'DELIVERED FROM THE SPIRIT OF POVERTY?':
PENTECOSTALISM, PROSPERITY AND MODERNITY
IN ZIMBABWE

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Introduction

In his influential study of the contemporary explosion of protestantism in Latin America, David Martin observes that little attention has been paid to the relation between pentecostalism and economic culture (Martin 1990: 205). Martin argues that, despite a widespread notion to the contrary, the debate, deriving from Max Weber (Weber [1930] 1990) over how much the Protestant ethic influenced, and was influenced by, the spirit of capitalism, has mainly focused on the first wave of Calvinist Protestantism, in the 16th and 17th century; has been less concerned with the second wave of Methodist Protestantism, and hardly engages at all with the third wave of Pentecostal Protestantism. The latter two waves of Protestantism have been analyzed more in terms of their contribution to democracy or civil society, to individualism and to political acquiescence.

However, the specific forms of contemporary pentecostalism (often known as the born-again movement) make it difficult to focus on just their economic or political aspect while ignoring the other. The growing influence of what is known as the 'prosperity gospel' has implications for both the formation of capitalist attitudes and activities, and for shaping political activism. Paul Gifford has argued that the use many southern African born-again Christians make of American bible belt literature and resources has made them vulnerable to the agendas of the American New Religious Right. Furthermore he contends that the doctrines expounded by Americans like Oral Roberts, Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland have the dangerous effect on southern Africa of diverting attention away from the socio-structural causes of the region's ills:
By advocating the gospel of prosperity it [born-again Christianity] dissuades adherents from evaluating the present economic order, merely persuading them to try to be amongst those who benefit from it. With its emphasis on personal healing, it diverts attention from social ills that are crying out for remedy. Its stress on human wickedness and the fallen nature of 'the world' is no incentive to social, economic and constitutional reform. By emphasising personal morality so exclusively, it all but eliminates any interest in systemic or institutionalised injustice. By making everything so simple, it distracts attention from the very real contradictions in the lives of so many in Southern Africa. (Gifford 1991: 65-66).

This paper, based on over a year's ethnographic and archival research, focuses on a particular version of the prosperity gospel propounded by the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA), a pentecostal movement which claims to be Zimbabwe's largest church. It argues that, while the movement's leadership do draw upon various American versions of the prosperity gospel to legitimate their excessive accumulation, its own dominant prosperity teachings have arisen from predominantly southern African sources and are shaped by Zimbabwean concerns. It explains the prevalence of the doctrines not in terms of false consciousness or right wing conspiracy but as a means of enabling pentecostals to make the best of rapid social change. For some, the doctrines have engendered social mobility. For others, they provide a code of conduct which guards them from falling into poverty and destitution. For all they provide a pattern for coming to terms with, and benefiting from, modernities' dominant values and institutions.

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God, Africa (ZAOGA), the New Believer and the Pentecostal Community

In Zimbabwe, ZAOGA is a predominantly urban movement. It originated in Highfields Township, Salisbury, the birth place of Zimbabwean nationalism. The movement was founded by a group of young pentecostal Turks—Ezekiel Guti, Abel Sande, George Chikowa, Joseph Choto, Raphael Kupara, Kennedy Manjova, Clement Kaseke, Lazarus Mavura, Aaron Muchengeti, Priscilla Ngoma, Caleb Ngorima—when they were expelled from the South African derived Apostolic Faith Mission in 1959 following a struggle with missionaries. The group subsequently joined up with the South African Assemblies of God of Nicholas Bhengu, working closely with the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. Once again, they were expelled, and in 1967 they formed their own organisation, Assemblies of God, Africa (AOGA). The movement expanded along migrant labour networks into other Zimbabwean towns and cities as well as into Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. In the 1970s the leader,
Ezekiel Guti, began to form relations with the American Bible Belt while studying at Christ for the Nations Institute in Dallas in 1971. After Zimbabwean independence in 1980, the movement mushroomed on a transnational scale, establishing itself in other African countries such as Botswana, Zaire, South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana and Tanzania. In 1986 it began to evangelise the former metropolitan power by planting the first of a number of churches in Britain. In 1995 it claimed a million and a half members in Zimbabwe.8

The movement, which had begun like most sects as a collection of young zealots rebelling against what they perceived to be corrupt and spiritually dead religious establishments, had itself grown into a denomination. The formerly egalitarian structures of government had been replaced by an authoritarian hierarchy and personality cult centred on Guti, who, today, is formally addressed as Archbishop but popularly referred to as the 'Prophet and Servant of God' and the 'Apostle.' The movement's desire to articulate popular sentiments is now matched by a search for respectability. Religious enthusiasm is trammelled by growing bureaucracy. Like large pentecostal movements elsewhere in Africa (Marshall 1995) and Latin America (Freston, 1995, 1996) ZAOGA's leaders have begun in the 1990s to explore ways of making political capital out of their enormous membership. Politicians from the ruling party, ZANU/PF, are increasingly invited to church functions and ZAOGA sporadically adds its voice to government proclamations on moral issues such as President Mugabe's now infamous outburst about homosexuality in 1995.9

Guti himself has penned his own idiosyncratic political and economic programme, a mixture of evangelical morality, liberation theology and Zimbabwean nationalism (1994a). However, although ZAOGA's leader has ambitions to remake the public sphere in his own pentecostal image,10 his writings and political machinations have so far had little effect on ZAOGA's membership. Like American born-again Christians who draw from the same voluntarist tradition it is not possible to associate ZAOGA members with any specific political/economic programme. Zimbabwean pentecostals tend to form their own political opinions. Nevertheless, their views do converge on 'moral questions,' particularly the practice of personal relations and family life (Iannaccone 1993). Indeed with its 'central theme of personal and social re-birth' (Marshall 1994: 215) pentecostalism begins with the remaking of the individual, and rapidly progresses to the family. It is in the domestic sphere that social relations are first and foremost revised and only then in the pentecostal assembly. And it is in these very localised
domains that evidence of new economic and political communities must first be sought.

