

ZIMBABWE CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

Pastoral Letter on

NATIONAL HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

God Can Heal The Wounds Of The Afflicted

1 October 2009

1. Introduction

The Spirit of the Lord is upon our land and God is ready to heal us. Today, as we struggle with the Global Political Agreement, national economic recovery, the national constitutional process, national healing, national visioning, etc., we must acknowledge and recognize the significance of this historical moment. God has given us an opportunity to face and resolve our crises.

We, your Bishops, said in 2007 that “Our crisis is not only political and economic but first and foremost a spiritual and moral crisis”.¹ Every problem has a religious dimension. Noone’s heart can be at rest as long as people are haunted by evil memories, never acknowledged and straightened out. This crisis can only be resolved if **we, the** people of Zimbabwe, confess our sins, are forgiven, fully accept each other and once more commit **ourselves** to work together in solidarity, justice and peace.

We, Zimbabweans, have hurt each other in many different ways and over long periods of time. We are all guilty, for those who have been victims at one time have been aggressors at another and many more have done nothing in the face of atrocities perpetrated before their eyes. Today, we all need healing from these hurts and from our guilt. This healing will facilitate reconciliation within and **among ourselves** and also with our Creator. With healing and reconciliation, our nation will recover and set itself up for political, social, cultural and economic development.

2. Why we all need healing

Without seeking to minimize or divert attention from current injustices, we can turn to our history to help explain why we have conflicts today.

2.0 The pre-colonial era, the colonial era, and the post-colonial era serve as easily identifiable historical periods in which our conflicts have taken place. Each era has its own sources of conflict that can be seen as political, economic, and cultural. However, the different eras have deeply influenced each other. What makes the situation complex is the fact that conflicts that existed before colonialism were used by the colonial system’s divide and rule strategies for the purposes of maintaining power and control, only to have some of the same modes of thinking, strategies and

¹ ZCBC, God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed, *Pastoral Letter on the Current Crisis in Zimbabwe*, Holy Thursday, 5 April, 2007:6.

institutions inherited and perpetuated in the post-colonial period. This makes the challenges of healing, reconciliation, justice and peace in Zimbabwe very complex as it becomes necessary to deal with the present hurts and wounds as well as trace the wounds of the past. Historical wounds have been carried to the present through memories, oral traditions and recorded reports. Members of one group that was victim to violence in one era have sometimes turned out to be the perpetrators in another. The following are some of the major historical conflicts that need our attention for the sake of national healing.

2.1 Pre-Colonial ethnic conflicts around control of resources and demarcation of territories are deep sources of conflict in our history. One of the most significant conflicts is the one that involved the Ndebele raids on Shona groups. The Shona have passed on to their children stories about the raids which involved the confiscation of cattle, food, strong young men and beautiful women by the Ndebele. The Shona have, over the years, cultivated negative feelings towards Ndebele groups. These feelings include hatred, contempt, suspicion and the desire to retaliate. These feelings may explain continued rivalry of the groups that has been shown during the liberation struggles and in sport, cultural and political activities. We need to heal hurtful memories from this ethnic rivalry. For reconciliation to take place we will need to ask ourselves pertinent questions. For example, what are these stories? For what purposes have these stories been told over the years? How useful are these stories? Can these stories be told differently? How has the psyche of the rival groups been shaped by these historical events? What effect has the need for jobs that have seen the ethnic groups settle in all parts of the country had?

2.2 The colonial era was dominated by racial conflicts stemming from racial discrimination in all sectors. Inferiority complexes developed among the blacks and superiority complexes developed among the whites. This created resentment among the blacks who then waged liberation struggles. These struggles further triggered hatred between the racial groups. These perceptions and feelings still do affect us today. We need healing from them. But before that can be achieved, racial groups need to repent of their respective sins. How can black and white people have genuine integration and solidarity with each other?

2.3 The Post Colonial Era started with the joy of independence from colonialism. Post independence expansion in education, health care, social services and general freedoms were recorded. As we pointed out in *The Zimbabwe We Want*, “We were able to build on the solid infrastructure which the colonial regime had managed to maintain despite the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations after the Unilateral Declaration of independence in 1965”.²

² ZCBC, ZCC, EFZ, *The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe*, 2006:5

However, as a nation, we made mistakes in the euphoria of independence. We forgot to attend to the needs of those who were traumatized by the war especially the ex-combatants. We ignored those who were physically and psychologically devastated by poverty, discrimination and oppression. They all were neither counseled nor treated. Whites who lost political power were not helped to heal from the trauma of that loss. Some of them tried to recreate Rhodesia even in the middle of a new nation and a black government. We all pretended that we could start afresh in a new Zimbabwe without dealing with our past or defining collectively what future we desired for our nation. We pretended that the anger and hatred that had accumulated over many years could simply vanish with independence. This failure to deal with our past continues to haunt us. We now have, however, a second chance. We must use it.

