‘Crossing Over’ from an Ideal to a Real Church: Journeying from Gullibility to Responsibility

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Abstract

The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ) lived in an environment of idealism, and at the onset of the third millennium, regained its consciousness towards reality. Since the 1960s and 1970s, when great theologians like Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti wrote on indigenizing theology, that in 70 years, the COCZ has failed to move with the times. This study discusses the awakening of the COCZ from its religious gullibility to a common heritage through conference centre construction and constitution making (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). The study was done through interviews, observations and literature reviews. More ideas came from conference topics and reactions by church members during discussion periods. The study examines the gullibility of the COCZ from a religious and ideological perspective, and suggests how the church can move with the times to become a modern institution. The COCZ has been run like family business where individual missionaries have appointed their own successors without the use of church laws, and such successors have humiliated every member who questioned how things should be done in the church. In the third millennium thus, the COCZ has built structures to localise the church, hence the awakening of the church to a common heritage.

Keywords: Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement, Autonomy, Gullibility, Heteronomy, Glocalization

Introduction

The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ) failed to move with other denominations onto the bandwagon of transformation during and after the colonial

struggle (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019:3). COCZ members suffered from ideological identity and other forms of gullibility, as they lived under the proverbial singing of a local song, yet forever living as a foreigner in the religious landscape of the restoration family of churches (Psalms 137:4). Faithfulness to Jesus Christ has been confused with faithfulness to extending and perpetuating American cultural forms in which they received the gospel (Hunter III 1996:65). Pastor Enock Jirrie (2018) argues that the COCZ did not receive the best of missionaries, hence too much ‘unprofessionalism, arrogance and lay incompetence’ (Magwidi 2018). While most denominations changed during the liberation struggle, ‘the COCZ maintained idealistic forms of the RM principles’ (Makadho 2018). Thus in 2011, someone stated that ‘the COCZ has uncoordinated visions, purposes and directions, pitting us as the church to be at the “crossroads”’ (Makarudze 2011). The COCZ has been viewed as a giant awakening from its ‘grasshopper mentality’ (Mate 2018). The move towards glocalization was meant to sustain its articulation of the faith in its Church business. The transformation of the COCZ attempted to restructure the COCZ faith content and faith structure (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019:5). The African experience in the transforming institution did not have to undergo conflict with Western ideologies of mission and identity (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). All fellowship groups (the Men’s, Women’s, Youths’ and Pastors’) sententiously remarked that the COCZ was in the process of localizing the faith traditions along ideological and administrative structures (Mabani 2018). The transformation of the COCZ marked a serious shift from ‘autonomous’ to ‘heteronymous’ thinking. The COCZ transformation attempted to make Jesus Christ a real object of faith in the denomination rather an ideal that no-one ever dreamt of achieving (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). Idealism led members to consume wholesomely a wave of teaching brought by missionaries as orthodox; hence gullibility as members never questioned the actions of missionaries or their proxies. This leads us to investigate the question: ‘To what extent can heteronomy address the challenges of gullibility advanced by autonomy in the COCZ?’

Background to the Journey

The COCZ occupies an interestingly precarious position in the country of Zimbabwe, where the formative traditions of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement (SCRM) have prevented the church from bearing a distinctively

Zimbabwean stamp, which in essence the church ‘must preserve full allegiance to the Eternal Cosmic, unchanging Christ, who is her only Lord’ (Idowu 1965: 7) by preserving and dedicating herself ‘to the glory of God anything that is of value in the [Zimbabwean] culture and institutions’ (Idowu 1965: 1). The COCZ of the third millennium must benefit from the general and specific historical developments of the Christianity of the post-development era. In the COCZ, ‘the RM is a central ideology that has even replaced the Lordship of Christ in the way the maxims are revered’ (Magwidi 2018). Rather, the RM was purposed at ‘communicating the ideals of a true Christian institution, in a descriptive rather than in a prescriptive manner’ (Magwidi 2018). This article argues about the liberation of the COCZ reader of the Bible to reflect freely on the ideals of the RM without ‘placing ourselves in a questionable position, if in defence of the truth we run away from the truth’ (Dickson & Ellingworth 1969: 15). That is why Maluleke (2000: 2) states, ‘For this generation of theologians nothing was more important than the quest for a coherent African religious identity which would account for the African past and present’, also called the fight against subjectivism (Beiser 2002).

Further, the transformation of the COCZ was concerned about mission and identity (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020), as African leaders were seen manipulating the RM declarations such as the 10 September 1803, *Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery* (Foster & Dunnavant 2004: 696); and the 17 August 1809, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Campbell 1960: 25); what scholars and theologians in the COCZ captured as ‘African Church Elites’ (Masengwe *et al.* 2012: 185–194). The RM principles were purportedly transliterated to serve the interests of individuals. Thus, Pastor Mordecai Chikwanda (2018) argues that,

The declarations were done to, and by, people with a federal democratic mentality who believed in the importance of private ownership and individual determination of social and business entities.