There are numerous means by which pentecostalism engenders a ‘revision of consciousness’ (Martin 1990: 287). Once born again, the pentecostal convert is brought into a ‘community of the saved’ (Marshall 1994: 216) where he or she strives to maintain a state of inner purity necessary to receive empowerment from the Holy Spirit. The new believer is captured and remade in two ways: first, through continuous involvement in religious, social and welfare activities centred upon the church; secondly through abstinence from what are popularly described as ‘traditional’ rituals and practices and by means of participation in Christian alternatives.

This re-socialisation makes the born-again believer more industrious and socially mobile than many of their ‘unsaved’ neighbours in a variety of ways. The first is through literacy. A good pentecostal knows his or her bible well and can discourse on key pentecostal teachings such as prayer, healing and spiritual warfare. The new believer is immediately initiated into a fellowship cell and progresses from a diet of scripture to Christian magazines and commentaries to night school bible courses, and often also professional and academic public examinations.

As with Latin American pentecostalism (Martin 1990: 221) the young male is a particular object of re-socialisation. Violence, domestic or extrafamilial, is scorned. Marital fidelity is taken as fundamental. The consumption of tobacco and alcohol is viewed as sinful. Wife beaters, drunkards, smokers, fornicators and adulterers are subject to church discipline. At times they are hauled up before the assembly in public disgrace. Aberrant elders and deacons are demoted, while failed pastors are suspended, or sacked. The new pentecostal male becomes less predatory, more able to care for the children of his marriage. He is more temperate and sober, more family orientated. Money previously spent on alcohol, tobacco and other women is re-channelled for purchase of consumer goods, education, and savings.

The pentecostal also shuns credit. A believer must either pay cash or not make the purchase. Debt is like bodily sin. It captures born-agains and takes control of their lives. Instead, the believer is taught how to budget. Money is saved by other means too. There is a rejection of secular entertainment provided by the cinema, nightclub, and rock concert. Other media, though, such as video and popular music are embraced, Christianised, and introduced in the church service. The new focus of the believer’s social life becomes the church: an unending round of bible studies, prayer meetings, choir practices and concerts,
revivals, evangelistic activities, weddings. Re-socialisation is reflected in the physical transformation of the believer. Smartness and cleanliness are encouraged. Born-agains dress up for church. Men flaunt their new suits and expensive wrist watches. Women show off their jewellery and elaborate hairdos.

The most important practice contributing to a new pentecostal economic culture is the rejection of what they define as tradition: a reified set of beliefs and practices, strongly associated with non-Christian rural culture, centring on ancestor veneration, possession and ecological cults and witchcraft. In a similar vein to the rejection of old rural sports and pastimes by English Methodists during the Industrial Revolution (Thompson 444-49), pentecostals are not supposed to participate in family and communal rituals, or provide resources for them. Possession rituals, rain-making and first-fruits ceremonies, funeral rites, sessions of divination and beer parties are seen as wasteful, and the spirits involved are believed to be demonic. Acts of traditional commensality are avoided. The church becomes the believer’s extended family and ties with the extended networks of kin diminish as energies are refocussed on the nuclear family. This new emphasis on the nuclear family is particularly important for the second generation of urban pentecostals, who grew up in the city. The negation of tradition by pentecostals is significant in a number of ways. First, as has been argued elsewhere (Van Dijk 1992; Maxwell 1995), in certain contexts it has been used by some women and young men to undermine the sacred legitimation of social hierarchies of male gerontocratic elites which have excluded them from political power and social status. Secondly, as Birgit Meyer’s paper in this collection argues, such a ‘complete break with the past’ contributes to the creation of free subjects able to embrace certain aspects of modernity. But for our purposes here it frees the believer from the exactions of kin and community, thus enabling personal accumulation. As well as becoming freer to accumulate, the new believer is smart in appearance, trustworthy, hard working and literate, and hence employable. Numerous pentecostals recounted in their testimonies how they began their careers as ‘garden-boys,’ or ‘house-girls,’ and eventually became white collar workers and consumers. Being born-again can create a ‘redemptive uplift.’

Moreover, new pentecostals also benefit from the material support of the church community. The believer is immediately supported by a system of informal fraternal networks: small scale welfare systems found within and between local assemblies and fellowship groups (R. Marshall 1994: 224-25; Mayer 1961 200-203). ZAOGA assemblies act as informal
burial societies, financing the travel of the bereaved, the transportation of the body and the cost of wake. Strong emphasis on the nuclear family and Christian marriage leads to collections for weddings. Pentecostals also care for the sick, orphans and widows, and often provide housing in an urban environment where it is scarce and expensive. Furthermore, born-agains like to employ their own (Marshall 1994: 230). Richer pentecostals will often engage poorer church members in their homes, garages, shops, or sewing and knitting businesses. Those offering employment, or searching for it, will make their needs known to the assembly.

While these processes of economic and social transformation are present in other Zimbabwean pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Assemblies of God or the Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe (formerly the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada), in ZAOGA they have been refined into two interrelated teachings which are central to the movement’s identity.

