Biblical Interpretations in Zimbabwean Politics from 2000 to 2016

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Abstract
This article is a contribution to the ongoing discussion on the relationship between religion and politics. The article did so by focusing mainly on the interpretation of the Bible to serve Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU-PF) political ideology in Zimbabwean politics from year 2000 to 2016. The article presented the interpretations of the Bible in light of the broader context of not only Zimbabwean or African but also global political arena. It however narrowed the discussion to the interpretations of the Bible proffered by ZANU-PF leadership and its supporters. Needless to say, the Movement of democratic Change (MDC-T) opposed such ZANU-PF interpretations while the majority of scholars on Zimbabwean politics accuse only ZANU PF of having the habit to ‘abuse’ Christianity. The Bible, pastors, traditional leaders and religious gatherings. This article provided evidence that all major political parties in Zimbabwe were involved in the habit. Evidence was adduced from media; both print and electronic especially social media: WhatsApp, Facebook and Youtube. Few political rallies and prayer gatherings were attended by the researcher which also inform the conclusions of the article. The purpose of the article was neither to endorse nor to condemn the interpretations of the Bible either by ZANU-PF or the MDC-T or any other political party in Zimbabwe. It is the responsibility of the readers to judge for themselves as regards whether what was done by the political parties in Zimbabwe was right or wrong for the Zimbabwean politics and religion.

Key Words: Biblical Interpretation: Politics in Zimbabwe; ZANU-PF; MDC-T; Succession Debate and Homosexuality
1.0 Introduction

That the Bible has always been selectively read and interpreted across the globe to justify and entrench pre-conceived sectional cultural, economic and political ideologies is incontestable. Beginning from the general, the article paid special focus on the appeal to the Bible in the Zimbabwean political fraternity by the leaders, strategists and supporters of the two dominant political parties; (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and Movement for Democratic Change led by Mr Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T). While they both appealed to the Bible, their interpretations were always conflicting. A stock of biblical references by politicians across the media; print and electronic including social networks such as WhatsApp, You Tube and Facebook, political rallies and prayer gatherings, makes it possible to talk of ZANU-PF and MDC ‘theologies’. Evidently, the Bible did not influence political decisions. On the contrary, it is political ideologies of the readers that determined the interpretation and meaning of biblical texts. The article took a deliberate bias on the interpretations of the Bible aimed at advancing ZANU-PF’s radical nationalist ideology since year 2000, for it was this interpretation that was contested by the MDC-T. Controversial issues at the centre of the political debates which have seen the Bible being summoned to address include: Zimbabwe’s land reform, economic indigenisation, President Mugabe’s leadership, age and succession debate and homosexuality.

2.0 Background

Introducing Volume 7 of Bible in Africa Studies entitled The Bible and Politics in Africa, the editors noted that although the subject of political uses of the Bible was not entirely an African phenomenon, the topic seems
especially relevant in African societies since many of them due to historical reasons ascribe a paramount role to the ‘Word of God’ (Gunda and Kuegler, ed., 2012). This is typically true in Zimbabwe. Politicians approach the Bible to find stories that validate their cultural, socio-political and economic ideologies. A survey of the Biblical interpretations clearly reveals that political, cultural and socio-economic ideologies of the contesting political parties are imposed on the Bible.

Since the formation of the MDC in 1999, there has been an increased interface between religious and political spheres (cf. Chitando, 2002: 1-16; 2005: 220-239). It is important to note that the formation of the MDC coincided with the beginning of the land reform in Zimbabwe that was spearheaded by ZANU-PF. As such, ZANU-PF accused the MDC of being forerunners of the former colonial masters (former Rhodesians and Western powers) and was founded to reverse the gains of the liberation struggle - the land reform. This background is important for understanding the use of the Bible in Zimbabwean politics. Hardly a week went by without mention in the media of a politician or his or her supporters having cited the Bible. Some claim that they are anointed by God and that their political party was divinely chosen. Other politicians went as far as to claim that their political actions were sanctioned by the Bible, God and their ancestors.

For instance, soon after the formation of Zimbabwe People First in February 2016 by ZANU-PF, heavy weights who were booted out of the party for allegedly plotting to oust or kill President Robert Mugabe, the party embarked on a campaign to delegitimise their former party, ZANU-PF. Interestingly, like ZANU-PF, they employed familiar ZANU-PF tactics such as quoting the Bible to mobilise
support and legitimise their political actions. Using social media platforms such as *WhatsApp*, the party claims that its formation was initiated by God. In fact, there were insinuation that the party was commissioned by God to remove ZANU-PF from power. In one of the popular messages circulated on *WhatsApp*, the party paraphrased the bible content in Exodus 3: 7-9: Then the Lord said, “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt (Zimbabwe) and have heard their cry because of their taskmaster (Government of Zimbabwe-italics are mine). I know their suffering and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of (ZANU PF) the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now behold, the cry of the people of Israel (Zimbabwe) has come to me and I have also seen the oppression with which (Mugabe and ZANU-PF) the Egyptians oppress them. Come, I send you (People First) to Pharaoh (Mugabe) that you may bring my people, the children of Israel (Zimbabweans-italics are mine) out of Egypt (Oppression, Underdevelopment and Dictatorship).”

Ironically when the leaders of People First were still in ZANU-PF, they saw it as a party ordained by God. They read the same Exodus 3: 7-12 referring to President Mugabe as Moses and not Pharaoh. In fact, already during the war, ZANU-PF liberation fighters were successfully integrated traditional culture, academic education and politics in their interpretation of the Bible. One of the teachers at Matenje refugee camp explained that:

You may deal with the topic ‘A Bad King Rules Egypt’. You may give the children the example of Pharaoh as Smith, Egypt as Zimbabwe, the Israelites as the people of Zimbabwe who were troubled by Smith for many years, Moses
as Cde Mugabe who was selected by the vadzimu (ancestors) to lead the people of Zimbabwe out of the hands of Pharaoh. Up to the liberation of Zimbabwe which you compare to Canaan; the country of milk and honey (McLaughlin, 1988: 134)

This serves to confirm that in Zimbabwe while the other party and supporters claim one thing as the meaning of a particular biblical text, the other party and its supporters may claim the opposite. For instance, since around year 2000, Romans 13: 1-7 (among other Biblical texts) has been cited by ZANU-PF government and party officials as God’s instruction for Zimbabweans to vote and support it not the MDC (Togarasei, 2009: 130-147; Chamburuka, 2012: 191-211). The MDC-T on the other hand had serious reservations for such interpretations. Thus, when Mugabe on the basis of the same text claimed in 2008 that ‘only God who appointed me will remove me, not the MDC, not the British’, Tsvangirai and his MDC supporters scoffed at him (The Telegraph, 2008).