H. Eugene Johnson (1975: 81) argues that,

Alexander Campbell was a brilliant pioneer; he was a child of his culture with his thinking largely circumscribed by the theologies and philosophies of his day.

These declarations incorporated a new wave of American political and philosophical thinking, and thus embraced a diverse group of persons from a variety of Christian walks. One more pastor in the COCZ argued that ‘These are solidarity speeches in line with cultural and political sentiments of their revolutions’ (Kakava 2018). The restoration fathers were raised during the industrial revolution, thus capitalism, liberalism and individualism was captured in their thinking of church governance. However, another COCZ pastor feels that ‘it was conceptually reasonable to make the movement self-sustaining, self-governing and self-propagating as surety for its life and growth’ (Magwidi 2018). Their members were coming from Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican and Catholic backgrounds; hence the ‘three-self formula’ was very relevant (Reese 2007:29). In Africa, its Christians come from a completely different conceptual system of governance that cannot operate from an exclusivist approach (Cox 2001:292), especially where autonomy in the COCZ was used without guiding principles or constitutions (Johnson 1975: 70); hence the issue of religious gullibility.

Normative Developments in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

The Church of Christ is one of the oldest denominations in Zimbabwe, with an estimated paltry membership of 18 138 members from an estimated number of 306 active congregations (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019: 9). The COCZ began in 1898 (Savage 1983: 3) with the arrival of self-supporting stone mason, John Sherriff (1864–1935) ‘for the purpose of raising up and training national evangelists’ (Zvobgo 1996: 79). ‘He left Melbourne, Australia, on 2nd February 1896, and arrived on the 28th of that same month. Later that year he went north to Bulawayo, in present day Zimbabwe’ (Lusby 1990:7). He came to Zimbabwe from South Africa after the outbreak of the Shona-Ndebele wars against the Boers in March and June 1896 (Lusby 1990: 7). From this early missionary history, New Zealand missionaries believed in equality between all races (Savage 1983: 1–2), and hence engaged in enormous developments of educational and health institutions (CBACC 1948–1965). It is these institutions, with over sixty-six schools under the Dadaya board and twenty-seven schools and seven health centres under Mashoko that have landed the COCZ in religious gullibility. Religious gullibility surfaced when ordinary members demanded ownership of Church institutions as boards of trustees and administrators. On the other hand, a crop of African Church Elites (ACE),

schooled (or bred) in the West (Masengwe *et al.* 2012), was seen as representing foreign missionary interests rather than Jesus Christ (Bediako 1992). By transforming the Church, African Christians attempted to disregard missionary revivalism, European superiority and Western progressivism in order to be committed to Jesus Christ (Magirosa 2014). Mbiti (1969: 66) argued earlier that 'Christianity is not a ready-made commodity which has to be transplanted to a local area', but rather we need a theology that is 'authentically African while at the same time being ecclesiastically universal' (Bediako 1992: 306). However, threats to Church Unity, based on the 'subject of authority, freedom and autonomy has turned out to be a highly charged political issue in the Zimbabwean Chapter of the Church' (Bhebhe 2013: 109); as if 'the way to human dignity and full-grown personality is in everything that has a European feel thereby despising their own cultures and institutions' (Idowu 1965: 5). Failure to live within the confines of its historical and cultural contexts threatened to destroy African selfhood, the very essence of mission and work in the African Church; hence dwindling numbers, a de-motivated pastorate and a double-faced membership (Chikwanda 2018). Pastors felt that ACEs treated them as juveniles who never went overseas; hence this awakening from religious gullibility in order to restore African selfhood and identity, and ultimately the Lordship of Christ (Nyoni 2018).

Further, the COCZ has in many ways provided leadership and education in the country (CBACC 1948–1965; Chimhungwe 2001). The ideology of autonomy came from Western capitalism, liberalism and private/ individual ownership (Magwidi 2018; Chikwanda 2018). Individual determination and self-interest undermines participation, voluntarism, unity and patriotism, of the common family (Masengwe *et al.* 2012: 185–194). Christian revivalism among Africans is possible as long as we 'ground the church in the culture of the people' (Mugambi 1998: 10). The COCZ, however, failed to capture the beliefs and practices of the African people and failed have self-determination and resolve many things in the country (Chikwanda 2018). Rather, 'church leaders fight for positions and power in schools and hospitals, neglecting the preaching of the word to the dying world' (Magwidi 2018). 'Autonomy is the culprit on church folly' (Makadho 2018) as the COCZ's 'roots dried after the war of independence' (Chikwanda 2018), as 'the husk [of imported Christianity] hid the kernel [of the gospel] through the autonomy adage' (Mate 2018). The COCZ needs to remember that 'The first two phases of Christianity in Africa vanished because of its lack of rootedness in the people's culture'

(Waruta 2000: 125–127). Probably, this lack led to distrust, disillusionment and discouragement towards the patrons of the post-independent COCZ; hence the COCZ has decided to ‘stop depending on foreign funding for the sake of its own mission in the country’ (Magwidi 2018).

