

Review

The global political agreement (GPA) and the persistent political conflict arising there from: Is this another manifestation of the council of Jerusalem?

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The global political agreement (GPA) and the council of Jerusalem (CJ) manifested in different times and geographical locations. The GPA is purely a political agreement signed by three political parties namely the movement for democratic change-Tsvangirai (MDC-T) led by Morgan Tsvangirai, the movement for democratic change-Mutambara (MDC-M) led by Arthur Mutambara and the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) led by Robert Mugabe. ZANU was formed in 1960 when it broke away from Zimbabwe African National People's Union (ZAPU) led by Joshua Nkomo. Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole became the first president of ZANU until Robert Mugabe assumed leadership of the party in 1975 (Chung, 2007). Both MDC political formations are an offshoot of the movement for democratic change, which Meredith (2002) says was formed in September 1999, out of Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union (ZCTU) and members of some thirty civic groups, to challenge ZANU PF's monopoly to govern Zimbabwe. Its slogan was 'Chinja Maitiro'-Change the way you are doing things'. The movement for democratic change splited when party members could not agree on whether or not to participate in the senatorial elections of 2005. However, political analysts and critics believe that the issue of senatorial elections was just a smoke screen to an underlying power struggle that had emerged among the party leaders. The split left Morgan Tsvangirai with a bigger party while Gibson Sibanda, who was Tsvangirai's deputy, led, temporarily, the smaller party. This smaller party invited Arthur Mutambara, who, then, was outside the country, to come back to Zimbabwe and lead it. The two MDC parties had to suffix the names of their presidents on the names of their parties so as not to confuse the electorate, hence the names MDC-T and MDC-M. The GPA was meant to resolve political and economic problems which bedevilled the country before and after the 2008 general elections. These elections could not produce a decisive winner on the presidential post. A run-off vote marred by violence forced Tsvangirai to withdraw before elections. Mugabe the sole candidate was declared the winner but was not recognised by the international community (Raftopoulos, 2009). This stalemate led to the signing of the GPA. The CJ was a religious council set to resolve the problem of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the early church. There was a conflict over the demands necessary for the admission of Gentiles. The paper explores the similarities and differences between the GPA and the CJ as regards to the principal issues to be resolved and the strategies adopted thereof. The paper also argues that the GPA and the CJ controversies are similar in that the Jews and the Gentiles had different ideologies about Christianity whereas the MDC formations and ZANU PF have different political ideologies. It further argues that the GPA as well as the CJ did not totally solve the conflicts which they had set to resolve as evidenced by the persistent mudslinging episodes witnessed within the operations of government of national unity, on one hand, and the relations within the early church, on the other hand.

Key words: Global political agreement, council of Jerusalem, early church, conflict management.

INTRODUCTION

The background of the problems of Zimbabwe goes far back to the 1990s but for the benefit and relevance of this

discussion, 2008 is considered as the benchmark for the problems under discussion. This is so because the

problems discussed in the paper, which gave rise to the GPA, were prominently conspicuous after the 2008 general elections, specifically after the presidential vote in which Tsvangirai polled 47.9% to Mugabe's 43.2% (Raftopolous, 2009: 229). It is after these elections that Zimbabwe went to another poll, the run-off. The run-off campaign period is described by Raftopolous (2009: 230) as follows:

"It was however, the violence that preceded the presidential run-off at the end of June that played the country into further political uncertainty. The violence inflicted by the ruling party on electorate as punishment for its loss in March election and as warning against the repeat of such a vote, was the worst seen in the country since the Gukurahundu massacres in mid-1980s. Directed by the joint operations command of the armed forces, most of the violence took place in three areas Mashonaland provinces, MDC candidate Tsvangirai withdrew from the runoff signalling a universal lack of recognition for Mugabe's resulting to 'victory'. The month of July to December, SADC attempted to bring a final resolution to the mediation effort. But ZANU PF and the MDC formations had little options outside the G.P.A. and had to agree to it."

The country was experiencing unprecedented economic and humanitarian problems which needed all parties to work together. The mediation process brokered by Thabo Mbeki of South Africa was signed on 11 September 2008. The agreement became to be known as the global political agreement (GPA). The GPA was not influential for a period of four months during which the parties were disputing on power sharing mechanisms. It was only in January 2009 that the political parties agreed to form an inclusive government born out of the GPA. The GPA has been described by Raftopolous (2009: 230) as having "presented severe threats and opportunities, seemingly irresolvable contradictions and a small opening for moving beyond the political impasse."