Surprisingly, since 2009, on the basis of the same text (Rom 13: 1-7) Tsvangirai claims to have been chosen by God for a special mission. Hence Zimbabweans had to subject themselves to his leadership. Further, Tsvangirai usually bemoaned ZANU-PF’s appeal to traditional chiefs and churches to canvas for political support, yet his MDC party did exactly that (Vengeyi, 2011a: 251-368). The different interpretations of the same text serve to confirm that the Bible (or any other religious symbol) was read and interpreted by both ZANU-PF and MDC from their respective political ideologies. Thus, a biblical text addressing a totally different context and subject was nevertheless roped in to rubber stamp an already defined political path.
The formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 between ZANU-PF and the MDCs\(^1\), following decade-long acrimonious relations often punctuated by violence has accentuated the reliance on the Bible (and religion) to ideologically attack and counter-attack each other. As a political strategy, ZANU-PF and MDC-T have consciously sought to outshine each other in courting religious groups and citing the Bible to the extent that they now appear as religious movements themselves (Vengeyi, 2011a: 251-368).

In April 2010, Minister of Information and Publicity, Webster Shamu advised ZANU-PF leadership and supporters to employ persuasive ways of appealing to the electorate such as reading the Bible at political meetings ostensibly ‘to draw lessons from it’, (The Herald, 10 April 2010). There was therefore a strong possibility of connection with strange developments that followed whereby nearly every ZANU-PF official including the most unlikely of all, the anonymous Herald Columnist going with the name, Nathaniel Manheru, refered to biblical stories and religious themes.\(^2\) It was a well thought out ZANU-PF political strategy. Characteristically, except for a few ZANU-PF (hence pan-African) intellectuals

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\(^1\) Today there are four different parties claiming the name MDC following splits due to leadership wrangles. There is MDC-T for Tsvangirai who was the president of the party since 1999; MDC-M, for Mutambara broke away from Tsvangirai in 2005 accusing him of being autocratic and dictatorial; MDC-N for Ncube also broke away from Mutambara in 2011 (but all three are part of the GNU); and lastly, MDC 99 of Job Sikhala, who also broke away from Mutambara faction. It should be noted that numerically however, only MDC-T seems to be a threat to ZANU-PF. As such, MDC in this article refers generally to the pre 2005 division and MDC-T after division.

\(^2\) Cf. Nathaniel Manheru, in, “MDC: The implosion that might come sooner”, The Herald. 27 August, 2011, he compares the Zimbabwean GNU to the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3) which story is interpreted from a *chiramu* concept of the Shona. In, “MDC: Becoming a blunt instrument of history”, The Herald, 17 February 2012, Manheru compares himself, Zimbabweans, and all Africans, who because of colonialism have been condemned to be slaves of others (Western world) to Simon of Cyrene (of North Africa) who carried the cross of Jesus.
such as Tafataona Mahoso (Vengeyi, 2012: 81-114) and the late Rev. Canaan Sodindo Banana (see Gunda, 2015), ZANU-PF officials usually refer to popular biblical stories or passages without being specific about either, the book, chapter or verse in the Bible from which the stories come from. This implies that their appropriation of the Bible was aimed at convincing the common people that ZANU-PF’s political path was biblical. This must have been a well calculated move, since the majority of the Zimbabwean people are neither interested in academic debates regarding context of the biblical text so appropriated, nor specificity of citations.

3.0 ZANU-PF and the Bible: A Historical Perspective

ZANU-PF’s biblical hermeneutical premise is influenced by its history in the liberation struggle against British colonialism (from 1960s to 1980). During this period, the reading of the Bible became an integral part to affirm not only the struggle but also the African cultural and religious world views that were trashed by the White colonisers as being backward. Since then, ZANU-PF sees its policies not as conflicting with the Bible or Christianity, but as policies that fulfill the Christian values expressed in the Bible. This is quite representative of how Africans have always read the Bible, especially since the first translations from English into vernacular languages. As John S. Mbiti eloquently put it:

Africans hear and see a confirmation of their own cultural, social and religious life in the life and history of the Jewish people as portrayed and recorded in the pages of the Bible…. The Bible is not simply an historical book about the people of Israel; through a re-reading of this scripture in the social context of our struggle for humanity, God speaks to us in the midst of our troublesome situation. This divine Word
is not an abstract proposition but an event in our lives, empowering us to continue in the fight for our full humanity (Mbiti, 1986: 26).

This is the premise to properly understand ZANU-PF’s reading and interpretation of the Bible because, although ZANU-PF was generally negative regarding Christianity and the Bible it was committed to the Leninist-Marxist political ideology which is anti-religious, the full implementation of this official position depended on the Zimbabwean contextual factors. In some communities, liberation fighters managed to ban people from going to church and from reading the Bible. However, in many areas, their attempts were thwarted by local resistance, thereby forcing liberation forces to compromise (cf. Gundani and Bourdillon, 1988: 147-161). Therefore, while the perception shared across sub-Saharan Africa during the struggles for independence was that the Bible and Christianity were tools of colonisation brought to Africa to cheat and negotiate Africans out of their land. Liberation forces began to repackage and to communicate the political philosophy in religious and biblical terms (cf. West, 1999: 9; Dube 2000: 3). Thus, for ZANU-PF, the Marxist-Leninist doctrine was not against Christian teaching, instead it affirmed the Christian gospel.³ From this ideological standpoint, ZANU-PF crafted a hybrid version of socialism that accommodates traditional religions and Christianity.

³ Cf. Robert Mugabe, ‘Our cause is not anti-Christian; it is anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. So we appeal to the churches for help….I do not understand how the Christian churches can be revulsed by Marxism and Leninism… I think the Christian Churches must take a new look at the doctrine of Marx and Lenin. I don’t believe that Marxist-Leninist runs counter to Christian practice. These principles as we apply them must take into account our own local situation, our history and traditions so that we end up with a system that is in accord with the aspirations of our people’, in, R. H. Randolph, Dawn in Zimbabwe: The Catholic Church in the New Order: A Report on the activities of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe for the five years 1977-1981. Gweru: Mambo Press, 1985, p.39; 72-73.
The Bible, since this era, began to serve a political ideology of socialism. The first President of Zimbabwe, Rev Canaan Sodindo Banana, giving reference to Acts 4: 32-35, went as far as claiming that socialism as expounded by Lenin and Marx intended to inaugurate the kingdom of God on earth. For him, Marx and Lenin and their many followers including ZANU-PF leadership and liberation fighters refract images of holy prophets, righteous kings of Israel, Jesus and his apostles, Saints and messengers or angels of God. This hermeneutical position was so engraved in Banana’s thought pattern that all his works bear this signature (cf. Banana, 1980; 1991; 1996). This is the same perspective that is indelibly engraved in the minds of ZANU-PF stalwarts.