Rejection of Gullibility for Pragmatic *Moralism* in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

Contention in the post-millennium COCZ came from ‘lack of transparency and accountability on how schools and hospitals were run to advance the preaching of the gospel, or the general work and mission of the church’ (Makarudze 2018). Institution boards claimed to have been appointed by foreign missionaries who left the country upon the expiry of their permits. One elder, also a medical doctor, was quoted saying ‘institutions were individual missionary families’ ministries, who chose appointees when they left the country’ (Bungu 2015). He continued, ‘They are running these ministries through Diaspora and general welfare funding’ (Bungu 2015). The argument contrasted with the new wave of locally funded projects, especially following the adoption of Somabhula by the COCZ in the wake of the dwindling of foreign support (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). However, foreign support did not give priority to local needs such as the construction of church buildings, effective and efficient use of resources, and engagement of modern methods of leadership management. Religious subservience led to costly management tools and failure to follow up on realistic outcomes of donor-funded projects (Chikwanda 2018).

This has thus led to unsatisfactory performance of churches and institutions, and we hope, until the autonomy adage is properly defined, the COCZ will continue to fumble in darkness (Magwidi 2018).

COCZ members have been clamouring for the redefinition of autonomy because they felt it never gave local churches the self-rule it claimed; and thus the localization of the COCZ was viewed as true autonomation of the church, where accountability and transparency empowered the church for evangelization and visibility in the world (Masengwe, *et al.* 2012). Localization bridged the gap between the Church as a ‘Whiteman’s burden’ to an African burden.

Localization is a moral obligation placed upon African recipients of the gospel for their generous spirit of sharing with the needy that is realized through the lives it ultimately transforms (Chikwanda 2018).

‘Interests of the COCZ can be fully realized when all concerned people of the common family are served’ (Bandera 2018); hence the move towards the indigenization of the Church. Thus, ‘we do not need to hear narrations of the Stone-Campbell maxims that bog us into the cultural idioms of western individualism, capitalism and privatization’ (Makadho 2018).

Further, it has been argued that ‘some people think that Africans are inadequately aware of a single ruling deity so they can worship God in their own contexts’ (Bandera 2018; Bediako 1992: 291). Transformation of the church is viewed as both a universalisation and localization of Christianity to achieve authentic followership of Jesus Christ (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). Africans have been made to consume everything foreign, hence the term ‘gullible’. Denial of foreign products, including religious products, has been viewed as a desire to move away from gullibility to authentic religiosity (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). New models of church structuring have been suggested (Sibanda 2016), with an unfortunate struggle for power between the lay and the clergy (Mafohla 2017). Mostly, those who acted as barons of the faith, especially the ACEs, interfered with the clergy, as there were no clear rules and regulations to inform strategic church partnerships and administrative processes (Sibanda 2016; Mafohla 2017). The transformation of the COCZ has thus interfered with the *quasi-joint stock* model that gave individuals direct ownership of church buildings and institutions (Makadho 2018).

Congregational autonomy in the USA has led to a successful COC in the West (Foster *et al.* 2004). Abuse of autonomy in Africa, one would believe, has led to religious failure as Africans were made to consume everything in the name of obedience to the Western forms of the gospel. Western churches have succeeded with autonomy, but African churches have been calling for a redefinition of autonomy by transforming both the faith content and the structure of the church (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). Inclusivity in life world of the members has led to localization of the church, hence increased participation, ownership, accountability and transparency, and hence increased efficiency and effectiveness in church affairs.

Localization in the COCZ is a belief that ‘we are no longer a mission field, but rather the missionary team in the mission of God’ (Magwidi 2018).

When local churches take the initiative to lead, they doctrinally become sound, stable and constant, as they ‘can support local evangelization, develop new form of the moral fibre that supports community and church growth’ (Magwidi 2018). This consequentially makes the church attractive to non-believers, and potentially viable for leadership planning. This allows a variety of church members to expand their personal and institutional resources to support high-quality evangelism and discipleship programmes that can realize the dreams, vision and mission of the RM (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019).

Glocalization: Is it Exploitation or Transformation?

