

An Exploration of Splits in African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe (2012-2014)

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Abstract- Zimbabwe is a religious country with freedom of worship, yet it has seen itself with mushrooming dubious African Independent Churches (AICs). This article investigates the reasons for division. Furthermore, the research study addresses how the Apostolic and Zion churches can predict the likely-would of church split so that the church leaders can prevent such splits in a biblical manner that benefits the spiritual health and growth of the church.

An extensive literature was reviewed from textbooks, the internet, newspapers, journals and others and aimed at putting perspectives to ensure that it identifies the gap in the actual research.

The researcher adopted a qualitative approach which utilized questionnaires, administrative court cases, interviews and non participatory observation as research tools to gather data. The information gathered was checked for completeness and accuracy of answers recorded. Data were presented using tables, figures, and charts and then analyzed. The research noted that greed, power hunger, spiritual doctrinal differences and false prophesy have high levels of effect on church splits, whilst politics, lust, financial squabbles, personalization and God calling have low levels of influence on church splits. The warning signs discovered help to identify and prevent church splits before they happen.

Index Terms- Church splits, African Independent Churches, Apostolic Churches, Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), Zimbabwe

I. INTRODUCTION

The Christian Church started in 33 A.D with Day of Pentecost, continued as one with one faith and one baptism (Eph 4:5) throughout the whole world for about five centuries. During this period if a new teaching would appear, representatives from all the churches would meet to discuss the new teaching and either accept it or reject it. The church was one apostolic Catholic Church, according to Church History (2015). Apostolic refers to its establishment by the apostles of the Lord, and catholic refers to its universality.

After about 500 years operating as one apostolic Catholic Church, the church split into two camps: the Oriental Orthodox Churches and Western Churches as a result of misunderstanding and miscommunication as one group used Greek theological idioms while another used Latin expressions. For the next 500 years in 1054 A.D. The Western Churches split into Roman Catholic (Western) Church and Eastern Orthodox Churches because of procession of the Holy Spirit. The Eastern Church

which had been around the 400s, stated that the Holy Spirit came out of the Father only. The Western church, using verses as John 16:13-15, Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:9 affirmed the double procession that the Holy Spirit comes out of the Father and the Son (Mark Nickens 2009). Then after another 500 years, the Roman Catholic Church in 1517 A.D. suffered another severe schism by 'Reformation' who opposed purgatory, sacraments and indulgencies and used authority of the bible. The corruption was to the extent that Pope Leo X needing money for completion of St Peters Church in Rome permitted John Tetzel to go through Germany selling certificates, signed by the Pope himself. Whoever buys these certificates for the friends living or dead, all their sins would be pardoned without confession, repentance, penance or absolution by a priest (Hurbut 1970). The church splits continued into Church of England to Protestants to Methodist then to Pentecostals and so on.

When the gospel spread to Africa, the mission churches could not be able to fully reconcile the traditional religious and cultural beliefs with their teachings of their church leaders (Reese 1981). As a result the splits and breakaways from their parent churches were inevitable. Beginning in the 1930s, there began to be splits and breakaways in Zimbabwe from mission churches sighting lack of africanization in the leadership of missionary churches. According to Oduro (2006), these African churches that are described as 'a place to feel at home' churches came to be classified as the African Independent Churches (hereinafter referred to by the acronym AICs which in fact could stand for synonymous terms such as, African Instituted Churches; African Indigenous Churches; African Initiatives in Christianity). However, the splits in Zimbabwe were quite few and justified unlike today where there are many funny people who just wake up in the morning, interpret their dreams and come up with their own new churches making the churches splitting up left right and centre. From a religious standpoint, the apostolic churches regard themselves as spirit-type churches and consequently base their religious beliefs and practices primarily on spirit, hence the abuse of spirit in form of dreams. The religious madness is likely to grip Zimbabwe if the expansion of dodgy religious groups is allowed to go out of hand (Chikamwe 2014). As a result, the objectives of this research are to assess the causes and impact on the African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe to split up left right and centre and how to predict that there is likely to be a church split or breakaway so that the church leaders can provide a biblical strategy and practical tools for use to prevent or minimize church split in a way that advances the churches toward growth spiritually and numerically. The remainder of this paper is organized into four sections: section 2 describes the sample and the data collection. In section 3 the validity and reliability of the data are presented.

Then in section 4 the research results are given and section 5 concludes the paper.

II. SAMPLE AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The study was collected primarily from the Bishops whose churches are affiliated to Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ) and administrative court cases of Apostolic and Zion Churches in Zimbabwe. Religion in Zimbabwe's 2012 estimates Christianity to be at 85%, about 10,200,000 of which Apostolic has the highest at 33%, followed by Pentecostal at 17%. About 700 apostolic churches in Zimbabwe are affiliated to ACCZ, followed by Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches and Zionists in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) that has about 70 churches affiliated to it (Maguranyanga 2011). The period covered is from 2012 when ACCZ started to collect data to current period of 2014. The main purpose of the study is being an exploration of splits in African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe (2012-2014). Talim Ministries noted seven church splits, but the researcher tested nine variables on church splits. The primary data collection instruments involved questionnaires, administrative court records, informal and one on one interviews. The researcher used qualitative approach to explore the complexity of splits in African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe and to become more experienced with this phenomenon of splits. Furthermore, the researcher used the descriptive survey design that began with a research question and then developed a theory during data collection. The descriptive survey design gives the researcher an opportunity to explore questions on church split which could not be examined through the experimental or quantitative approach.