Talents and the Spirit of Poverty

ZAOGA’s doctrine of talents fosters what can be called ‘penny capitalism’ (Martin 1990: 206): the vending of cheap food stuffs and clothes initially within the religious community but later outside it, to finance the expansion of that community. It is not a new doctrine, but was pioneered by Nicholas Bhengu, leader of the Assemblies of God South Africa during his ‘Back To God’ Campaign in Highfields Township in 1959. The practice was perfected by one of ZAOGA’s co-founders, Priscilla Ngoma, who taught that women should ‘prosper the church,’ and indirectly themselves, by ‘using their hands.’ Many women still cook peanuts, chips, fat-cooks (a dough-like substance) and cakes, sell sweets, and sew cushion covers in keeping with the initial conception of the teaching, but others, aided by chip fryers, pop-corn makers, sewing and knitting machines and paid labour have launched themselves as successful ‘indigenous business women.’ Still others make use of the relaxation of customs and currency restrictions to buy and resell at a profit. ZAOGA members are well known at borders, which they cross regularly to buy bales of clothes, blankets and electrical goods. In a sense, these pentecostal women are behaving no differently from many other Zimbabwean women who have learnt various means of self-reliance in the face of desertion or absence of the male wage earner, or in response to the rising cost of living brought about by World Bank ordained structural adjustment programmes. Indeed Ezekiel Guti’s initial enthusiastic promotion of talents doubtless stemmed from his mother, Dorcus’
own industriousness and creativity in holding his family together. Nevertheless the movement has systematised women’s production.

A period of talents, which usually lasts about six months, will happen about every three years. Guti will first decree which new resources the church needs in the coming years such as vehicles, computers, new buildings. Then talents workers pledge how much they will earn, and begin to work towards it. There are services of encouragement, and those church members recognised for their financial acumen are called upon to offer advice during assembly meetings. An economic culture is talked into existence as the successful ‘testify’ about budgeting and market niches. Starter-grants are offered, and earnings are recorded on computer. Although some men and children also volunteer for talents it is a predominantly female activity. Feminine images are drawn upon to motivate. Women sing: ‘We are working to sweep away poverty’—tiri kushanda tichakanda zweze and often liken the added financial strain of talents to the experience of carrying and giving birth to a child. Moreover, the process of giving is feminised. Money is collected in zambias (mbereko-chi-shona) the decorated piece of cloth often wrapped around a woman’s waist or used to carry a child on her back. Alternatively, it is placed in large enamel bowls held by women whilst elders wash their hands, and used for washing up. But these feminine associations do more than enhance the appeal of talents, they moralise money. Through pentecostal agency money is invested with moral qualities of trust and intimacy by contact with swaddling cloth. Furthermore, the notes and coins are cleansed by association with the washing-up bowls. It is clear that money cannot be simplistically ‘credited with in intrinsic power to revolutionise society and culture.’ To a large degree it is given social meaning by ‘the cultural matrix into which it is incorporated.’ Thus, rather than viewing money as some ‘dark satanic force eating away at the fabric of society’, Zimbabwean pentecostals seek to transform it for the sake of the kingdom (Parry and Bloch 1989: 1-32).

At the end of talents, the money is collected with much celebration at provincial-level services. Workers give testimonies as to how God helped them make money and each person’s earnings are read out. In what resembles a graduation ceremony, those who have done well are rewarded with certificates. Indeed ZAOGA members joke about ‘graduating from the school of talents.’ Although the earnings varied from province to province, the amounts of money produced were quite astounding. In 1995 women in Harare West Province, which included the city centre and prosperous northern suburbs, produced a modal average of about z$5000 (£365—the equivalent of a white collar salary).
A few made more than z$150,000 (£10,950). ZAOGA took enough money to buy 18 brand new trucks for the Provincial overseers and two lorries.

Once the period of talents is over women are encouraged to continue their production and make money for themselves. Justifying the doctrine to a middle class and student audience (see below) Ezekiel Guti’s wife, Eunor, told the gathering: ‘So have I been brain-washing you? My order from the boutique won’t go when talents finishes.’

The second doctrine, Spirit of Poverty, became prominent in the mid 1980s but its roots are far deeper. The notion that a believer remained poor because of their spiritual condition was first expressed in the movement’s sermons preached in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s. The formal doctrine then evolved by appropriating and re-working various American prosperity gospel teachings. As Gifford observes, these teachings first made themselves felt in Zimbabwe in Reinhard Bonnke’s Harare Fire Campaign of 1986 (1987). However they were rapidly discredited in the eyes of the majority of black born-again Christian leaders due to Campaign’s association with Ralph Mahoney. On his return to the USA, Mahoney published a right wing tirade about Zimbabwe, characterising it as a corrupt communist tyranny which paled in contrast to ‘Christian’ South Africa. Outraged by this attack, which found its way into the Zimbabwean press, a collection of Zimbabwe’s born-again leaders published a blistering rebuttal in The Herald. The response, which was signed by twelve church leaders representing more than 80% of the born-again community, argued that Mahoney equated ‘western culture plus capitalism with Christianity and [made] communism the enemy of both.’ On Mahoney’s ‘biased [and] ill-informed views on South Africa,’ they wrote ‘It seems to us that standing for one’s dignity and self-identity to your mind turns any black person into a communist that any white person must be helped to eradicate.’

In ZAOGA’s case, the movement chose to appropriate a version of the prosperity gospel more in line with African sentiments. In particular, it drew from the teaching of the black Bahamas-based preacher, Myles Munroe. Munroe, a graduate of Oral Roberts University, propagated a message which drew heavily from his interaction with the American Civil Rights movement. His own particular brand of the prosperity gospel stressed that God had given dominion of the world to humankind, who were responsible for realising their own ‘dreams.’ Munroe placed a strong emphasis on black pride and self-actualization. His teachings were immediately seized upon by ZAOGA members when
he first encountered the movement at its 1985 International Deeper Life Conference. Munroe’s Dominion doctrine was reworked into the evolving Spirit of Poverty doctrine.