With this background, it is easy to explain why the then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe’s (1980: 3) reconciliation address in 1980 emphasised on the need to ‘beat swords into plough shares’ (Isaiah 2: 4). In the light of Banana’s hermeneutical standpoint, Mugabe may have already fitted the shoes of the anointed messiah (cf. Isaiah 2: 4) to inaugurate the kingdom of God in Zimbabwe through his socialist policies. Therefore, Mugabe must have chosen Isaiah 2: 4 because its theme of the coming reign of the Messiah corresponded with the aspirations and perceptions of the Zimbabweans of him as the deliverer and the Messiah. It is this history of deliverance from colonisation by ZANU-PF under the leadership of Mugabe that usually informs today’s conception of Mugabe as divine.

For about a decade, from 1980, it was impossible to criticise Mugabe without societal backlash and chastisement. Mugabe had been transformed into an international model of “democracy” by Western media and governments who previously regarded him as a
communist terrorist. The local people who benefitted from his small-scale land resettlements, free education and free health programmes also awarded him divine status. However, from 1991 when the government was forced by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to abandon socialist policies for a free-market economy through the adoption of Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) in order to qualify for financial aid, the situation radically changed. The move triggered unprecedented economic hardships for the working class and peasants (cf. Gibbon, 1995; Mlambo, 1997; Verstraelen, 1998: 113). Coupled with persistent droughts and absence of a comprehensive programme of land reclamations to decongest rural areas, the economic wellbeing of the ordinary citizens was distressed. Hence, the people began to question the ‘messiahship’ of Mugabe and openly criticised his policies.

The social strife led to the birth of the MDC in 1999. The party, capitalising on popular discomfort with free-market policies, premised its campaign for political office on the promise of returning to popular socialist policies. Unfortunately, the party recanted this promise in less than a year after it was formed. Be that as it may, this promise had already attracted all the lower levels of the society especially in towns and cities. As mentioned, the formation of the MDC coincided with the beginning of the ZANU-PF led fast-track land reform programmes, also known as Jambanja or Third Chimurenga (Revolution); the violent reclamation of land by war veterans and peasants from white farmers (cf. Harrison, 2006). These land invasions were ignited by a letter from the British Secretary of State, Claire Short. She indicated in her letter to Zimbabwe that the British government had reneged on the 1979 Lancaster House agreement which bound Britain
to compensate white farmers in Zimbabwe for the land they held. According to the agreement, upon payment of compensation, the land was to be transferred fully to the indigenous people of Zimbabwe in 1990 (cf. Claire Short’s letter, 1997).

While, the Western governments, with the influence of Britain, interpreted these compulsory land reclamations as a violation of property and human rights, ZANU-PF interpreted the land reforms as a logical fulfilment of the goals of the liberation struggle. For the Zimbabwean peasants, the land reform intended to correct the colonially-inspired economic injustice. In response, Western governments enacted punitive economic sanctions against Zimbabwe and travel bans on ZANU-PF leadership and anyone they interpreted to be sympathetic to ZANU-PF; academics, journalists, clerics and even farmers. However, the economic effects of sanctions affected the common people and not the so called targeted individuals (cf. Vengeyi, 2011b: 223-237; Vengeyi, 2015: 69-87).

Concurrently, the MDC, Western governments, Non-Governmental Organisations, some mainline churches, Western and local private media orchestrated one of the most vicious and sustained propaganda against the land reform, ZANU-PF and Mugabe. Reverting to pre-1980 media propaganda, ZANU-PF was equated to the NAZI regime and Mugabe was branded ‘a black Hitler’. Even authors joined in the propaganda against the land reforms (cf. Moore, 2001; Campbell, 2003; Miles-Tendi, 2010). Lately however, some scholars are beginning to disconfirm the media propaganda about the land issue (cf. Kilgore, 2009; Scoones, et al., 2010; Hanlon, Manjengwa and Smart, 2013).

Confronted with the possibility of losing elections to the MDC, ZANU-PF reinvigorated its propaganda
machinery to churn out through songs, jingles and dramas on state controlled radio, television and newspaper columns, nothing but ZANU-PF perspective (cf. Vengeyi, 2011c). Contrary to MDC and others who presented ZANU-PF and Mugabe as evil forces and Zimbabwe as a cursed land, ZANU-PF propagandists turned the narrative up-side-down. For them, Zimbabwe is the biblical paradise and the chosen house of Israel. From this ZANU-PF perspective, President Mugabe, began to be awarded with several titles, ranging from, divine being, Angel Gabriel, Prophet Moses, Joshua, to Son of God (cf. Machingura, 2012). ZANU-PF strategists therefore implored all Zimbabweans to support him, arguing that doing so was biblical.

4.0 Be subject to ZANU-PF governing authorities! Thus says the Bible!

Lovemore Togarasei (2009: 130-147) observes that it was during this time when the legitimacy of President Mugabe and ZANU-PF-led government began to be challenged that Romans 13: 1-7 and such texts as 1 Peter 2: 13-17, 1 Timothy 2: 1-2 and Titus 3: 1-2 were summoned to become prescriptive of support for ZANU-PF leadership. President Mugabe and ZANU-PF leaders were interpreted as the ‘governing authority’ and not MDC Councillors, Mayors and MPs that had been elected into office in 2000. Therefore, these scriptures began to have a new meaning; that supporting ZANU-PF was a service to God. From such interpretations, MDC leadership was branded as agents of the devil, the dark forces and puppets possessed by Western demons. This perspective is featured repeatedly by ZANU-PF Government ministers, journalists, church leaders, ordinary supporters, activists and scholars.
5.0 ZANU-PF’s land reform and *Jambanja* Biblical Exegesis or Theology

While the propaganda from the MDC and allies discredited the then on-going land reform as mere Mugabe political gimmick, Mugabe forged an alliance with previously relegated Christian religious communities; African Initiated Churches (AICs), Pentecostal movements, some leaders of mainline churches such as Bishop Nolbert Kunonga and traditional leaders/chiefs. These became ZANU-PF ‘allies’. The forces did not only provide the much-needed religious legitimation of President Mugabe’s presidency and government but also crafted a theology, a kind of biblical exegesis that supported the land reform programme and ZANU-PF (Vengeyi, 2010: 173).

In this article, this interpretation is termed ‘*Jambanja* Biblical Exegesis’ as it was meant to aid rather than denounce the *Jambanja* (derogatory name for land reform) and ZANU-PF. Thus, ZANU-PF politicians and members of the clergy often appealed to biblical stories to support land reclamations. This kind of biblical interpretation is only but a revitalisation of a land theology that had already begun around 1990s when agitations for land began to gather momentum (cf. Bakare, 1993).