RESOLUTIONS OF THE GLOBAL POLITICAL AGREEMENT (GPA)

The global political agreement made a declaration of commitment as follows: The parties hereby declare and agree to work together to create a genuine, viable, permanent, sustainable and nationally acceptable solution to the Zimbabwean problems and in particular to implement the following agreement with its aims of resolving once and for all the current political and economic situations charting a new political direction for the country.

Among the things they resolved to achieve and act upon, without giving much detail of each item, are:

- (1) Restoration of political stability and growth
- (2) Sanctions and resources
- (3) Land question
- (4) Constitution
- (5) Promoting of equality, national healing and cohesion and unity
- (6) Respect for national institution and courts
- (7) External interference
- (8) Free political activity
- (9) Rule of law, respect for the constitution and other laws
- (10) Freedom of assembly and association
- (11) State organs and institutions
- (12) Traditional leaders
- (13) National youth training programmes
- (14) Humanitarian and food assistance
- (15) Legislative and agent priorities
- (16) Security of persons and prevention of violence
- (17) Freedom of expression and communication
- (18) Framework for government
- (19) Implementation mechanism
- (20) Period review mechanism
- (21) Interim constitutional amendments

PERSISTENT CONFLICTS

From the time the GPA was signed, and the government of national unity (GNU) began to operate, there continues to be conflict in a number of areas. One of the chief grey areas of conflict was highlighted on the 15th of August 2010 through President Jacob Zuma's report to the Troika summit of the SADC organ on politics, defence and security cooperation on the Zimbabwe negotiation process.

On outstanding issues which are of persistent conflict, the principals had the following two items:

- (1) That we have still not come to a consensus on the issues relating to the appointment of Gideon Gono, Johannes Tomana as well as the appointment and swearing-in of Roy Banett. We are seized with this matter and,
- (2) That on the appointment of Provincial Governors while agreeing on the appointment formula recommended to us by the GPA negotiators we have resolved that this matter be addressed simultaneously and concurrently with the sanctions removal strategy (The Prime Minister's Newsletter 19 August 2010: 4).

The two items have remained, among other things, areas of conflict in the GPA. These issues have not been solved up to this day adding petrol to fire as it were. Governors were unilaterally appointed without consulting the principals of the MDC formations. Apart from the conflicts that arise through the failure to observe and adhere to the spirit and letter of the GPA, there seems to be a conflict of ideology between ZANU PF and the MDC formations. The difference in ideology can be partly

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explained by the different historical backgrounds of ZANU PF and MDC parties. ZANU PF has a liberation history which it always reminds the general population about. It reminds the people that it is the party which brought independence to Zimbabwe. There are also claims by the same party that MDC formations are handled by the west. The claim further goes on to suggest that such handlers of MDC formations are bent on reversing the gains of independence. This claim seems to be an attempt to project MDC formations as parties that lack legitimacy of their own.

On the other hand, MDC formations claim to be the parties of the time that do not rely on past historical exploits for their legitimacy and relevancy. They claim that they champion democratic changes which are at stake in Zimbabwe. The issue of who is the best candidate to rule Zimbabwe seems to put both ZANU PF and MDC formations on a collision path since insinuations in ZANU PF circles seem to put liberation war record as the criteria for one to rule Zimbabwe. Those who did not fight the liberation struggle seem to be regarded as being handled by the west.

The rhetoric as to who is a suitable candidate to govern Zimbabwe has even seen some individuals in the Zimbabwe uniformed forces joining the debate. Such individuals seem to support the idea that the liberation war credentials are prerequisites for one to be considered suitable to govern Zimbabwe. Such statements are considered inflammatory and misplaced since a vote, in any democratic society, decides who governs a particular country.

The legitimacy issue between ZANU PF and MDCs seems to dodge the GPA. This legitimacy issue brings about suspicion on both sides. It seems as though the agreement was signed to expedite a process without the concerned parties having come into mutual respect of one another. Not surprising, almost two years after the signing of the GPA, there are outstanding issues which continue to haunt the Inclusive government. Over and above the foresaid issues, there has been sporadic violence in the country even well after the GPA and the consummation of the GNU. The violence perpetrated on party members and political activists is testimony that the GNU is not functioning smoothly and is negating or rather abrogating the letter and spirit of the GPA. At this juncture, we would like to interrogate the council of Jerusalem, its resolve and conflicts, before we glean the similarities of the global political agreement and the council of Jerusalem.

BACKGROUND TO THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

The council of Jerusalem possesses a lot of historical and theological problems. The questions which are problematic to answer up to this day are, "Whether the council of Jerusalem managed the conflict?" and "If the conflict was managed, why then, do we have almost the

same problem in the genuine Pauline letters?" It is therefore, critical to find out how the conflict between Christianity and Judaism was managed by the synod of Jerusalem.