In 1995 the Spirit of Poverty was expounded upon a great deal during talents; it was also preached widely by the movement’s evangelists on crusades throughout the year and reproduced by pastors, elders and deacons at ordinary church meetings. Fundamentally, the doctrine entails a wide ranging assault on ‘tradition.’ While most pentecostal churches demonise ancestor veneration and spirit possession, (see Marshall 1994; Maxwell 1997; Meyer 1992; van Dijk 1992) ZAOGA’s attack is far more systematic and wide ranging. ZAOGA argues for a complete break from tradition—not just the world of spirits—but the whole culture of commensality. Communal rituals associated with rites of passage; defence against illness, infertility and misfortune; or the organisation and successful practice of agriculture are completely shunned.

The teaching can be summarised as follows. Africans stay poor, not because of structural injustice, but because of a Spirit of Poverty. Even though they are born again, only their soul has in fact been redeemed. Ancestral spirits, along with their pernicious influence, remain in their blood. These ancestors were social and economic failures during their own lifetimes. Believers’ male ancestors led lives of violence, indolence, drunkenness, polygamy, ancestor veneration and witchcraft: lives of waste and poverty, rather than accumulation. And these ancestral spirits account for the precarious existence of Zimbabweans in the age of liberal Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs). They explain the experience of never being able to accumulate: the new shirts that are burnt by the iron; the car that always breaks down; the money vanishing from a person’s pockets with little sense of where it goes. Misfortune is passed from generation to generation via demonic ancestral spirits.

In a sense, the proponents of ZAOGA’s Spirit of Poverty doctrine are preaching what older pentecostal missionaries taught about African culture and religion (Maxwell 1997; Burke 1996, 52-56). The movement’s teaching is, in part, an inheritance from its Apostolic Faith Mission forebears (Maxwell 1998). However, as we shall see, ZAOGA’s evangelists and preachers demonise tradition with more effect because their characterisations stem from first hand experience. The origins of the doctrine, along with the talents teaching, also lie in the social sources out of which the movement arose. They derive from a collection of gifted, but marginalised urban artisans struggling for recognition and respectability. These ZAOGA pioneers’ teaching of thrift, temperance
and industry, and their invocation to turn away from corrupting habits of the past were part of what James Campbell, in his brilliant study of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America and South Africa, calls a programme of 'racial vindication' (Campbell 1994: 26-7, 64). Exemplary new lives lived by believers would hasten their full inclusion in white dominated Rhodesian society. Soon after returning from the USA in 1972, Guti made a concerted effort to teach manners and mores, diet and hygiene to his ministers and their wives: they were taught how to 'make a party'; how to address 'higher people'; how to organise a bank account; how to exercise chivalry towards women. He also organised the first International Deeper Life Conference and invited white American speakers. At the same time, economic advance through penny capitalism in the 1960s and early 1970s acted as a compensation for many who saw their political aspirations blocked by an intransigent and seemingly intractable white minority government.

In Zimbabwe in the 1990s the teachings have a different meaning. The working of talents resonates with ideas of self-reliance, indigenous business and black empowerment propounded by the ruling party and state controlled media. At the same time Spirit of Poverty successfully explains and exploits popular insecurities. In rural areas, it explains to the male household-head why his daughters remain unmarried, or are sent home by dissatisfied husbands demanding the return of bride-price. It explains why a family is prone to domestic violence, or a plague of avenging spirits—ngozí. The household is simply perpetuating a downward trajectory begun by their progenitors. The aspiring middle classes are thwarted in a different manner by bad ancestral blood. They may be well-off but their children will be dull and need expensive extra schooling. Alternatively, they may fall ill and incur big health bills. Spirit of Poverty doctrine also merges with another ZAOGA teaching, Third World Mentality, to explain Zimbabwe's plight in global terms:

Any nation or country which worships idols or animals will have problems. Go to any nation where they worship idols or cows, these countries have problems and are poor. I say lets start with God. A nation that puts its trust in witchcraft, must know that witchcraft leads to laziness, hatred and killing one another...

This is the problem with the third world (Guti 1989: 24).

In a similar manner to the young puritan preachers whom Van Dijk studied in Blantyre, Malawi (1992: 168-69), those who teach Spirit of Poverty in Zimbabwe use strongly anti-rural sentiments. It is almost as if rural equates with evil. The communal lands are the places where demonic ancestral spirits originate, polluted substances are manufactured, witchcraft is rife and non-believing kin pressure or entice born-
again back into traditional practices. Like the advocates of the English Industrial Revolution (Thompson 1968: 445), pentecostal preachers and evangelists in ZAOGA constantly seek to fashion an image of rural idiocy. To be a ZAOGA pentecostal is to be urban and modern. In the 1980s and 1990s the movement has made a concerted effort to expand into the rural areas but this is viewed as mission work from an urban base.

The doctrine's proponents, evangelists and pastors, are skilled in the principles of stereotyping and ridicule and are masters of acute social observation:

Your uncle Samanyika, oh, I hate to be called Samanyika. He will call you to go with him to the bar. What's the name of the bar here? He will walk like this, this [comic walk swinging his hips which prompts cheering and laughing] stopping every woman he meets on the way. That's the same demon in you. He is married to eight wives, but still not satisfied...