Professor Jonathan Moyo, then Minister of Information and Publicity, made it almost his sole responsibility to ‘rebrand and market’ Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF, President Mugabe and the land reform programme. Among others, Moyo presented Zimbabwe as the biblical paradise. Chitando (2005: 220-239.) observed that a jingle released by his department, for example, echoed the biblical story of creation (Genesis 1: 1). In it, a deep narrator’s voice, reminiscent of most biblical documentaries set the scene thus: ‘*in the beginning was*
the land. The people were on the land. The people owned the land. As it was in the beginning, so shall it always be. Welcome to Zimbabwe. We are down to earth!’ For Moyo therefore, the land reform became not only justifiable but divine as well; since it endeavoured to return to paradisal normalcy. The original divine order where black people were in paradise (of Zimbabwe) was disrupted by the fall (colonisation). According to him and ZANU-PF therefore, Zimbabweans were supposed to see colonisation as an act against the plan of God. This was the line of thinking among ZANU-PF supporters, a position clearly evident in the ‘Jambanja Biblical Exegesis’.

Bishop Kunonga of the Anglican Church, Harare diocese, whose pan-African ideology and support for ZANU-PF was not a secret, was one of the proponents of the Jambanja Biblical Exegesis. While the land reform was generally regarded by opponents of ZANU-PF as responsible for the economic down-turn hence as the worst thing that could ever happen to Zimbabwe, for Kunonga, it was the only good thing that could ever happen to Africans. In 2002, at the height of the farm invasions, Kunonga argued; ‘The land struggle is a significant part... for Africans to stand up against the West. They are my own those who identify with justice. They are close to me those who identify with correcting the gross imbalances in Zimbabwe’ (cf. Vengeyi, 2011d: 32). He also taunted MDC supporters saying, ‘You are sick to think the Western political and economic interests are your interests. They are here to look for puppets to put in Government, ignorant African leaders who can easily be manipulated’ (Vengeyi, 2011d: 32). With these remarks, Kunonga branded the MDC as puppets of the Western powers hence enemies of God. This was the ideological
In his exegesis of the infamous Naboth’s vineyard episode (cf. 1 Kings 21), Kunonga compared black ancestors who were dispossessed of their land by White colonisers to Naboth. For him, the weak and oppressed African ancestors were the righteous ones, like Naboth. White colonialists on the other hand, fitted into the shoes of Ahab, the powerful and unjust king of Israel. By implication, the whole of Zimbabwe was Naboth’s vineyard, with all there is; mines, companies and wild animals. According to Kunonga, peace could not prevail in Zimbabwe unless justice was done. And justice for him entailed the return of land stolen from black ancestors (Naboth) by white colonialists (Ahab) (cf. Gunda, 2008: 299-318).

Contrary to the MDC and Western concept of democracy, according to Kunonga, real democracy was inseparably attached to ownership of land and all the natural resources by the indigenous peoples of Africa. He called this model, the ‘democracy of the stomach’. Kunonga once argued that Mugabe was a prophet like Moses whom ‘God raised to acquire land and distribute it to Zimbabweans; we call it democracy of the stomach’ (cf. Guma, 2008). The land reform was therefore the background from which Kunonga and many ZANU-PF supporters compared Mugabe to great biblical figures such as Moses and Joshua.

There is no doubt that the comparison between Mugabe’s land reform with Moses and Joshua’s struggles and subsequent redistribution of the promised land of Israel was a re-reading of the Exodus story in the light of Zimbabwean political realities. Zimbabwe was therefore depicted as the promised holy land of Canaan. In that way,
the land reform was some form of a holy war, authored and guided by God and ancestors, as was the Exodus and the liberation struggle.

According to ZANU-PF biblical exegesis, without land redistribution the promised Canaan had remained a distant future. The distribution of the land to the masses marked the transition from Egypt (colonialism) to Canaan (Zimbabwe). In that way, the struggle for independence was not over at independence in 1980. Political independence was just a rest along the way to Canaan. Another critical point to consider was emphasis on Mugabe’s divine selectedness. Since Mugabe, Zimbabwe’s Moses was chosen by God and vadzimu ve (ancestors of) Zimbabwe, it was only God and vadzimu that could remove him from office. Any attempt to remove him was considered to be against God and the ancestors. This equated him to the kings of Israel (and of the African traditional system of government), prophets, angels and Shona spirit mediums. By these titles, supporters of ZANU-PF acclaimed Mugabe as supra-human.

6.0 President Mugabe is Angel Gabriel and not human! Thus says the Bible!

Since the inauguration of the GNU between ZANU-PF and the two MDCs, ZANU-PF utilised every opportunity to canvas for support for President Mugabe in preparation for elections. He was regarded as the biblical Angel Gabriel. Social networks such as Facebook were harnessed to articulate this ideology. Sibusisiwe Jamela, for example, on 26 July 2011 posted a photo of President Mugabe on ZANU-PF Youth League Facebook page depicting him as the biblical angel Gabriel. On the colourful and well-designed photo was the Jamaican flag. This could have
been done to crown him the emperor, lion of Judah, as Rastafarians would refer to Jesus. More striking were the biblical verses; Revelation 18: 1, Hebrews 13: 1-2; Jude 1: 7, inscribed on the photo, just below Mugabe’s name. In the middle of the photo, a face of Mugabe was inserted. On the right side, another picture of Mugabe was a seven in his head. To suggest that Mugabe was the angel referred to in Revelations 18: 1; the verse has an arrow pointing to the number 7 on Mugabe’s head. On the left side just below the Jamaican flag was inscribed: “Lord Jesus”. Below the inscription was another picture of Mugabe, almost suggesting that after Jesus, God sent Mugabe, his other son. Immediately below, the picture of Mugabe on the left, were verses (Hebrews 13: 1 and Jude 1: 7). Just below, there was a dove flying, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, at the very bottom was an inscription: Angel Gabriel (cf. Jamela, 2011).

After the photo was well received, with all comments confirming that Robert Gabriel Mugabe was divine and indeed the biblical Angel Gabriel, Jamela added another photo and an explanatory message:

How many of you know that President Mugabe is not a human being, but only appears human to the world?
I am serious; Mugabe is the Biblical Angel Gabriel.
How do I know? Hebrews 13: 2 ‘be careful how you entertain strangers’. Do you have dreams of Mugabe?
I do. Proof =Revelation 18: 1 “And I saw an angel come down from heaven with great authority the whole world was filled with his glory” (Jamela, 2011).

