christianity. Some church leaders deluded themselves, but no one else, by their claim to neutrality, which is hardly a prophetic stance. As is often the case, liberal missionaries became an obstacle to direct confrontation which appeared to be the only force that would initiate a process of reconciliation, considered by white people as unscriptural. Non-violent confrontation also brought its own difficulties, not least and more than often, a violent response from those in power. This was a time when nationalism became more open to African Traditional Religions' (ATR) influences, which raised questions regarding syncretism as well as giving missionaries serious cause for reflection on their theology and their political stance. Through all this, the pervasive influence of Christianity remained, for example in leading personalities like Sithole, Muzorewa, Nkomo, and Mutambirwa. Fundamental to all of this was the inherent worth and dignity of human persons. White Christian missionaries were perhaps more easily dealt with through deportation. They had learned the hard way that accommodation with a white settler government was not a viable option.

The white settler Christian option became more vocal during the 1960s, according to chapter five, although this was not unanimous and was normally met with repressive measures. This coincided with Africans taking up leadership positions in church bodies, such as the Presbyterian, Rev. Herbert Chikomo, who became Secretary-General of the Christian Council of Rhodesia in 1964. The Land Tenure Act of 1969 had exactly the same impact as the notorious South African Land Acts in its enforcement of racial segregation.

Chapter six examines the circumstances that led Zimbabwe to independence; a process in which Christian voices would certainly be heard. The author challenges the widespread influence of traditional religion. The African National Council emerged as a political lobbying group with a religious dimension and was a unifying force among Africans with a Christian leadership. The introduction of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Programme to combat racism introduced an extremely

controversial dimension to the process. In Zimbabwe this led to ‘vibrant social action’ (p. 145).

Chapter seven outlines the process towards independence as ‘the war within the war’, leading to the internal settlement. The final chapter is devoted to the postcolonial aftermath of Zimbabwean independence, which was based on reconciliation and national unity and enhanced the development of African Christianity. The author argues that while political liberalism, African Traditional Religion and Marxism all played a role in bringing independence to Zimbabwe, ‘... at the strategic level, the evidence suggests that Christianity played a greater role’ (p.196).

The book is a good historical resource, although not all will agree with its assumptions and conclusions. It provides an interesting introduction to various areas of study which clearly requires more research.