Right now you have a house in the suburbs, but we see you here [Sakubva] often, why? Coz your girl friend lives here. In her little room, there is no rocking chair, only bricks. She doesn't have a cooker, but only a primer stove. But you spend the whole night there, sitting on the bricks and smoke coming into your eyes from the primer stove. You are not doing anything about it. But in your own house, you know you have a rocking chair where you can sit.³³

You are a Father, you work to earn money. It goes nowhere. You are hopeless... Spirits spoil marriages, they make your wife look like a donkey so that you don't feel for her... Spirits of ancestors cause ignorance. When you are asked what is one plus one you say six.²⁴

The proponents assert with equal force that the old solutions no longer work: 'your body is covered with a n'anga's [traditional healer] cuts. You are losing blood every day but nothing is happening.'²⁵ The traditional healer's seance and the possession dance are part of the evangelists' comic repertoire. But just as ineffective is the independent church prophet with his holy water.²⁶ Even the more recent solutions, proffered by the aid agencies prove useless:

People are trying to give help to third world persons. They find third world persons do not prosper. Money is being poured in a bucket. It's being poured in a bucket that has holes. Nothing is being achieved. Billions and billions of dollars have been poured out. Hallelujah! But nothing is happening in Africa. Africa is remaining under the Spirit of Poverty.²⁷

Nevertheless there is deliverance. It is received in two ways. First, Christians are taught that they are freed through giving. Blessings come through giving. ZAOGA pentecostals do not only work talents, but, in keeping with mainstream pentecostalism, they also pay tithes. Moreover, during meetings they are encouraged to give spontaneously love-offerings and freewill-offerings. The former are a reward, or perhaps
more accurately, a tax levied from an assembly during the visit of an overseer or itinerating pastor. They are a supplement to his salary. Freewill offerings can be for the orphanages, weddings, funerals, hall hire, evangelistic campaigns, choir-gowns, musical equipment and public address systems—the stuff of church life. Finally there are special gifts—tribute—for Archbishop Guti, one on his birthday, the other for Christmas.

But deliverance is also a process, a drama acted out on the body. At the climax of crusades, or talents meetings, Christians are given the chance to come forward for deliverance from their ancestral spirits. At the height of the 1995-96 talents campaign Eunor Guti, wife of the Archbishop spoke to a gathering of students and middle class ZAOGA members meeting in a humanities lecture theatre of the University of Zimbabwe.28 At the crescendo of her sermon Mrs Guti invited her audience to receive deliverance. There was a mad rush forwards and attendants had to hurriedly pack away the table/altar, chairs and lectern to make room as 90% of those present sought her spiritual remedy. For 15 minutes her team delivered a kneeling crowd four or five rows deep, whilst she continued to recite various phrases into the microphone: ‘deliverance, deliverance, deliverance deliverance in the name of Jesus . . . blood of Jesus, blood of Jesus, blood of Jesus. . . .’ These incantations which were interspersed with tongues [glossolalia] also spoken into the microphone had a mesmerising effect. The exorcists worked at a great pace. Some simply touched the forehead of the client, others grasped the temple firmly moving the head in a circular fashion while gripping the back of the neck. Certain phrases were invoked to hasten deliverance: ‘Out vile spirit . . . release, release, release . . . in the name of Jesus, in the name of Jesus.’ Some of those delivered returned quietly to their seats, others fought with the exorcist, their ancestors unwilling to leave their bodies. Others still were ‘slain in the spirit.’ So overwhelmed were they by the power of the experience that they crawled under chairs or lay on the floor. Some women wept. Parents also presented their children for deliverance, to remove the ancestral scourge from their family once and for all.

**Analysis: The Popular Reception of Talents and Spirit of Poverty**29

The enthusiastic response to Spirit of Poverty by those pentecostals gathered at the University of Zimbabwe was mirrored in many other locations through the county: in Sakubva Stadium in the city of Mutare in the east; in evangelistic crusades at a lumber camp in Charter in
the Chimanimani mountains and on a vlei in the middle class suburb of Chisipite, Harare; in the Revival Centre in Highfields high density suburb.

The success of these doctrines hinges on two interrelated sets of reasons. First, they are effectively ‘marketed’ by those with a keen perception of popular aspiration. Secondly, they work in idioms familiar and accessible to a wide range of Zimbabweans.

ZAOGA projects an image of material success. Its leaders, particularly, Ezekiel Guti, make great play of their international connections (see also van Dijk 1997: 142). Although American influence is publicly castigated, exposure to the American way of life is particularly emphasised. Black America has consistently been represented as a haven of freedom, educational advance and sophistication for southern Africans, its history powerfully idealised by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Campbell 1994). But more recently, the allure of American society owes much to Zimbabweans’ diet of American soaps and films seen on their television screens (Hyslop 1995: 34). The international image of the movement is most prominent in the annual Deeper Life Conference where international pentecostals are invited at the movement’s cost. White speakers and participants at the conference are very significant trophies.

Those pastors gifted in raising money, in putting up buildings, in raising love offerings for their overseers, are rapidly promoted. Throughout the 1980s there occurred an elevation of hard-nosed businessmen into the higher echelons of the leadership. These men were keen to use the movement’s international connections to import goods and resell them at a profit. Their promotion was at the expense of Guti’s co-founders, Raphael Kupara, Abel Sande, Joseph Choto, Priscilla Ngoma and others who were purged, marginalised or out-manoeuvred. The movement’s Business Men’s Fellowship has also grown in prominence. At big events its leaders sit at high table with the Archbishop.