The process of localizing the church can be viewed as a costly exercise because it is quite demanding (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). When achieved, localization increases effectiveness and efficiency as individuals’ potential for contribution is increased. Scepticism about the endeavour arose from the thinking that the transformed COCZ would veer away from the Stone-Campbell initiative (Masengwe *et al.* 2012; Sanneh 1995). For this reason, ‘Our training at Zimbabwe Christian College [Bible College for Church ministers], ensured that no form of localization should take place as church support was from the West. We were grilled in Western conceptions and taught that any form of transformation, especially of the church ideology and structures was ungodly’ (Nyoni 2018). Unfortunately, the dwindling foreign support led to all reasons for the domestic initiatives (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). Localisation has been meant to change church policies and to keep in tune with new developments (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). However, ministers at ZCC and those who were trained in the USA did not support a change of church policies and structures. Pastors who went to universities in the country developed a new form of thinking that authenticated and promoted the ideology of autonomy (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019).

We have frantically denied containment by the status quo and are opting to stand by unpopular questioning of the truthfulness of autonomy; for the long-term interests of the COCZ itself (Nyoni 2018).

This has led to a new model of envisioning, evangelization and discipleship that ensures church development and growth. However, questions can be asked

concerning the viability of autonomy to achieve local and global realities in which the COCZ finds itself today!

Regionalization and Centralization: Unusual Models of Localizing the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

Localization in the COCZ has been achieved by building regional blocks, conference centres and ministerial formations of various strengths. Conference centres are rehabilitation centres for transforming church structures and policies. Local projects in the COCZ are emblems with a universal expression of the local people's faith, demonstrating the invisibility, infinity, omnipresence and omnipotence of the immanent and transcendent God at one and the same time (Masengwe *et al.* 2012). This is the same God whose moral attributes of love, mercy, justice, honesty, kindness and faithfulness must be experienced by all Zimbabweans who want to seek him through a designated place of worship (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). The conference centre thus expresses that this God is for all people, and is the God of the COCZ as well (Mbiti 1970: 131–144). Hence, this localization of the church addresses the problem of gullibility in the COCZ.

The COCZ practice of autonomy in the COCZ did not counterbalance the origin of the term, where business and politics in European cities used autonomy (Weber 1978). Autonomy arose from the secular world during the industrial revolution; hence the COCZ practice of autonomy accepted individualized church settings (Johnson 1975: 81). Hence, a small number of elites tried to enfranchise the COCZ into a private-limited organisation (Masengwe *et al.* 2012). Rules, regulations and decisions thus became insidious, narrowing the interests of church institutions (Magwidi 2018). This has led the church to fail to uphold the symbolic expressions of education, health, social work, gender and religion, among others, in terms of community service and organizational performance. ACEs thus refused the generality of the COCZ to have access to the running and affairs of church schools and hospitals (Chikwanda 2018). ACEs argue against the democratization of structures and policies of the church, where new church leaders continue to argue for new operational systems (Sibanda 2016). In this way, trading using the name COCZ demands accountability, responsibility and transparency (Sibanda 2016). This can assist when church leaders face conflicts of interest, or when they struggle for power, especially between pastors and elders (Mafohla 2017),

or men and women (Jack 2017; Tembo 2017). Localisation and centralization of the COCZ have been avowed for increasing institutional memory and relevancy (Chikwanda 2018). Evangelism and community development such as *Bhaibheri neBhora* (Christian Soccer) tournaments, borehole drilling and orphanage programmes have been advanced as tools of evangelism (Chikwanda 2018). Unfortunately, without local leadership supervision, control, monitoring and evaluation, the COCZ has lived in the context of gullibility, failing to benefit the church and its membership in any significant way. It is this view of gullibility the article appraises and acknowledges the strategies to address the same. In all, the Church of Jesus Christ can benefit maximally if it has financial, material, logistical and administrative support (Sibanda 2016); hence the call for an African heteronomy model.

Heteronomy – A New Localizing Ideological Model for the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

Heteronomy is a new concept that needs explanation, and cannot be explained in these few sentences. Heteronomy is a contrasting concept to autonomy that appeals to the nature and structure of the African family, community and society. Heteronomy puts an African complexion on the identity of the Church; hence it is not an absolute concept, with ideologizing effect (Makadho 2018). It reverses and roots the COCZ in Africa against the premises of Western autonomy. Many new leaders in the COCZ have lived to prove that ‘Great ideas often receive violent opposition from mediocre minds’ (Mark Twain – 14 March 1879–18 April 1955). The experience of childbirth from gullibility to responsibility has assisted in broadening the debate on church localization. The benefits of a locally owned church include winning many new converts, which may be difficult for a foreign owned institution (Magwidi 2018). Strong communal ties are strengthened by the egalitarianism model, and can withstand the adversities of life. Gullibility is overcome as local leaders lead church institutions purposefully. This contrasts with the economic framework of thinking in autonomous churches, as heteronymous churches exercise charity and love rather than profit-making (Chikwanda 2018).

Respondents commended the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) as a real Church because it has life.