The teaching that Mugabe was an angel really sunk into the masses of Zimbabwe particularly the youth who idolised President Mugabe. One young lady who was
among the more than 40 000 faithful supporters who thronged Mutare stadium to celebrate Mugabe’s 88th birthday forcefully emphasised that, ‘the name Robert Gabriel Mugabe-Gabriel means messenger which means he was sent to this country to rule it till (death)’(cf. Stein, 2012). and As she spoke, many youths surrounding her audibly concurred. The belief was so pervasive that even some churches taught that President Mugabe was the biblical Angel Gabriel sent to deliver Africa from Western oppression. A Vadzidzi Apostolic Church preacher was recorded on video telling followers to support Angel Gabriel Mugabe and ZANU-PF not the MDC, a puppet of the whites. On the video, the preacher was intercepted by a song supporting the idea that Gabriel Mugabe was indeed the Angel Gabriel sent by God to rule and liberate Africans from Western colonialism and neo-imperialism.4

According to ZANU-PF functionaries, the divine status of Mugabe had skipped political borders and was already accepted even by members of the opposition including Tsvangirai, who was regarded as Mugabe’s bitter rival. In fact, Tsvangirai shocked the world when he claimed that, ‘President Mugabe is chosen by God, he is God-given… so it is important for all Zimbabweans to pray for their leaders…. You can like President Mugabe or hate him, but that should not stop you from praying for him’ (The Sunday Mail, 2012). The basis for his claim was Romans 13: 1-7, the same text that ZANU-PF supporters cite. This was quite tactful. It seems it was the gateway for Tsvangirai to also claim divine selection, now that he had become Prime Minister. True to the assumption, Tsvangirai, went further claiming that ‘in the same vein, you can dislike the Prime Minister, but that should also not stop you from praying for me. You should pray for the leaders’ (The Sunday Mail, 2012).

Although, private media houses emphasised the fact that Tsvangirai (and not President Mugabe), was chosen by God, after this speech, Tsvangirai was subjected to relentless criticism by his ordinary sympathisers. ZANU-PF strategists on the other hand, feasted upon that political gaffe. For instance, Nathaniel Manheru (17 February 2012) wrote:

the gentle reader could not have missed Tsvangirai’s mournful reminder to all Zimbabweans that indeed President Mugabe is of, and from God….. On that regard he (Tsvangirai) joined vanaComrade Mutasa in apotheosising President Mugabe… Of course the President is always the first to assert his own humanity, to insist he is only of clay, like all of us. I would go slightly further than his own modesty to assert that he is of better clay.

The impression from Manheru was that although Tsvangirai did not always want to admit it, he was one of President Mugabe’s ardent admirers, if not actually a ZANU-PF cadre. Such association was targeted at ordinary MDC supporters to follow suit and support Mugabe. This was because if, Tsvangirai, the leader could be a disciple of Mugabe, who of his followers could not? Also, the emphasis that Mugabe ‘is of better clay’ than the rest of humanity resonated with ZANU-PF theology which

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5 Tsvangirai is quoted as having said: ‘I am blessed to be chosen among the multitude to leader the country. I was chosen by God because it is said in the Bible leaders are chosen by God. Whether you like me or not you should remember that I was chosen, even President Robert Mugabe was selected by God. What you should do is to pray for us as the leaders of the country so that we have the vision to deliver the nation.” Cf. Morgan Tsvangirai ‘I was chosen by God: Tsvangirai’, The Zimdiaspora.Com. [http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7720:i-was-chosen-by-god-tsvangirai&catid=38:travel-tips&Itemid=18](http://www.zimdiaspora.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7720:i-was-chosen-by-god-tsvangirai&catid=38:travel-tips&Itemid=18).
conceptualised him as supra-human, divine and angel. Most importantly, it reminded the Zimbabwean reader about the biblical story of creation in Genesis chapter 2. It was, as such an interpretation of Genesis chapter 2 from a ZANU-PF ideological framework, thereby depicting Mugabe as having the texture of Adam, the first man. And that dismisses Tsvangirai as an ordinary being who cannot claim divine status, thus confining divinity and divine selection to Mugabe. Logically therefore, Mugabe was holy but Tsvangirai was not.

7.0 As Jesus exorcised demons, Mugabe exorcises ‘demon-possessed’ MDC!
Western imperialism, according to ZANU-PF had immensely transformed itself since the end of colonialism. It now fronted African puppets and enacted economic sanctions to help their puppets come into power. President Mugabe on several occasions had labelled Tsvangirai and the MDC as British puppets ‘possessed by demons at number 10 Downing Street, (the official residence of the British Prime Minister), which needed exorcism’ (New Zimbabwe. Com, 2011). The use of such concepts as ‘demons and exorcism’ by President Mugabe quickly reminded Zimbabweans of biblical stories about Jesus casting out demons from people. Thus, President Mugabe placed himself in the shoes of Jesus and portrayed Tsvangirai as a demon-possessed patient.

The same vocabulary was adopted in describing the MDC by Isidore Guvamombe (cf. The Herald, 2012), a journalist whose pan-African ideology resonated with ZANU-PF political philosophy. He railed at the MDC especially its urbanite supporters who generally look down upon people from the villages or rural areas. Because of their continued support for ZANU-PF, rural people
were often described by urban dwellers as primitive and backward. Hence, ZANU-PF was regarded by the MDC as a party of the past. However, for Guvamombe, MDC supporters were possessed by the spirit of puppetry. He thus saluted the rural dwellers for remaining loyal to ZANU-PF regardless of the unrelenting propaganda and economic sanctions.

According to Guvamombe, the loyalty of the Zimbabwean rural people to President Mugabe and to ZANU-PF was comparable with the loyalty of the disciples of Jesus Christ. He argued that they (disciples of Jesus) were also villagers, without higher education yet they readily grasped what he taught. Thus, President Mugabe was like Jesus Christ and ZANU-PF supporters were like Jesus’ disciples. It therefore followed that MDC supporters, were enemies of Christ hence were followers of the devil (Western powers), the arch-enemy of Christ (Mugabe). The use of such strong language was deliberate. It aimed at dissuading the electorate from supporting the MDC, which eventually would give political advantage to President Mugabe and ZANU-PF, for ordinarily, nobody wants to be associated with the devil.