2.3.1 Political sources of conflict include the unrelenting pursuit for power which has been demonstrated by groups and individuals in our history. Some groups and individuals have shown the desire to monopolize power and political control at the expense of other groups and individuals. Those who have been marginalized have resisted the exclusion. The resultant conflicts have formed the basis of the political conflicts that have arisen among us and the contexts within which we have done wrong against each other and sinned against God.

Our political history is characterized by the use of state institutions as partisan tools to support the ruling party. Those who have opposed the ruling party have been marginalised and sometimes criminalised. In our history, there has not been space created to allow for healthy political debates and contestation. This has caused a lot of frustration and resentment.

The formation of strong political opposition parties has become a source of strong political conflicts and violence. Women, the youth and minorities feel that they are not fully included in the development of the country. So, politically, our country is deeply divided.

2.3.2 Economic sources of conflict are to do with control of the country's resources including wealth, land, minerals, property and other national resources. Poverty of the marginalised majority, corruption, mismanagement of resources, sanctions, lack of transparency and accountability are continuing sources of conflict. In fighting for our undermined dignity and in defending our economic advantages, we have lost sight of the humanity of others.

We have been divided by disagreements on how national resources and social goods are to be owned, used and distributed. At the centre of economic conflicts has been the distribution and re-distribution of land. The post independence economic downturn that was partly caused by the experimentation with structural adjustment programmes, and the crisis of leadership that has continued to dog our country led to frustration. This frustration and impatience eventually led people to resort to using violent and non-transparent means of accessing the land. Corruption, incompetence,

mismanagement, arrogance, and economic greed led to the collapse of our economy. With high inflation, unemployment and poverty many fled to the diaspora where they continued and continue to experience economic hardships.

2.3.3 Social sources of conflict are to do with perceived cultural differences, ethnic groupings and divisions, religious differences, and divisions in race, gender, and class. The desire and attempts by some groups to culturally dominate others has led to social and cultural conflicts. In Zimbabwe, intolerance, mistrust, lack of respect for other cultural groups were deepened by divide and rule tactics of the colonial systems. These tactics have been re-invented in the post-colonial context where political parties and factions have been ethnicised or tribalised. The distinction of those who are supposed to have participated in the liberation struggles and those who are seen to have contributed nothing to the struggles has also been used as a source of socially destructive division.

Social conflicts have been complex and deep. Fundamental human rights have been violated. Violence has been institutionalized as demonstrated in various successive instances in the pre-independence war period, *Gukurahundi*, land re-distribution, *Murambatsvina*, violence during elections of which the worst was the period after the harmonized elections of 29 March 2008. Many people in Matabeleland still feel that *Gukurahundi* was meant by the Shona to eliminate the Ndebele people. They are wounded and they do not feel that they have enough solidarity from fellow Zimbabweans even as they struggle with regional development challenges. This has helped to build frustration and anger which needs to be dealt with if we are to have national healing and reconciliation. The nation needs to acknowledge and respond to the deep wounds of *Gukurahundi*.

The violence that took place after the harmonised elections of 29 March 2008 has left deep scars on the Zimbabwean people. In its press statement of 30 April 2008, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) reported on “country-wide reports of systematic violence in the form of assaults, murders, abductions, intimidation and wanton destruction of property against innocent civilians whose alleged crime is to have voted ‘wrongly’ ”.³

Post colonial social conflicts have been caused by ways of thinking, emotional responses and social institutions we have built for ourselves as individuals and as social groups. What we believe about ourselves and our relations with others informs how we relate to each other. So far, our ways of thinking have been divisive, exclusivist and aggressive. This has been true of our party politics, racial conflicts, ethnic divisions, gender and generational schisms. We must acknowledge and recognise the various cultural animosities which have impacted on our politics, economics, Church and other gatherings and social activities. This is a serious area in need of healing and reconciliation.

³ CCJP, *Grave Concern over post 29 March 2008 political Situation in Zimbabwe*, 30 April 2008.

3. We have sinned

As Zimbabweans, we have made very serious social, political and economic mistakes over the years. It is essential to identify the areas in which we have made these mistakes in order to respond to them. The main cause of conflicts in Zimbabwe is the consistent violation of human dignity and therefore human rights. We have prevented each other from attaining human fulfillment by depriving each other of life, education, shelter, health, information, freedom of speech and association, freedom of conscience, justice and peace.