In some instances, the researcher watched the ACCZ Administrative Court Proceedings during its formal meetings. The researcher would gather data through observation as they conduct their meetings and critically analyze the response of Apostolic and Zion church leaders in these meetings.

The research targeted at Apostolic and Zion churches in Zimbabwe. The target population of this research study consists of Arch-Bishops or Senior Pastors, Bishops or Pastors, Ministry Heads and the ACCZ Chief Registrar and ACCZ Peace and Commission Committee members. A sample was picked from the churches that represented the ACCZ. Random systematic sampling was done to ensure that all churches were fairly represented as different churches.

In this study bishops were called to come to area of study at ACCZ offices and stratified random sampling was first used to ensure that different churches sizes with different leadership structures were all included. During the dais visit, the researcher made appointments to come and conduct a research with the chosen churches. The fact that the researcher is part of management team of ACCZ made the work accepted and easy to conduct the research.

The list was prepared before the questionnaires were sent. Because of limited time, people who were given questionnaires with limited time to fill and return. The research subjects were willing to take part and they were happy about participating in the study. A total number of 20 bishops whose churches are members of ACCZ were interviewed. The researcher made it a point that all the members had equal chance to be chosen within

the sample to increase the reliability and validity of the research. Their response to this was superb and cooperated very well with the interviewer.

III. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

With this regard of the validity of the questionnaire the researcher judged this using face validity, construct validity and content validity. In essence, the questionnaire was given to the supervisor and co-supervisor and other academics in different disciplines to test its validity.

Although the questionnaire has a number of advantages, the researcher is aware of its limitations. The researcher used interviews as to make up for the limitations of the questionnaires and obtain up data that might have been left out by the administration of the questionnaires.

In a move to thoroughly obtain the required data about the phenomenon, the researcher also engaged in document analyst, that is, reading what has been written about the ACCZ Administrative Court in Zimbabwe, therefore by getting some valuable information that would be paramount importance to the study. There are incidences where the researcher employed all the three methods to collect the same data and this is called triangulation. This involved observation, interviews and questionnaires.

The researcher was fairly confident that the results derived from the sample size of the population could be generalized to the whole of that population. But to achieve such accuracy, a sample must be representative. Representative sampling that the researcher employed involved population as a whole. The sampling size was more complex that it seemed. Thus the statisticians developed various rules for working out the correct size and nature of samples.

IV. FINDINGS

The researcher will present, analyze and discuss data using the response received from interviews and questionnaires and court records from ACCZ Peace Commission. The research will use descriptive procedures to describe the research findings since most of the data is qualitative. The researcher will use tables, graphs, percentages and pie chart to come up with patterns and relationships of research findings.

The researcher sought to explore how church splits be minimized in a Christian manner. The research considers the warning signs of possible splits and how they can be overcome. Report on church splits in this case study came from highest level of leadership. Researcher focused on avoiding church splits or minimizing such splits if unavoidable.

A. Reasons For Church Splits

Nine variables on church splits were tested on African Independent Churches intending to capture different church characteristics that can influence the degree of church split. The results of the variables are presented in table 1

The researcher also examined the ACCZ records of church disputes brought by bishops or churches themselves to ACCZ Peace Commission in year 2014 when the ACCZ Peace Commission was launched. The results are put in table below.

Table 1: Reasons For Church Splits

The Table below shows the sample of 20 church leaders interviewed. The sample has been derived from members of Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ). Questionnaire with 9 variables on church splits has been given to each church leader for his consideration. The number of church splits has been extracted from the answered questionnaires and has been also expressed as a percentage. The church leaders/Bishops have been categorized according to their answers pertaining to church splits

Reasons for Splits (Variables)	No. of Splits	% of Splits	Sample of 20 Bishops as%
Greed	7	17%	35%
Power Hunger	10	24%	50%
Policies/Doctrines	5	12%	25%
Politics	3	7%	15%
Lust	3	7%	15%
Fin .Squabbles	2	5%	10%
Personalization	4	10%	20%
False Prophecy	6	14%	30%
God Call.	2	4%	10%
Total	42	100%	
Average	5	12%	25%

The results show that the impact of church splits with number of splits 5 and above or 12% and above or supported by more than 24% of sampled bishops or churches have influence on church splits. Greed, power hunger, policies (doctrines) and false prophecy have high levels of effect on church splits. Conversely, those below the average of 5, namely, politics, lust, financial squabbles, personalisation and God calling have low levels of influence on church splits.