Living organizations bear children; look at the AFM and the ministries

ministries that broke away from it. We cannot celebrate the tensions and fights in its camps, but we can acknowledge the life in the denomination that leads to those tensions and conflicts. This cannot be found in dead churches like the Church of Christ (Nyakuhwa 2018).

From the AFM, people like Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of the United Family International Church (UFIC) and Apostle Tavonga Wutabwashe of Heartfelt International Ministries (HIM) are world-class personalities that were key preachers in the AFM (Machingura 2011:12-29). AFM groomed prominent speakers and preachers through its governing structures and ideological policies. Its elaborate structures back up evangelism, spiritual growth and congregational unity. However, breakaways eventually happened because the structure could not sustain the fast increasing numbers of members (Chikwanda 2018). With good structures, however, the AFM had to give in to human personalities. This only happens where structures solidify, and refuse any new changes; hence the need for renewal of the human person. AFM has been a stronghold in Zimbabwe because of its elaborate structuring. This has not been the case in the COCZ, where one pastor clearly retorted:

We, however, are aware of the horse trading, claims to entitlements, among others, which lead to the weakening of the structures in our church, resulting in that the best person is not allowed to take the reins of power (Chikwanda 2018).

This has led the COCZ to a level of religious gullibility a new crop of leaders has begun to reverse.

Further, use of autonomy as an ecclesiological model bends the Church towards the capitalist profit-making model. Heteronomy on the other hand, provides prudent and inclusive models of church leadership that are effective in an African context (Magwidi 2018). Use of autonomy, has firstly created conflict between stakeholders such as pastors and elders (Mafohla 2017). The model has affected COCZ programmes, as no proper vision, strategy or plan could be followed; hence autonomy has been regarded as a setback to the growth and transformation of the COCZ (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). The COCZ failed to relate its teachings of the Bible to everyday human life (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). This has led the COCZ to be treated like a ‘private limited company’ (Magwidi 2018), by a few individuals who disenfranchised the rest

of the COCZ family. Privatising the COCZ for short-term interests thus has led to a particular set of Christians in the COCZ. The Christians are afraid of evil spirits (Banda & Masengwe 2018), afraid of political leaders (Bhebbhe 2016) and are weak (Masengwe *et al.* 2012). ACEs thus use weak Christians and churches to achieve their economic and political goals. Thirdly, weakened Christians are vulnerable to economic changes such as the meltdown of the Zimbabwe dollar that eroded financial gains of the past. This article is not meant to blame foreign missionaries as some, for instance, the families of the Pruets, the Pembertons, the Grubbs, the Todds and the Penningtons continued to provide moral, financial and other logistical support (Magwidi 2018). Some few missionaries handpicked their lieutenants and pensioned them with mission houses, mission cars and continuous financial support, despite the changing nature of the mission field. This has led the foreign sponsored institutions to suffer heavily from dwindling foreign support, which has eventually affected Christian conversion and church growth in the COCZ. The COCZ is estimated to have fewer than 19, 000 members in the country (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019: 9). In some regions, like Mashonaland, the withdrawal of missionaries left the Church in a pathetic position, with underdeveloped structures and infrastructure. This has led to conflict between church leaders (Mafohla 2017), with a negative effect on church work and ministry.

At the end of the first decade of the third millennium, a new revival arose in the major cities of the country such as Harare, Chiredzi, Mutare, Gweru, Zvimba East and Chinhoyi. Progressive individuals were attached to such revivals, for instance Pastor Mordicai Chikwanda at Tshovani Church of Christ (2018); Mr Matthew Chishamba in Zvimba East and Rev. Dr. Nicholas Kakava in Chinhoyi (Kakava 2018). In Harare, the Church Growth Committee that was started by Pastor Enock Jirrie in the late 1990s yielded a lot of fruit (Magwidi 2018). This contrasts the idea of privately owned churches, as African communities prefer heteronomy to autonomy, and hence pool together financial, human and spiritual resources for the growth of the church, especially during the downturn of the economy. This is not to celebrate heteronomy as the same system can be abused by powerful individuals for self-interest. However, heteronomy cannot be compared to autonomy, because heteronomy applies to the African traditional system, while autonomy applies to Western capitalist and business society (Weber 1978; 2009). Autonomy has been adopted in the Church, but the concepts of profit-making for a charity organisation have proven to be disastrous (Johnson 1975: 81). In all, heteronomy, with its own

challenges, proves to be applicable to the African society, in relationship to principles of egalitarianism and equality.