Moreover, a business culture seeps down into the main body of the movement. Young pastors are told to use their first love-offerings to purchase a suit, shirt and tie and new shoes. They are expected to dress smartly like a successful entrepreneur. The language of business has even found its way into services. Thus, God is a good clerk who does not forget the gifts His people offer him. He promotes those who are faithful. His ‘word is good. You can take it to the bank and cash it. Such a business culture makes perfect sense in a voluntarist Christian tradition. In contrast to the older mainline denominations where the clergy are paid a ‘living,’ pentecostal pastors will only eat if they can recruit enough members who are willing to feed them. In a voluntary
system there is a very strong incentive for preachers to build large followings and remain in touch with popular feeling (Bruce 1996: 132).

Other secular practices associated with the handling of money are introduced into the church service. Thus the rituals of giving resemble the practices of tax gathering practised by the colonial state. When making pledges, and certain special offerings, believers are ordered into long lines before the church secretary who records the amount pledged, or given, in a book and supplies the giver with a receipt.

While ZAOGA’s leaders exhibit a conspicuous consumption, legitimated by the prosperity gospel, they attempt to balance it (not always successfully) with a conspicuous charity. In public displays of giving, believers are often lined up to give, obliged to place their notes on a chair, a table, into a piece of cloth, for all to see. There are competitions for individuals and fellowship groups within assemblies to out-give each other in tithes and freewill offerings. In a practice which appears to be a cross between a Shona wedding and an auction, a pastor or overseer will announce a financial need and tout for offerings. The movement’s message is that God will provide for those who give. ‘Our God is a very good God’ Guti continually reminds his audiences. It is noteworthy that many ZAOGA members actually endorse the consumption of Ezekiel Guti, their Armani clad Apostle, who is chauffeured to and from Church in a silver Mercedes. Guti represents collective aspiration. As ZAOGA’s leadership and an influential minority of its membership have prospered they have abandoned much of their social distinctiveness. The former aversion to fancy jewellery, make-up and fancy clothes, which marked out their sectarian status, has given way to embrace the opportunities of the material world.

It appears that Zimbabweans have a far less problematic attitude to consumption than the Ghanian subjects of Meyer’s work (1996), who attribute a fetishistic quality to numerous mass-produced commodities. Zimbabwe’s economic history differs considerably from that of Ghana’s. A settler economy rather than a peasant trade economy, Southern Rhodesia developed a reasonably diverse economic base from the outset rather than a cocoa mono-economy vulnerable to fluctuations in world prices (Austen 1987: chapters 6-10; Burke 1996: chapter 3). Indeed, Southern Rhodesia did not experience a post-war slump like Ghana. The Rhodesian post-war economy initially boomed. After a brief slump in the late 1950s it was forced to diversify further in the face of international sanctions following the Rhodesian Front’s Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 (Burke 1996: chapter 4). Moreover, ZAOGA was born in those urban townships created to
supply labour to the country’s emergent secondary manufacturing sector. Many Zimbabweans do not find commodities alien, or indeed scarce. 34 Thus Zimbabwean pentecostals seek to accumulate clothes and luxury goods as quickly as possible. They are a sign of God’s blessing. It is only that the droughts, unemployment and structural adjustment of the 1990s hamper the process of accumulation.

It is in this struggle for commodities that contemporary pentecostalism differs from the types of ascetic protestantism that Weber and his interlocutors have written about. Though some Calvinist protestants did make personal fortunes, they did so only because of the unintended consequences of their religious doctrines on lifestyle. Calvinist theologians did encourage virtues consistent with the spirit of capitalism but they usually defined these virtues in religious terms. Calvinist protestants were to be diligent because it enhanced assurance of election, or because God commanded it. Calvinist leaders remained unhesitating in their condemnation of avarice and materialism (Weber [1930] 1990: chapter 5; G Marshall 1980: 30, 69, 224). Closer to the case in hand, Zambia’s Jehovah Witnesses do exhibit a similar capacity to accumulate as pentecostals and practice a similar policy of repudiating close bonds with non-believing kinsfolk (Long 1968: 222). However, in distinction to modern pentecostals they also cultivate a detached attitude to wealth, their focus being on preparation for ‘the new life ahead’ (216). Contemporary Zimbabwean pentecostals have no such qualms about the acquisition of wealth. Accumulation is the formal doctrine of the church and is preached with great regularity. If a believer is not accumulating something is wrong with his or her faith. 35 Thus while all of these forms of protestantism created or create diligent, sober and hard-working converts, ZAOGA’s version of modern pentecostalism is not, especially ascetic (Weber [1930] 1990: chapter 5).

Herein lies what is new about contemporary Zimbabwean pentecostalism: its concern to come to terms with the ‘carriers’ of modernities and some (but not all) of their values. 36 While its rejection of philosophical and moral pluralism, and its emphasis on a sacred text and transcendent experience stands it in opposition to modernities’ values, its repudiation of traditional hierarchies and legitimations places it four square in the modern world.

The forerunners of the modern Zimbabwean pentecostal movement, the older pentecostal denominations such as the Apostolic Faith Mission or Bhengu’s South African Assemblies of God, did preach an explosive message ‘blasting away not only old values but old networks’ (Mayer 1961: 205, Maxwell 1998). But these movements had a ‘world rejecting’
orientation, appealing to a small minority of the poor. ZAOGA is a mass-based movement which embraces the modern world. As well as teaching Spirit of Poverty, Guti has written well over a dozen short tracts which instruct his followers on everything from dress sense and bathroom decorum to a successful sex life and female orgasm (Guti, 1993, 1994(b), 1995(b)). Guti is the archetypal modern Zimbabwean man. From a peasant background he has made his way through the minefield of modernities and is now helping others to find their way too. ZAOGA-style pentecostalism has multiple discourses and its business culture and fixation with commodities shapes lives as fundamentally as scripture itself. After Guti and his wife, the next most influential person in ZAOGA is Christopher Chadoka. Chadoka, an ex-businessman, devotes most of his sermons to preaching about money, often with little recourse to scripture. He is, of course, considered an 'anointed man.'