As Zimbabweans we should focus on what brings us together more than what separates us. The Good News of Christ tells us that we are one. It is important that this Good News transforms us to see this fact. If we are truly transformed, our faith will become our culture. As Pope John Paul II points out, “a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived,”⁴

We recommend that there be open and public admission that violence has been part of our life and history. The truth about this violence needs to be told. Victims need to tell their stories in a free and supportive environment. Perpetrators also need to take responsibility for their sins, but also in a humane environment. The cycle of violence, humiliation, oppression, and exploitation must stop. Anybody who has used his or her position to direct, command, plan or directly commit acts of violence should not be allowed to hold any public office that he or she can use to perpetrate further violence in future.

4. We are wounded

Since pre-colonial times, Zimbabwe, has experienced a lot of suffering. Notwithstanding, we have seen many blessings come our way. We have a country that is rich in human and resource diversity. We have benefited from many cultures and traditions both local and international. With commitment and hard work, Zimbabweans from many backgrounds have over the years developed decent social, political, economic infrastructure. Our rich cultural and religious heritage has generally responded well to the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet we have not used our blessings well. We have allowed our different backgrounds to be sources of suffering rather than happiness. The richness in our racial, ethnic, gender, age, class and educational backgrounds have been turned into sources of our suffering when they could be the reason for our joys. Over the last ten years those divisions have really plunged our country into an unprecedented abyss characterised by economic, social, and political woes and unimaginable forms of political intimidation and violence. We broke the world record of high inflation. Our economic crisis allowed most of our industries and infrastructure to breakdown to the extent that over 90% of the people are now unemployed, diseases such as HIV and

⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* #78, 2005

AIDS, cholera and malaria have spread at an alarming rate. Poverty has deepened. Schools and universities have stopped functioning properly, if they do function at all. Political conflicts have broken individuals, families and communities. In April 2007, we described the situation as “extremely volatile”.⁵ In 2008, that description became a sadly gross understatement. Today our nation is deeply traumatised. As a nation, we are wounded physically, emotionally, and spiritually. “There are Christians on all sides of the conflict,”⁶ we noted in 2007. The Church itself has not been spared of conflicts, intimidation and violence.

There is now general and open admission that our situation is a real crisis which cannot be left unattended. We are grateful that through negotiations facilitated by SADC, the major political parties in the country reached a Global Political Agreement (GPA) in September 2008 although the agreement itself has some limitations. It was reached through a process that was not all inclusive. It is basically a political agreement and yet our crises are more than political. However, we regard the Agreement as a moment of grace that can and should be turned into “a new beginning”⁷.

In this agreement between ZANU PF and the two formations of the MDC, the principals to the agreement, admit to the reality of the “divisions, conflicts and intolerance that have characterised Zimbabwean society”.⁸ The facts about our crises speak for themselves despite attempts to minimise the gravity of the situation. Reading through the “Preamble” of the Agreement, it is clear that the principals admit to the seriousness of the situation. When they say that they are “determined to build a society free of violence, fear, intimidation, patronage, and corruption” they acknowledge how these ills have debilitated Zimbabwe and its people. This point is confirmed in Article 18 entitled, “Security of persons and prevention of violence”. More explicit acceptance of what has happened in the country is found in Article 7, with the title, “Promotion of equality, national healing, cohesion and unity”. The parties to the agreement agree that the unity government:

- c) Shall consider setting up of a mechanism to advise on what measures might be necessary and practicable to achieve national healing, cohesion and unity for victims of pre and post independence violence.

The agreement took cognizance of the fact that there were periods in Zimbabwe’s history that were fraught with conflict and during which acts of political violence were committed, and also the fact that unless the hurt, pain and sense of loss that were occasioned by these conflicts were effectively addressed, Zimbabweans would never

⁵ ZCBC, God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed, *Pastoral Letter on the Current Crisis in Zimbabwe*, Holy Thursday, 5 April, 2007:8

⁶ Ibid., 2007:3

⁷ Ibid., 2007:3

⁸ *A People’s Guide to the Agreement*, Produced by the Bookteam, Africa Community and Development Trust, 2009:10.

experience genuine peace, unity and national cohesion. It is also clear from Section c) of Article 18 that the principals need help to establish mechanisms for national healing. In this area, the Church is prepared to offer the mechanism, not just to advise; to play a significant role not only in healing and cohesion but also in the much needed reconciliation. But real genuine healing and reconciliation can only take place when the environment is open, free and democratic. When such an environment does not exist, as is currently the case, the church commits herself to work towards its establishment.

5. Role of the Church

We, as leaders of the Church, are committed to help this country achieve normalcy. As the theme of the Second African Synod encourages us, we commit the Church to be in the service of reconciliation, healing, justice and peace. The Church aspires for the greater justice of the Kingdom, which goes beyond law; it is a virtue. It does not deny human justice, but integrates it and transcends it. In this way, justice becomes a path leading to forgiveness and true reconciliation, and thereby restoring communion. We urge Government to show political willingness by creating a conducive environment for national healing, reconciliation and integration.