Contrasting Autonomy with Heteronomy

Autonomy and heteronomy are similar, but different ideological concepts. Autonomy patronises the operations of the Church to related individuals, while heteronomy liberates the Church to the common group. Autonomy thrives on individual control and thriftiness (Weber 2009). Unfortunately, patrons can be unqualified and unprofessional individuals who terrorise institutions, especially where appointment is by precedence such as an appointment to board membership by a retiring board member (Sibanada 2016). The COCZ churches used this form of appointing successors to run mission stations (Magwidi 2021). Heteronomy, however, cannot forever condemn the institution to eternal damnation as individuals have no constitutional nor historical precedent to appoint their own lieutenants. The institutions are democratic, as approaches to leadership are open and integrative to public scrutiny and participation. Openness to members makes institutions viable, and this increases the usefulness of institutions of the church. Respondents indicated that COCZ institutions were transplanted from the West to Africa, hence the need for transformation (Bandera 2018). Respondents also cited other missionary churches such as the Methodists, Reformed, Presbyterians and Baptists, who have transformed and increased their viability, and those that did not transform and have begun to die (Magwidi 2018; Chikwanda 2018; Makadho 2018; Kakava 2018). Such denominations followed viable paths and improved on membership and church growth in the same geopolitical and socioeconomic environment. During a time of resistance, the same missionary churches suffered from breakaways, for instance the United Methodists with the breakaway of Johanne Marange and Guta Ra Jehovah (Ruzivo 2014: 19), who were heavily influenced by the Adventist and Sabbatarian movements, and the Apostolic Faith Mission's Holy Spirit possession and speaking in tongues (Ruzivo 2014: 19) are notable cases. The resoluteness of missionaries forced many Africans to begin Independent Churches as rebel movements by unhappy worshippers (Venter 1998: 412–436). The local relevance of the new movements led to the growth of AICs. The COCZ did not go beyond the attitudes of missionaries during the colonial era, hence the persistence of gullible behaviour among some of its African Christian leaders (Masengwe *et*

al. 2012). This has led the COCZ to emphasise impractical things such as denial of mass prayer and spirit exorcism as demonic; hence deny the church from transforming into a modern institution (Sanneh 1995). Autonomy made the COCZ inaccessible to ordinary Christians, demanding the use of heteronomy for authentic transformation (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). This is believed to address the issue of gullibility.

Autonomy - Heteronomy Tension

Ideologies need to be examined seriously, especially the tension between autonomy and heteronomy. To begin with, heteronomy has a choice that autonomy lacks (Berg 2001). The church could plan to change its structures without individuals being seen as stumbling blocks, victims or perpetrators (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). Autonomy, on the other hand, has been seen to be more efficient compared to heteronomy, because privatized entities can exploit opportunities using individual prowess and ingenuity (Weber 2009). Some Christians in the COCZ are reportedly taking away donations meant for the disadvantaged (Mate 2018). This has raised issues with some donor communities in the COC, especially concerning donations for children's homes and schools (Bandera 2018). The problem was caused by a lack of accountability to the entire church family. Heteronomy however, promises to hold technocrats accountable for their actions, because most activities will be controlled by the Church board/s (Sibanda 2016). Boards, rather than individuals, determine policies and procedures in heterodoxies while individuals determine them in autonomies. Boards are used by both ideologies, but autonomies use them to authenticate their processes, while heterodoxies use them to satisfy their stakeholders. Boards set up by institutions that consider autonomy as their major ideology are handpicked by individuals, while boards set up by heteronymous organizations are transparent and inclusive (Sibanda 2016). Autonomies hire personnel based on relationships, while heteronymous organizations use professionalism. Heteronomy makes it clear that it is a withdrawal from individuals to claim sole ownership of an institution, as well as any developments and benefits accrued through such operations (Sibanda 2016). Thus, the COCZ suggested using a new operating system (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). In the COCZ, one respondent stated that:

We want to critically emphasize that aspects of volitional choice by

individuals on common entities are not acceptable because of its potential to undermine the ethical principle of solidarity. For all people to access church institutions on individual volitions are counterproductive because individuals use preferable times and relationships to choose who from among members of their common family can access such entities. As people who use the Bible, autonomy is not supported by Pauline egalitarianism; hence the need for us to use inclusive models of running the church institutions (Magwidi 2018).

In overcoming gullibility, the COCZ has adopted inclusive institutions, where heteronomy seems to be the ideological model in church institutions. This contrasts with the use of individualizing models such as autonomy. Heteronomy is an important ideology for the COCZ, because the denomination is not built by an ethnically or racially homogenous community. The COCZ cannot be understood from a constructivist perspective because its geographical boundaries are not the boundaries of its socio-political and ecclesiological body (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019: 9). The COCZ community is spread across the country, and building solidarity can just be a mere rhetorical approach in a multicultural church (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). This can thus bring all stakeholders closer, as members of the Church can begin to work together and benefit from the proceeds of church institutions (Magwidi 2018). For instance, one (the late) member asked,

How can I, from Gokwe or Binga, benefit from Mashoko High School, even if I wanted to send my children to school? Am I part of that Church of Christ that built Dadaya when I am not participating in the activities and rituals of those communities? (Marumirofa 2018).