Zimbabweans also rushed forwards for deliverance at ZAOGA meetings because Spirit of Poverty teaching effectively makes sense of their economic insecurities. Economic liberalisation means that many Zimbabweans do find it very difficult to keep money in their pocket. With inflation running at an average of 26.3%, 1990-96, (Stoneman 1997: 2) money does indeed appear to run though a person’s fingers. By offering explanation in terms of spiritual forces, the Spirit of Poverty doctrine works in idioms Zimbabweans are familiar with and understand. Indeed this reflexive use of religious idioms is nothing new in Zimbabwe’s religious history. During the liberation war, Shona spirit mediums—masvikiro—offered rural Zimbabweans conceptual control of political mobilisation by explaining it in terms of idioms employed by royal ancestor cults (Lan 1985). While the spiritual explanation ignores the macro and the socio-structural explanation it does at least focus the pentecostal’s attention on how changes in personal and family lifestyle can enhance social and economic mobility. Furthermore, the majority of ZAOGA members view the pervading political climate as bleak. While their leadership attempt to court the upper echelons of the ruling party, they share with the majority of the electorate a disaffection with the political process which was marked by their non-participation in the 1996 Presidential Elections. Hence it is not surprising that ZAOGA members choose to refocus their hopes and creative energies on economic advance as they did in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Spirit of Poverty doctrine first emerged.
Limits to the Spirit of Poverty and Talents Doctrines

The doctrines of Spirit of Poverty and Talents advanced by ZAOGA's leaders and teachers are pervasive but by no means hegemonic. They have been subverted and critiqued by a number of different constituencies. The origins of the contestation lie in changing class relations within the movement. As noted above, the church was founded by and amongst artisans living in Highfields Township in the 1960s. In the 1990s the movement's leaders, and many of those early members, have migrated across the railway tracks to the former white suburbs, or have made a shorter journey into the former coloured suburbs. In the process ZAOGA has attracted a larger white-collar membership and a collection of businessmen. Yet at the same time the movement as a whole has expanded its base amongst the urban poor and, latterly, the peasantry. A good illustration of this expansion across class-lines is the make-up of the original church in Highfields. There, the movement has expanded from one to 10 assemblies but the early members who now act as elders and deacons live in the former coloured suburbs of Waterfalls and Hatfield and commute in on Sundays in their cars. In a sense, the movement has become a microcosm of wider society and shares many of its tensions.

It is clear from the hundreds of letters Guti receives each year from ordinary church members that the majority do not so much seek prosperity but security, 'to stay well at home'—*kugara zvakanaka kumusha.* They look to the movement, and Guti in particular, for protection from *ngozi* avenging spirits, *chikwambo* witchcraft, and for fertility, healing, success in public examinations, jobs, repaired marriages. For many, ZAOGA stands in a trajectory of Central African personal security movements, providing good fortune and preventing misfortune (De Cremer, Fox and Vansina 1976; Maxwell 1995). Hence their goals are at some variance with a leadership and some members in the low density suburbs who are more gripped by unmediated versions of the American prosperity gospel.

There is also a growing perception that the leadership, the Archbishop, his overseers and favoured few administrators, have in fact lined their own pockets at the expense of the pastors and membership. It is argued that Guti, in particular, has used the church to promote his family's interests and those of his Ndau ethnic group. Guti and some of his henchmen have fallen foul of a moral economy operating within the movement (Marshall 1994: 230) which appears to be a 'reinvention of traditional cultural constraints' (Burke 1996: 187) on accumulation.
Though believers are not supposed to be ‘stingy,’ neither are they supposed to be greedy. A leader’s legitimacy rests on keeping his/her accumulation in balance with the fortunes of their members. In 1996 there was a widely felt sense that the leadership had overstretched the mark.40

This perception is most widely felt by pastors and evangelists. While Guti receives millions from the church in Christmas and Birthday gifts, many remain as poor as church-mice on allowances of z$200—z$500 per month (£15.00—£37.00). Those pastors fortunate enough to be leading a rich congregation are well looked after but others struggle. One church worker ruefully cited the scripture, ‘don’t muzzle an ox while it threshes’ and protested that he had certainly not been delivered from the spirit of poverty. Shona patriarchy has been effectively reproduced in the church structures.41 Wealth and power move up the leadership hierarchy with great rapidity. Young male pastors are politically neutralised because they are so reliant on the church for their livelihoods. They live in church accommodation and the movement pays their lobola—bride-price—and finances their weddings. The opportunity for social advancement is also restricted. Despite the movement’s international image, the opportunity of escape into the world for access to education and foreign exchange is restricted. Ezekiel and Eunor Guti have a separate office, staffed by family and trusted friends, which controls the movement’s international relations. Opportunities to speak and study in the west are monopolised by the leadership, and international speakers visiting conventions are strictly chaperoned so that young pastors cannot ask them for bursaries and bible school places.42 Those who make it overseas are often overseers’ children. Nowhere is the hierarchy of the movement more explicit than at weddings where the leadership quite literally leave with the biggest share of the cake.

Popular resentment is expressed obliquely. First, as in many oppressive organisations, rumour is rife. While overseers remain too powerful to accuse directly, it is rumoured that they use talents money to feather their own nests. Some church members complain that position in church no longer follows holiness but material wealth. It is alleged that certain businessmen have been rapidly promoted despite private lives which fall short of pentecostal expectations.