Let us look at what necessitated the synod of Jerusalem according to Acts of the Apostles chapter 15:1ff. It was when some men went down from Judea to Antioch and taught that for one to get salvation he/she has to be circumcised according to the laws of Moses. On the other hand, Paul was teaching his gospel of justification by faith. Paul and Barnabas reported after their missionary journeys that, the Gentiles had accepted the Gospel without being first asked to become Jews. They also tabled that they had established many churches in the Gentile countries. However, this report of free acceptance of the Gentiles into the church was questioned and challenged by the strict Jews from Jerusalem. These Jews demanded that for one to be accepted into the church, one should be circumcised and observe the law. The rapid progress of the Gospel among Gentiles in Antioch Acts II: 10ff, Cyprus and Asia Minor Acts 13:4, 14:26 posed a serious problem for the Judaizers. It was apparent that if the spread of the Gospel among the Gentiles continued, there was likely to be more Gentiles than Jews in the church, with a consequent threat to the maintenance of Christian moral standard. However, it could be pointed out that the problem was not the admission of the Gentiles as such, but the terms on which they were to be received. This resulted into conflict between Judaism and Christianity. When the Antioch church could not manage the conflict they suggested sending a delegation of the church to meet the pillar of Jerusalem which was headed by James the brother of Jesus.

SOME ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE CONFLICT AND CHALLENGES IN THE EARLY CHURCH

According to Acts of the Apostles, the council was to answer the question, "can the Gentiles be required to fulfil the Jewish law before they are baptised to become Christians?" The Antioch church was represented by Paul and Barnabas. At the council, Paul and Barnabas narrated everything that they had experienced. In their speech, they made it very clear that the Gentiles were accepted without circumcision and keeping the laws of Moses. The Gentiles were accepted on the basis of justification by faith. The Pillars (James, Peter and John) accepted what Paul and Barnabas had said, but on circumcision, partly (Jews) insisted that circumcision was necessary for the Gentiles. In spite of Titus' effectiveness, as a Gentile missionary in Antioch, Judaizers at Jerusalem insisted for the circumcision of the Gentiles before they were to be admitted into their fellowship. Paul did not submit to them, whether Titus was eventually circumcised or not is difficult to establish because of the ambiguity on this issue. Acts 15:3 which

says, the church sent them on their way, and as they travelled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they told how the Gentiles had been converted. This news made all the brothers very glad" (Acts 15:3, NIV). At the council according to Acts, Judaizers insisted that the Gentiles should be circumcised. However, Peter supported the Gentiles' inclusion into the church. Peter reminded the council/conference how he had started the Gentile conversion without being circumcised when he converted and baptised Cornelius Acts 10:1-8. He also opposed observance of the law as an obligation upon the Gentiles because the Jews themselves had failed to obey it as evident in Acts 15:19-29. Because of Peter's speech, it can be pointed out that Paul and Barnabas' mission to the Gentiles was approved. The implication being that the Gentiles were also beneficiaries of God's redemption.

According to Acts of the Apostles, the conflict or crisis ended with the decrees which are in Acts 15:19-29. According to Acts, there were decrees which were proposed and agreed to by Paul, which involved the enforcement of certain ritual prohibitions on the Gentile converts. There are four such prohibitions, which are, idolatrous pollutions, unchastity, things strangled and blood. This is presented in Acts thus: "Instead we should write to them, telling them to abstain from food polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from meat of strangled animals and from blood" (Acts 15:20, NIV). These were regulations which the Gentile converts were to follow for them to be accepted into the church. The Apostolic decree needs special attention, "Pollution of idols" refers to meat offered in an idol temple before being sold at a market or idol worship in general but the former is more likely because this is addressed to a Christian community. "Unchastely" refers to prohibited marriages or mixed marriages with pagans. "What is strangled" refers to meat of animals killed by strangling. 'Blood' may be understood as prohibition of the Torah (Mosaic Law) to drink or blood being interpreted as blood-shed or murder (Mikolaski, 1992: 151). If we look at the Apostolic decrees critically as they are presented in Acts of the Apostles, there are more questions than answers. Acts 15:22-29 refers to a letter, which was written and distributed to Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. Haenchen (1985) argues that, the letter itself is quite surprising because it does not answer the Antioch question directly as they expected. If the conflict was solved at the council why then do we find similar problems in Pauline letters which appeared to have been resolved by the council? There are dietary problems noted in Romans thus: "One man's faith allows him to eat everything but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables" (Romans 14:2, NIV). In 1 Corinthians 8, there is also an issue of food sacrificed to idols. This is stated as follows: "So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but One (1 Corinthians 8:4, NIV).