In other words, most COCZ communities are unable to access church institutions, making use of church institutions for evangelism and discipleship a fruitless endeavour. Heteronomy advances the thinking that education, health, orphanage and community projects are evangelism tools for the wider COCZ church family.

Finally, autonomy has made it difficult for the COCZ to source local funding because many entities in need of support lead to fundamental questions of *ownership*. A question of *ownership* and *responsibility* is an unconscious presupposition for overcoming gullibility, as locals participate in cost-benefit

sharing on local programmes. Ownership presupposes benefits, whereas lack of ownership due to autonomy leads to the reverse. Heteronomy increases a sense of ownership by the general membership of the Christian family (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). Dealing with a heterogeneous COCZ family demands that the Church provides the space to understand its membership by understanding the circumstances in which church members live. This can only be truly understood if all its members are part of the decision-making in the church, rather than followers of a foreign organization made to address African problems (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). Heteronomy can assist in making the COCZ projects, institutions and congregations viable, rather than the use of autonomy which undermines such viability.

How Autonomy Causes Gullibility on Public Entities in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

Autonomy is a concept that was derived from business and political entities; hence it has little justification from the Scriptures to teach it seriously without proper hermeneutics. It falsely promises the worshipper to be independent from questions of responsibility and accountability. This led COCZ members to say: ‘We have failed to disentangle the goal and purpose of autonomy in Africa for it was designed for private entities in America’ (Magwidi 2018). Autonomy thus supports private entities and individuals in preserving cash and profits for the business community. It benefits those encircled in the entity. ‘Autonomy is a concept that does not give regard to personal responsibility, accountability and transparency’ (Chikwanda 2018). It engages in social projects for corporate social responsibility as a business strategy for marketing and tax evasion. Its use in the COCZ has thus led to calls for a renewed ideological concept that enfranchises ordinary members to address gaps created by the use of autonomy in the infancy and history of the COCZ.

Furthermore, autonomy has led to the exclusive patenting of Christian institutions into family projects (Bandera 2018). Patenting excludes the generality of the Christian family from accessing a church that is run like a private limited company, because policies are designed and driven by patrons of the entity. Entities are monopolized by individuals intending to commercially gain from such entities (Magwidi 2018). The lifeline of a church run on autonomy is dependent on individuals as privatization and individualization of church properties undermines common access. One respondent stated:

Even where church institutions charge very little fees for its services, lack of transparency and accountability has robbed them of efficiency and effectiveness as little fees do not encourage institutional staff (Magwidi 2018).

This is because individuals cannot motivate the entire staff compliment that is not mission conscious for evangelism and church growth. One pastor who was involved in COCZ transformation and COCZ unity talks stated:

We are actually wary of the future because the commitment of the current leaders of our schools and hospitals may not be replicated by future leaders of those institutions. We continue to ask leaders of schools and hospitals to entrust the wider church family with their responsibility of running those institutions; so that we can groom future leaders (Bandera 2018).

One can actually understand that the leadership of mission stations in the COCZ is a committed lot, but the ideology of autonomy does not guarantee the same for the future of the Church. A younger generation of leaders has thus been demanding a conscious and sensible team of young leaders to be groomed on the vision and mission of COCZ entities (Nyoni 2018).

Leaders in our schools and hospitals need to learn to sacrifice. There are times when institutions are bankrupt, and leaders have to sacrifice. Methods can be changed but not principles. We cannot use students' money for our personal needs. The sooner the church is allowed to run schools the better it is for grooming future leaders for these institutions (Nyoni 2018).

Viable institutions are important for evangelism and community development; hence the need to prepare the church to run schools and hospitals efficiently and effectively. Autonomy unfortunately leads to duality, which paralyses church growth, but heteronomy streamlines entities for a common good. With heteronomy, 'we can change our beliefs concerning privatization, individualism, capitalism, liberalism and self-interest' (Chikwanda 2018). Autonomy thus can be seen as supporting gullibility, while heteronomy leads to responsibility. This answers our question: 'To what extent can heteronomy address the

challenges of gullibility advanced by autonomy in the COCZ?’ Appropriating heteronomy with responsibility thus can assist in addressing the problems of gullibility caused by autonomy and viability in the COCZ.

Standing on a Stamp of Indigenous Originality in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

Localizing the COCZ is a normative honour for Zimbabwean Christians in that denomination. Localisation assists the church to attain local roots, and thus an African identity, ‘a demonstration of the very presence of God on the African soil’ (Chikwanda 2018). This calls for an indigenization of both the structures and policies of the COCZ (Idowu 1965: 11). A respondent further stated:

The COCZ stamp of approval for the COCZ does not come from Kentucky, Sydney, Peru or New York, but from a purposefully constituted African church (Chikwanda 2018).