While still in ZANU-PF, as Vice President, Joyce Mujuru equally described NGOs and MDC-T as proxies of Western governments to distract Zimbabweans from their inheritance, the land. To reach her point home, she cited the biblical episodes where Jesus warned his disciples to beware of wolves in sheep skins-hypocrites (Matthew 7: 15) and the temptation of Jesus where the devil promised him (Jesus) dominion over the world on condition that he worshipped him (the devil) (Matthew 4: 1-11; Luke 4: 1-13) (cf. *The Herald*, 2012). There are two important issues raised here. First, according to her, Zimbabweans should heed the message of Christ (Mugabe and ZANU-
PF) and be able to realise wolves in sheep skins (Western governments, NGOs and MDC-T). Second, as Jesus (Mugabe and ZANU-PF) refused to bow to the demands of the devil (Western governments, NGOs and MDC-T) during the period of temptation (from 2000 in the midst of unprecedented vilification, poverty and economic woes), Zimbabweans needed also to stand their ground and refuse to be deceived by the Western proxies. For her, no amount of deception or force was supposed to make Zimbabweans capitulate to the demands of the devil. Zimbabweans, for her needed to be ready to shed their blood for their birth right, the land as did the liberation fighters and ZANU-PF leadership.

In the same vein, a ZANU-PF Women’s League leader told a gathering that Mugabe was like Jesus, the good shepherd, who does not forsake his sheep during times of trouble but stood ready to shed his own blood for the sheep (John 10: 11-15). The economic meltdown, sanctions, vilification, political violence that Zimbabwe witnessed since 2000, were for her, meant to cause popular uprising to remove Mugabe from power, so as to install puppets. Be that as it may, Mugabe remained resolute and continued to serve ordinary Zimbabweans by distributing the land and championing economic freedom.\(^6\) Evidently, the reference to Mugabe as Jesus was quite profuse. This was obviously to spite Mugabe’s political rivals who often poked fun at his advanced age, health and always talked about his impending death. For the MDC, Mugabe needed to leave power as soon as possible to guarantee the bright future of Zimbabwe. However, for ZANU-PF, Mugabe was only leave power ‘in God’s time’.

\(^6\) Cf. Grace Chirwarwa (*not real name*), Marlborough East, ZANU-PF Women’s League Cell meeting, 15 April 2011.
8.0 Mugabe to only go in God’s time! Thus says the Bible!

The demand by MDC for Mugabe to retire as soon as possible was met with several references to the Bible by ZANU-PF supporters. For instance, Dr Ibbo Mandaza (2011), a well-known academic and MDC sympathiser, published an article whose thesis was that the WikiLeaks cables for Zimbabwe had revealed in no uncertain terms that across the political divide there was unanimity that Mugabe was supposed to go (retire), and pass on the button to younger generations preferably Tsvangirai. Of the many respondents to Mandaza’s article, some were quite interesting for they, in line with ZANU-PF ideology, linked Mugabe’s presidency not with the mandate of the people given through elections but with the will of God. For example, according to one writing by the name Rukudzo:

Why should Mugabe go? I was taught that leaders are put in place by God, and it is God alone who will say they should be removed. This I was taught by the Whiteman’s bible. What has changed now comrade Ibbo. You talk of Patronage and violence…. It was God himself who taught us that those who do not respect authority should be dealt with ruthlessly. Lucifer challenged God’s authority in heaven, and he was ruthlessly dealt with. Those who respected God’s authority in heaven are still our guardian angels. Robert Mugabe is made in the image of God. Why should he behave differently from his creator? Finally Dr, the Bible, tells me that those who follow God’s steps, he gives them long life. Is it not the case with President Mugabe? (cf. Rukudzo, New Zimbabwe. Com. 17 September 2011).
From the ZANU-PF biblical exegetical perspective, the Bible confirms their leadership ideology. In other words, supporters thought that ZANU-PF was a party that strove to fulfil the will of God expressed in the Bible. Thus, pitching his argument on Acts 1: 7 and 1 Kings 1, Mahoso claimed that Mugabe would not leave power regardless of pressure from the MDC; for in Africa it was not the responsibility of men to decide when a leader must leave power, but it was God’s. Therefore, Mugabe would only go in God’s time (Acts 1: 7), for it was God alone who knew the time. From his reference to the succession debacle in the house of David between Adonijah’s faction and Solomon’s (1 Kgs 1) and the succession debate in Zimbabwe (between ZANU-PF and MDC), it was clear that for Mahoso, ‘God’s time’ implied that Mugabe was only going to be succeeded after death (cf. Mahoso, 2012). He also made it clear that as in the case of David, Mugabe was only to be succeeded by ‘a Solomon’, someone from within ZANU-PF not by ‘an Adonijah’, (Tsvangirai or anyone from the MDCs). By comparing Tsvangirai and his ministers to Adonijah’s camp who from the narrative was presented as one who wanted to snatch the throne from Solomon, the legitimate heir, Mahoso made Tsvangirai an outsider. And this was well in line with ZANU-PF perception of Tsvangirai as a puppet of the West.

Clearly, this biblical hermeneutical standpoint was informed by the traditional worldview of kingship, whereby a king or chief was not chosen by the subjects, but by the spirit world according to dynasty. Therefore, a king or chief could not be removed or forced to leave power by the subjects. It was only death hence the claim that only God had the power to remove a leader from the throne, which in turn would be inherited by those of his clan. This, for Mahoso was what the Bible says about African leadership (of Mugabe).
Therefore, opposing Mugabe and wishing him ill health and even death as did Tsvangirai and the MDC was in essence being rebellious to the ancestors and God. According to ZANU-PF biblical hermeneuticians, instead of attacking Mugabe and wishing him dead, Zimbabweans must instead pray for him to be given a long life for this was not only cultural but biblical as well.

9.0 Praying for Mugabe and wishing him good health is biblical!

Mugabe’s health and rumours of him having died or having to die soon due to poor health and old age had been the preoccupation of his political opponents, for many years. On more than three occasions, rumours swelled Zimbabwe that Mugabe had died. But, Mugabe would emerge looking very fit for his age. On 5 February 2012, a popular Nigerian prophet, T.B. Joshua said,

We should pray for one African head of state, president, against sickness that will likely take life; it is a sickness for a long time – being kept in the body for a long time; God showed me the country and the place but I’m not here to say anything like that. I am still praying to God to deliver the president concerned.