B. Cases Handled by ACCZ

Table 2: Court Cases

The table below presents the 14 cases handled by ACCZ Peace Commission in year 2014, the year Peace Comm. was established. The commissioners are ACCZ members whose occupations are lawyers, policemen, economists and chief registrar.

Court Cases Handled by ACCZ in Year 2014			
Specific Problem	Main Dispute	Church Disputes	
		Frequency	As a %
leadership wrangle	Power Hunger	8	57%
satanism,sorcery	False Prophecy	2	14%
Adulterous	Lust	2	14%
marrying 2 wives	Policies	1	7%
Family & church	Personalization	1	7%
	Total	14	100%

Source: ACCZ Peace Commission Records of 2014

The table shows that 14 cases were brought before ACCZ Peace Commission for trial in 2014. According to court records cases, church splits are caused by power hunger which is the highest, followed by false prophecy and lust. However, lust is only featuring as a church split on court cases only. This is so because on court cases the churches are the ones that sometimes bring the bishops to court, whereas on the questionnaires the bishops would not report their lust as a cause to church split. Similar disputes have been grouped together and also presented as a percentage.

Table 3: Highest Church Splits Causes

The table shows the splits causes with highest church splits on each category

Description	Highest Variable	Frequency	% Freq.	No. of Bishops %
Leaders Age	Power Hunger	16	31%	45%
Church Age	Power	8	38%	40%

	Hunger			
Membership	Power Hunger	5	31%	25%
Education:				
Up to Secondary	Greed	4	25%	35%
Diploma	Power Hunger	3	33%	17%
Degree	Power Hunger	4	50%	20%
Overall	Power Hunger	10	24%	50%
Court Cases	Power Hunger	8	57%	57%

Unauthorised Meetings	6	23%
Not Attending Services/Events	5	19%
Disrespecting Leadership	5	19%
False Prophecy	1	4%
Disagreement with Leaders	8	31%
Preaches Targeted to Leaders	1	4%
Total	26	100%

The research reveals that African independent Churches in Zimbabwe are too many, not that the leaders have been called by God to become Bishops but they just felt to become Bishops no matter what comes. Power Hunger has derived them to become Bishops. Zimbabweans are taking the work of Bishop as an occupation whereas the work of God can be served without tearing the Body of Christ, thus causing confusion by dividing Christians or apostles. Power hunger is not affected by the age of the leader, or his education, or the size of membership, or even the age of the church as according to this research.

It should be also noted that in table 3, there are 25% chances that people with no secondary education are fighting to be bishops to the extent that their greediness are causing church splits as 35% the bishops sampled highlighted this.

C. Warning Signs of Church Splits

It is important that church leaders should be in a position to predict the likely-would of church split before it happens and take corrective action before the church is divided. The results of the survey carried out are presented below in a table.

Table 4: Warning Signs of Church Split

The results below show the warning signs of church split as extracted from the questionnaires distributed to 20 Bishops of African Independent Churches in Zimbabwe. The survey was carried in 2014 to members of Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe.

Warning Sign	Frequency of Warning Sign	Frequency As %
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Among the warning signs for church splits, the biggest warning sign is numerous disagreements with church leaders. This accounts for 31% of the warning signs. Out of the 20 churches sampled, 40% of the Bishops interviewed highlighted disagreements with church leaders as the main warning sign of possible church split. Such rebellion followers hunt for reasons to object whatever is put across by leaders.

Another second highest warning sign of possible church split is unauthorised meetings. The church members begin to do meetings not authorised or sanctioned by church leaders. The meetings would have hidden agendas with the intention of rebuking or counter-acting on the resolutions of the church leaders. About 30% of sampled churches admit that unauthorised meetings has led to church split if no correct action taken on such warnings. Church split is associated with 23% of warning signs on unauthorised meetings.

The other warning signs of church split are for not attending church services and events, and disrespecting leaders. Such members see themselves on the equal footing with the church leaders, assuming themselves holding the same positions as their leaders. Excuses after excuses are given as reasons for not attending the church services and events. Some even go to the extent of boycotting events. According to table above, the failing to attend services/events and disrespecting leaders account for 19% each on warning signs of possible church split.

False prophecy and targeted preaches to leaders have low levels of warning signs for church splits and each account for 4% with 10% of members. Instead of preaching the word of God, the verses are chosen in such a way that at the end of the day the church leaders are humiliated.

V. CONCLUSION

In respect of assessing the objectives of this research on the causes and impact on why the African Independent Churches split up left right and centre, the study concludes that power hunger, greed, policies (doctrines) and false prophecy have high levels of effect on church splits. The other conclusion that answers the final objective to this study is that if the church leaders see their members frequently disagreeing with them, or that the members are seen hold a number of unauthorised meetings, or that members are no longer attending services/events or even disrespecting their leadership, it means

there is a church split that is likely to happen. As a church leader it is important to take corrective action in a biblical manner that benefits the spiritual health and growth of the church before the church is divided.

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