This is believed to allow Zimbabwean Christians to worship their own God as Zimbabweans. This should be compatible with the spiritual temperament of Zimbabweans serving their own glorious God in Zimbabwe (Daneel 1987: 19). This unlocks three ‘scopes’ mentioned earlier, namely that the local expression of faith becomes instrumental to the life and mission of the COCZ (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019). Localizing the COCZ is in a way universalizing and popularizing Christianity, resulting in affirming and preserving both an African presence in the Christian faith and emphasizing the centrality of the Christian faith to an African indigene (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2019).

Secondly, localizing the COCZ expresses the pre-eminence and lordship of Jesus Christ, making Jesus Christ real to Zimbabwean Christians, for all along, lack of authority, identity and dignity, which were in the hands of Western overlords who supplied doctrinal teachings and resources for the COCZ was a form of humiliation (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). Gullibility can be found where the missionary is an overlord to COCZ Christians (Savage 1983). For a long time, the COCZ has been conditioned by Western dominance, making autonomy a strong reality of Western lordship on Zimbabwean Christians. Western overlords can be viewed as having replaced the Lordship of Christ in some communities, as church leaders served ‘the hand that fed them’. Heteronomy thus addresses the question of gullibility as local Christians

begin to listen more to their Creator rather than to a mere human being.

Finally, a local COCZ is a sign of a restored African Christian identity and an expression of a true African selfhood (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2020). Heteronomy allows the COCZ to set up convenient worship spaces called conference centres, which provide the church with roots on an African ground.

Most of those involved in localizing the church experienced missionary cruelty as most of them sold everything they raised for the church at their time of departure. With this conference centre, we are going to freely express ourselves and worship our Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord, not like some imported divinity from the Western pantheon (Marumirofa 2018).

Personalizing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour in the COCZ goes a long way towards fulfilling the universalisation of the Christian faith in the Zimbabwean context. However, it needs to be acknowledged that imported Christianity was in fact a forerunner to the current developments, and a preparation of the African self-expression of the faith, where Jesus Christ came for every race on earth, the Jew, Scarthian, Roman, Greek, and Zimbabwean alike (Machingura & Nyakuhwa 2018).

In all, localizing the COCZ can be seen as a stamp of God's approval for making the COCZ a 'home to breathe an atmosphere of spiritual freedom', making the COCZ 'no longer a marionette with its strings in the hands of some foreign manipulators' (Chikwanda 2018). The COCZ thus 'has been waking up from its slumber of gullibility to a level of excellence that demands admiration and acceptance across the globe' (Kakava 2018). Listening to Judge Nare (2015), preaching at an ordination ceremony for Pastor Antony Bandera made me think that he was confirming Mbiti (1979: 66)'s view that the Christian faith is translatable into new forms of language and culture, which is an effective way of Christianizing the African population in Zimbabwe while at the same time Africanizing Christianity (Mbiti 1970: 430). Localizing the faith facilitates acceptance of Christianity by Africans being served by it the same way new births are accepted in their society. Thence, localizing the faith helped in addressing the question of gullibility in the COCZ.

Conclusion

Autonomy has been viewed as the source of gullibility in the COCZ, which

robbed indigenes of experiencing a fully transformed COCZ of the Stone-Campbell Movement (Sanneh 1995). Autonomy short-changed members as individuals wilfully profited from institutions intended for altruistic goals and civic virtues. A truly autonomous church is also a truly heteronymous church, because heteronomy helps to facilitate autonomy. Heteronomy builds leaders who can become independent, but will eventually seek for interdependence in their independence. Rather, an exclusive use of autonomy as an ideology opens the church to risks and abuse as autonomy advances issues associated with privatisation and commercialisation. Privatisation and commercialisation of church entities undermine the trust that church leaders are appointed to serve the church members. J.J. Rousseau (2010: 1754–1762) calls this a ‘social contract theory’. Gullibility is advanced in autonomous institutions, because like-minded leaders are co-opted from time to time without an idea of the social contract. Co-option is done in entities with donor mentality rather than success through innovation, creativity and self-sustenance. Some church entities driven by autonomy hide their real intentions during fundraising exercises, as their voices present a vision of a public good, but barely address the same. Others become too closed, leading to their inability to reach out and to attain their maximum potential. From an American standpoint, autonomy is a noble conception that has been obtainable due to the ideological commitments of the American community, while in Africa, where ‘kith and kin’ are more important engagements, rather than profits, heteronomy appeals to the externalization of decision making and control over public entities. In all, the COCZ, led by a heteronymous ideology, promises to be a COCZ of today and of the future and hence overcome the problems of gullibility in the denomination.

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