This ‘prophecy’ was widely interpreted by MDC supporters and private media houses as prophecy about Mugabe’s impending death within 60 days; that is, until 16 April 2012. But that did not happen. Mugabe did not die. Mugabe on 21 February 2012, jokingly responded to such rumours saying, ‘I have died many times, (in the media). That is where I have beaten Christ. Christ died once and resurrected once. I am as fit as a fiddle’.7

7President Mugabe, in an interview aired on national radios and Television on the occasion to mark his 88th birth day on 21.02.2012.
Although T.B Joshua later clarified the ‘prophecy’ and distanced himself from such weird interpretations, the rumours of Mugabe’s death had already generated fear among his followers who had begun to pray for him to be spared. Tendai Manzvanzvike, a newspaper columnist, encouraged Zimbabweans to pray for President Mugabe as was recommended in the Bible. Manzvanzvike argued that it was not a moment for finger pointing or celebration (as was done by Mugabe’s political opponents) but, a time for prayer and supplication for leaders as was recommended in 1 Timothy 2: 1-3. For Manzvanzvike, every prophetic message as that of Prophet Joshua was a call to action, self-introspection, repentance and putting one’s faith and trust in the Lord. Isaiah 38: 1-6, according to Manzvanzvike, shows that God can change his mind (and spare Mugabe), like he did with Hezekiah, if people pray. Manzvanzvike justified the call for prayer and fasting by citing the example of the King and the people of Nineveh (John. 3: 1-5) who fasted until God spared their city (cf. Manzvanzvike, 2012).

What was not clear however was whether Zimbabwean leaders to be prayed for included MDC leaders or not. But since it was in direct response to the prophecy widely interpreted to be about Mugabe we can make sound assumptions. Because this was not the first time that 1 Timothy 2: 1-3 has been cited in support of President Mugabe, it was very likely that Manzvanzvike confined ‘leaders’ to Mugabe.
10.0 ZANU-PF biblical perspective on Economic Indigenisation and Economic Prosperity

While the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (IEEA)\(^8\) was widely condemned in the West and by the MDC as another political gimmick by Mugabe, like the land reform (with detrimental consequences to the economy of Zimbabwe), for ZANU-PF, it was a necessary part of the decolonisation agenda. ZANU-PF ministers fell over each other in praising President Mugabe for the promulgation of the Act. From a typical ZANU-PF biblical interpretational premise, Saviour Kasukuwere, then Minister of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment, speaking during the official launch of the Mhondoro-Ngezi-Zvimba Community Share Ownership Trust at Zimplats, said, “I always prefer to refer to President Mugabe as our Angel Gabriel from the Bible, sent by God to the people of Zimbabwe” (cf. Nyangove and Tahungai, 2011). It was not by coincidence that Kasukuwere referred to Mugabe as Angel Gabriel. It was terminology that was aimed at attracting the youth to ZANU-PF, since it was them who were mainly the targeted beneficiaries of the Economic Indigenisation programme.

At the same occasion, then Mashonaland West Governor and Resident Minister Faber Chidarikire said to President Mugabe, “You are our biblical Moses… the people of Zimbabwe will forever cherish having you as their leader who led them out of the wilderness”

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8 The Act was gazetted in 2007 but its implementation only gathered momentum from 2010. It compels foreign-owned mines, banks and companies to cede 51 percent of the shares to black business people and communities of Zimbabwe in the following order: 10 percent shares are transferred to black workers (in the company, bank or mine), 10 percent to the local community (in which the company, bank or mine operates) and 31 percent goes into the government coffers, the Sovereign Fund.
Typically this was a reading of the Exodus story in the light of Zimbabwe’s economic circumstances. The wilderness he referred to was the colonial era and the period between 2000 and 2009 during which period Zimbabwe experienced the most difficult economic situation. It was this economic situation that was compared to hunger and thirst that Israelites endured along the way from Egypt to Canaan, the land of milk and honey.

In the same way, by 2011, ZANU-PF thought that the worst days were over. The understanding was that the same God who saved his people during the liberation war (and from 2000-9), was this time ushering Zimbabwe into eternal economic prosperity through the Economic Indigenisation Act. Manheru therefore ended one of his articles by citing Psalm 23: 4 (Manheru, 2011). By appealing to Psalm 23, which emphasises the providence of God, Manheru was being consistent with ZANU-PF ideology which understood Zimbabwe as the holy land of Israel and Zimbabweans as the children of Israel. Thus, Zimbabwe belonged to God! The Lord was Zimbabwe’s shepherd through President Mugabe, his messenger, prophet, angel and son.

Ironically, in another article on 24 February 2012, Manheru began by denouncing the commitment of Zimbabweans to the Christian religion; who because of that have become more interested in keeping the status-quo which he sarcastically calls ‘the Sabbath’. This was a scenario whereby the Zimbabwean land, mineral resources and companies were owned by foreigners.† For Manheru, and of course ZANU-PF, this was what the

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9 And as has become Manheru’s tradition, the whole article is littered with Biblical and religious phrases such as, “holy Sabbath, Book of commandments, Holy Scriptures, Thou Shalt not, God-given, Sins, Saint, Buddha, rites of passage, omnipresent and omnipotent and the log in the eye”.

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MDC stood for. It was interested in having black people as mere workers for the white capitalists. He even went to a considerable length citing the letter by King Leopold II of Belgium to the colonial missionaries in Congo, itself (the letter) replete with Biblical references. For him, this letter sustained the argument that Western countries are still interested in looting mineral resources from Africa rather than to serve Africans. They only use “democracy”, “human rights” and “rule of law” as pretexts for controlling the land and mineral resources of the African people. Zimbabwe under the leadership of Mugabe and ZANU-PF, according to Manheru, was in the struggle to liberate the land and mineral resources from colonisers. It was from ownership of these resources that eternal prosperity and bliss awaits Zimbabweans.

This argument was sustained by the fact that diamonds mined from Marange by indigenous companies were contributing to the national fiscus treble the other minerals controlled by Western companies. Manheru therefore compared the diamonds in Marange area with the biblical stone that the builders rejected but which became the cornerstone (cf. Psalm 118: 22; Mark 12: 10; Acts 4: 11) (of the economy of Zimbabwe). To discourage Zimbabweans from heeding the MDC ‘gospel’ that was against the indigenisation of the Zimbabwean economy, Manheru (24 February 2012) ended the article by rewriting a biblical verse. He says, according to the MDC as a front of white capitalists, an ‘African shall not live on bread alone, sorry, on bread at all!’ (cf. Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew. 4: 4; Luke 4: 4). For him, by contrast, ZANU-PF was a movement committed to seeing that Africans do not only eat bread, but also control the means of producing the bread they eat.
According to ZANU-PF, the Zimbabwean economy collapsed due to Western imposed economic sanctions and sabotage by white industrialists in solidarity with white farmers whose farms were being reclaimed. For ZANU-PF therefore, if the economy was owned and controlled by the indigenous people, the collapse could not have happened. The Economic Indigenisation Act therefore sought to hedge the economy against further manipulation by foreigners. The control of the mineral resources especially the vast diamond deposits estimated to be the largest alluvial diamond reserves to be found in human history was therefore a necessary step towards prosperity. According to Mahoso, it was solely these diamonds that could turn around Zimbabwe’s economy even in the face of sanctions. For him, Zimbabwean diamonds are comparable to the stone that David used to strike and kill Goliath (1 Samuel 17: 49) (cf. Mahoso, 2011). Accordingly for Mahoso, Zimbabwe as today’s David shall defeat Goliath (the Western imposed economic sanctions), through the sale of diamonds. Prosperity was therefore guaranteed since God was on the side of Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF leadership.