The example cited above, shows that really the council did not manage the conflict. If the conflict was managed,

why then, do we find what was in the decrees being problems in Rome and Corinth? Was Luke (Acts) being tendentious or being apologetic to either Roman authorities or Judaism that Christianity was not a threat to Romans or Judaism.

THE COUNCIL AS IN GALATIANS 2 VS 1 FF

The picture of the council in Galatians is different. Paul in Galatians accepts that there was a crisis concerning the acceptance of Gentiles into the church but he does not talk of Synod, council or conference. According to Paul in Galatians, the conflict was settled when Paul made consultation visits to Jerusalem. In a way Paul in Galatians, is implying that he was in no way dependant upon the leaders of the Jerusalem Church for his Gospel although the three Pillars had rubber stamped his mission to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:18 to 2:10). What can be pointed at this time is that, what we find in Acts 15: 1-21 and Galatians 2:1-14 cannot be reconciled. The question remains whether Acts 15:1-21 and Galatians 2:1-14 are referring to the same council.

On his first visit, Paul says he saw only Cephas and James the Lord's brother, contrary to Acts 9:26-29. In Galatians it is Paul's second visit. Hayes (1946: 394) argues that Galatians suggests that the council was private and it was between elders and apostles. Whereas Luke in Acts 15:12-16 suggests that the council was public. Galatians is silent about the visit of the relief. Presumably, Galatians 2:10 implies that Acts 15:1-29 seems to be the passage parable to Galatians 2 - maybe due to the following reasons.

- (1) Both passages talk about the place of Gentiles in the church.
- (2) In both incidents the conflict started in Antioch of Syria and the crisis was taken to Jerusalem.
- (3) In both cases the conflict was settled in Paul's favour, that is, Gentiles were to be admitted into the church on the basis of faith. However, the Gentiles in Acts were given decrees.

Concerning the decrees, Paul in Galatians argues that the Jerusalem apostles added to the content of his Gospel. We are therefore confronted with a difficulty; it is complex to believe that Paul would hardly have completely misinterpreted the essential outcome of the deliberations of the council. To this end, scholars conclude that Acts of the Apostles must be reflected in favour of Galatians. Haenchen (1985) discredits Luke for trying to cover-up or being tendentious to the deep differences which existed between the Jews and the Gentiles in the church.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE GLOBAL POLITICAL AGREEMENT (GPA) AND COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM (CJ)

- (1) Both the GPA and the CJ were born out of conflict

situations.

(2) Both the GPA and the CJ were fire fighting measures. There was an urgent need for the MDC(s) and ZANU PF to work together in the government of national unity in order for Zimbabwe to move forward, Christianity and Judaism were supposed to function together in order for the early Church to move forward. Both the GPA and the CJ left loose ends on the issues they were confronted with and as such consummation of government of national unity and the resolutions of the Council of Jerusalem remained problematic.

(3) Both the GPA and the CJ tried to put people together who had different ideological orientation. The CJ was meant to resolve religious differences, while the GPA meant to resolve political differences.

(4) Both the GPA and the CJ put a document which was supposed to guide them in the consummation of the agreement. The MDCs and ZANU PF had the GPA while the CJ had the Apostolic Decree.

(5) In both cases, instead of the documents guiding and helping in solving the conflicts, they were embedded with conflict issues

(6) Judaism, on its own, had come a long way as the religious belief of the Jews unlike the inclusion of the Gentiles which was a fairly recent development and this seemed to the Jews as an act of turning the tables of religion upside down. ZANU PF has a long history in politics and the MDC parties are fairly recent. To ZANU PF, the inclusion of MDC parties in the GNU seems to be turning the tables of the Zimbabwean politics upside down.

CONCLUSION

From the above argument it would appear that conflict issues are difficult to manage. This is partly because parties would be stampeded into signing agreements before the real issues are considered. The Government of National Unity is limping with outstanding issues on the table almost two years after the signing of the GPA. The parties involved continue entrenching themselves in order to remain the ultimate winner. The longer the parties stay in the GNU, the bigger their differences. The early Church continued to be haunted by the religious issues well after the Council of Jerusalem was convened. The more the early Church tried to accommodate the Gentiles, the more the confusion emanated on what was regarded as the proper way of worship. The vicious circles continued with no solution in future, the same as with the Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe.

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