The Church has already been contributing to the healing of those who have been wounded and whose lives have been destroyed. We invite the support of all the Christians and people of good will, the government, civil society, NGOs, all our Church organs, Parishes in all their sections and funding partners to support this effort to heal those who have been wounded over the years of our history. We believe that restorative justice will help to heal those whose rights were undermined and with the help of the Lord, they will achieve reconciliation and peace. Our Lord Jesus provides the best example of one who pays the ultimate price on the cross for the sake of our reconciliation with God. "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19-20). "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).

This is not by any means an easy or short term task. We accepted without discrimination and looked after those whose hands were chopped off, those whose homes were burnt and those wounded in crossfire. We saw victims of inhuman torture in our hospitals. Through our faithful, we were made to be the good Samaritan, prepared to heal, often at own expense (Luke 10:25-37). This work we have begun, we desire to complete it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We appeal to those among us who can afford to contribute towards the expenses of addressing the injustices of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras to join us in this great task.

We appeal to the perpetrators of these atrocities, accomplices, and instigators of violence to acknowledge the evil deeds and in conscience to own up and make restitution as Zacchaeus did (Luke 19,8). You need to be justified before God to find peace.

Finally, we appeal to the victims of any of the evil acts in our country, the offended, to forgive. It is not easy. Do not expect total compensation but what the community can afford in the circumstances we find ourselves. Let the following words from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans give you an attitude that fosters healing, peace and reconciliation, even though what is provided may fall short of meeting the requirements for full retributive justice:

“Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12,17-19)

Forgiveness does not mean that you submit to injustice or let people walk all over you or that you do not stand up for your rights. Nor does it mean that forgiveness should be all one sided. The person who causes the hurt should help bring forgiveness into being by saying, “I was wrong, I am sorry, I should not have done that, forgive me”. It is much easier to reduce a grudge if two people resolve to address it together. But even if the other party will not take any blame, or meet halfway, the Christian message is: You do not have to make the same mistake again – but let your bitterness go. Jesus asked for forgiveness for his crucifiers even when they had nailed him to the cross and were not repentant. Even in the heat of their hate he was forgiving them. “Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34).

6. Recommendation

Reconciliation is a very demanding responsibility which calls for great commitment, dedication and sacrifice. We must support processes which are already happening in various communities. In May 2009 the Churches and Civil Society came up with a framework for national healing and reconciliation, which proposes a comprehensive process for intervention by Government, the Church, Civil Society and all levels of our society. The framework could serve as a starting point for healing our nation.

7. Repenting to Bring Healing

For national reconciliation and healing to take place effectively, it is necessary that the entire nation participates in a comprehensive, all-inclusive, holistic and clearly defined national process underpinned by strong political will and desire to reconcile and heal the nation. We envision National Healing and Reconciliation as a home grown inclusive process that will lay the foundations for a peaceful and cohesive Zimbabwean society; where the security of individuals and communities is

guaranteed; where the dignity of the individual is respected; where broken relationships are healed; where trust is restored; and where diversity is celebrated.

In 2007, we, your Sherpherds, pointed out that, “Our Country is in deep crisis. ... Yet, it can also be turned into a moment of grace and of a new beginning, if those responsible for causing the crisis repent, heed the cry of the people and foster a change of heart and mind ...”⁹ We need this moment of grace and the new beginning now more than ever before. We need more and more people both within and outside Zimbabwe to be humble enough to admit their responsibility by commission or omission for the evils that have happened in this country. We all need to repent for the suffering of the black people who were forced from their homes, enslaved, exploited and oppressed during colonialism; the many white people who became victims of circumstances; the migrant communities who have suffered humiliation and exploitation; the victims of Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina who have suffered persecution and violence; women, youth and children who struggle for recognition and violence-free lives; and for many more wounds plaguing our nation. We are wounded but we can also be healers if we make a deliberate effort to follow the example of the Wounded Healer as he hung upon the Cross. By His wounds let us be healed.

Indeed, God can and will heal the wounds of the afflicted.

- +Robert C. Ndlovu, Archbishop of Harare (ZCBC President)**
- +Alex Thomas, Archbishop of Bulawayo**
- +Alexio Churu Muchabaiwa, Bishop of Mutare (ZCBC Secretary/Treasurer)**
- +Michael D. Bhasera, Bishop of Masvingo**
- +Angel Floro, Bishop of Gokwe (ZCBC Vice President)**
- +Martin Munyanyi, Bishop of Gweru**
- +Dieter B. Scholz SJ, Bishop of Chinhoyi**
- +Albert Serrano, Bishop of Hwange**
- +Patrick M. Mutume, Auxiliary Bishop of Mutare**

⁹ ZCBC, 5 April 2007:3