Already by around 2002, such a belief was evident in ZANU–PF. The Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Herbert Murerwa, presenting the 2002 national budget, concluded by a biblical quotation from prophet Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 29: 11). The promise of hope and prosperity to Judah were for Murerwa applicable to Zimbabwe (cf. Gunda, 2010). Zimbabweans therefore needed to be quiet and trust in the Lord rather than blaming ZANU-PF leadership for the failure of the economy. Instead of blaming leadership, Zimbabweans were encouraged to pray and turn away from their sins, hence according to Chitando, (2012: 274-289) 2 Chronicles 7:
14-15 became very popular from this era. For ZANU-PF, it was through the land reform (and the diamonds from the land) that the Lord would usher Zimbabwe into eternal economic prosperity.

11.0 The Bible is against Homosexuality! Thus says ZANU-PF!

Homosexuality is another contentious issue in Zimbabwe that has seen the full deployment of the Bible and the indigenous cultural and religious perspectives by politicians (and the public) (Gunda, 2010; 2011: 93-108; Togarasei and Chitando, 2011: 109-125; Biri, 2011:160-174). While Mugabe consistently ranted against homosexual practice, vehemently denying the Western position that homosexuality was a human right too, Tsvangirai vacillated depending on his audience. When Tsvangirai spoke to Zimbabweans, like Mugabe, who regarded homosexuals as ‘worse than pigs and dogs’, he castigated homosexual practice as irrational. But when Tsvangirai addressed foreigners, especially Western politicians and journalists, he embraced the practice as a human right, speaking exactly the Western narrative (cf. Tsvangirai on BBC Radio or Television, 2011). Surprisingly, Tsvangirai’s sudden change of perspective suspiciously coincided with British Prime Minister David Cameron’s push for African governments to accept homosexuality as a precondition for financial assistance from the British government (and from the West) (BBC News UK, 2011). This was been seized upon by ZANU-PF as evidence of Tsvangirai, and MDC’s subservience to the British.

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10 Cf. Speaking at the International Women’s Day, in Chitungwiza, (Zimbabwe) Tsvangirai said, “I totally agree with the president…Women make up 52% of the population . . . There are more women than men, so why should men be proposing to men?”. BBC Online, 26.03.2010.
President Mugabe’s consistent attack on homosexuality earned him enemies in the West but a majority of admirers at home, across the political, religious, class and gender divide. On the other hand, Tsvangirai’s acceptance of the behaviour earned him a good name in the West but many enemies in Zimbabwe (and Africa) at large. For, except for a very minute number of activists and scholars who campaign for the acceptance of homosexuality, an overwhelming majority of Zimbabweans regard homosexuality as a foreign behaviour that the West seeks to impose on the people as a strategy to destroy Christian and African cultural values of the family (cf. Shoko, 2010: 634-639). There is truth, in claiming that nearly all the religions of the world represented in Zimbabwe condemn homosexuality. And this religious constituency (especially Christians and followers of the traditional religion) was so important a factor in Zimbabwean politics that every politician tried to package his or her policies in ways that were acceptable to it.

With this in mind, Mugabe realised that it was not enough to rely entirely upon the traditional religious and cultural perceptions about homosexuality. For wider appeal he roped in the Bible. Tactfully, Mugabe often juxtaposed polygamy with homosexuality in his interpretation of the Bible. For him, polygamy, a common practice in Zimbabwe (and the rest of Africa), was actually biblical. Hence, the Zimbabwean constitution needed to protect it. On the contrary, homosexuality, which is highly respected in the West as a human right, was for Mugabe not only unnatural, but it was also categorically denounced in the Bible. Therefore, for him, homosexuality should never be enshrined in the constitution. To support his argument, Mugabe once referred to the story of King Solomon in the
Bible (1 Kings 11: 1-3) whom he said was not only given wisdom by God but many wives as well, (cf. Vengeyi, 2011a: 362) as if to suggest that having many wives results in wisdom or was evidence of being wise. In that score, he attracted a good following from the majority of Zimbabweans, both Christians and traditional religious believers.

Tsvangirai, on the other hand, after wide condemnation by the Zimbabwean public who had begun to accuse him of being gay himself, sought to explain his stance by appealing to the biblical verses that prohibit humans to judge others (Luke 6: 37; John 8: 7) (cf. Tsvangirai’s statement on 2 November 2012). In his statement, Tsvangirai emphasised the fact that he does not judge, since it was the prerogative of God. In a way, Tsvangirai accused Mugabe, ZANU-PF and all that opposed homosexuality of not being Christians and of not being loyal sons of God. This was a political strategy to lure the electorate, to divert their attention from his political blunder when he endorsed homosexuality.

12.0 Evaluation and Conclusion
This article has mainly demonstrated that in Zimbabwe, there is a conscious and readable pattern in the appropriation of the Bible to advance political ideologies. From the top echelons of ZANU-PF to the grassroots, the Bible is readily deployed to justify party positions on a number of controversial issues dogging the Zimbabwean political landscape. What was clear from the ZANU-PF biblical hermeneutical position was the integration of a pan-African ideology. This was a carefully considered political strategy to appeal to the masses that belong to Christianity and African indigenous religions. Today, in Zimbabwe, about 75-80 per cent of people are
Christians while 15 per cent follow traditional religions. Nevertheless, owing to colonial history, all Zimbabweans have some knowledge of biblical stories. The Bible was the most revered, popular and easily available book to all the masses especially in the rural areas, where 70 per cent of the population still live. And that was where missionary schools, hospitals and churches were concentrated. And, for ‘many years the only purpose in erecting mission schools was that they could help people to read the Bible,’ (Daneel, 1987:78). Characteristically, the reading of the Bible opened the day and closed the day. Attending Bible classes was mandatory and recitation of verses and stories from the Bible by pupils was highly encouraged. With the ever-growing African Initiated Churches (most of which are staunch supporters of African cultural values) (cf. Vengeyi, 2011a; Togarasei, 2006: 5), and the recent phenomenal advance of Pentecostalism, (that is known for its reverence to the Bible to the extent that the Bible has been treated as fetish) (Vengeyi, 2011e: 95-129) today, Christianity is the dominant and crowd pulling religion that any serious politician targets Christian voters. And one such strategy analysed in this article was the appropriation of the Bible to support a particular political ideology.

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Obvious Vengeyi

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