There are also various theological critiques. Most significant is the clash of the prosperity gospel with an older populist pentecostalism which ‘values the socially humble person as more receptive to the gospel’ (Freston 1995: 124) and places a greater emphasis on suffering as a necessary part of the believer’s life. This populist tradition is advanced by the older pastors who joined the movement in the 1960s and 1970s
when it was more township-based. These older hands express both bewilderment and disquiet at the preaching of a newer ‘soft and smooth’ Christianity. Others make a theological critique on the basis of more orthodox evangelical doctrine. They argue that the Spirit of Poverty teaching suggests that Christ has done ‘an imperfect job of redemption.’ Others are highly critical of the personality cult cultivated by Guti which often confuses or merges his identity with that of Christ. In this context orthodox Christological sentiments take on an almost subversive quality. Finally, there has also been a good deal of criticism of the method of exorcism used by some Spirit of Poverty proponents. Student members of ZAOGA present at the meeting at the University of Zimbabwe, mentioned above, were outraged by the propensity of some exorcists to shake the head of their client until they fainted with dizziness. According to the students this made the exorcists no better than the healer-prophets of the Vapostori movement who allegedly use the same bogus technique.

In the daily struggles of local assemblies, challenges to the Spirit of Poverty doctrine take a variety of forms. In one middle class assembly in central Harare those elders who were aggressive advocates of a conspicuous charity were edged out by young professionals who found their behaviour distasteful. In the high density suburb in Harare South Province, elders and deacons organised a petition against their ‘materialistic and greedy’ pastor. The document which was submitted to Archbishop Guti, over the head of the Provincial Overseer, complained that ‘most of the time nowadays his sermons are interjected by his intended plans for a car . . . stands [for housing] and other physical attributes . . . He insists on being given cash for transport and love offerings, things which the Christians should voluntarily give. . . .’

At national level there was a remarkable development in 1996 with the emergence within the movement of a secret 5th column called TPZ—Think Progressive ZAOGA. This was a predominantly lay initiative: an informal collection of disgruntled young professionals who went to the popular monthly magazine, Parade, with details of corruption within the leadership. It is widely believed that TPZ has a strong basis in ZAOGA’s Post Graduate Association. This group of young professionals are most cushioned from economic deprivation, less in need of deliverance from their past. Independent from the church hierarchy, they are at liberty to make their grievances known. Moreover their experience of interdenominational Christianity at the University Christian Union group and through travel gives them alternative theological perspectives. Some of the strongest advocates of an assertive civil
society are found amongst the University’s academic staff and their ex-
students. It is hardly surprising that these democratic and egalitarian
tendencies reproduce themselves within ZAOGA and that they emerge
out of the movement’s rich associational life.

Conclusions

Returning first to the question of pentecostalism’s relation to eco-

nomic advancement, it is clear they do go together, although there is

no direct correlation. Most contemporary Zimbabwean pentecostals, are

not solely motivated by economic gain. Like their Puritan ancestors

(Lamont 1996: chapter 7; Seaver 1985: 77-78, 122-24), and unlike their

more aberrant leaders, African and American, their tendency to accu-
mulate is trammelled by other more fundamental biblical doctrines like

tithing and basic Christian charity.

Turning more specifically to ZAOGA, in many respects the move-

ment has become a victim of its own success. David Martin identifies the
tension inherent in expanding pentecostal movements: ‘Much depends
on the balance which pentecostalism maintains between its ability to
expand among the masses, by remaining of the masses, and its ability
to advance their condition. If the former remains powerful the latter
must operate at the margin’ (1990: 232). The social mobility ZAOGA
engenders has helped create a small second generation of young pro-
fessionals, and attracted others, who are now crying out for reform.
But they may not be as successful as they hope. It is true that most
Zimbabweans are not getting richer. Inflation continues to increase
along with unemployment as the gap between rich and poor grows ever
wider. Since 1995 there have been waves of strikes by civil servants, doc-
tors and nurses, construction workers and security guards. Nevertheless,
as an explanation for, and response to, misfortune, Spirit of Poverty
continues to have great appeal. It does distort the gospel of the crucified
saviour (Northcott 1990) and it might not be as conceptually pleasing
as socio-structural analysis is to secular social scientists or liberation
theologians. But Gifford’s dismissal of pentecostalism in favour of Latin
American style liberation thereby misses the point that pentecostalism
does enable ordinary Zimbabweans to face painful social and economic
transitions (Gifford 1987 & 1991). For many Zimbabweans it provides
a framework with which to respond to the pressures of modernisation.
For others it offers guidelines for material success. For those living on
the margins of poverty pentecostalism’s emphasis on renewing the fam-
ily and protecting it from alcohol, drugs and sexual promiscuity at least
stops them from slipping over the edge. While liberation theology promises to pull people down into violent struggles, of which Zimbabweans have already had enough, pentecostal practice at least offers them some realizable advance in their livelihoods.

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NOTES

1. This paper was given at the International Conference on the Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights, University of Zimbabwe, 9th-13th September 1996 and the Workshop on 'African Pentecostalism at Home and Abroad,' Manchester University, 10 April 1997. I am grateful to John Peel, Richard Werbner and Paul Freston for comments and subsequently to Jocelyn Alexander for her editing. The research was funded by the Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and the Economic and Social Research Council (grant R000235975).

2. The scholarly response to Weber's thesis was considerable. Some of the more well known works are: Tawney 1926; Giddens 1990; Hill 1958 & 1964; Marshall 1980. For a more recent response, see Lamont 1996.


4. Field work was carried out in three locations: Highfields, high density suburb, Harare; Avenues, a low density suburb in central Harare; and Katerere in the rural north-east. I also followed two crusade teams as they moved around Zimbabwe and made brief studies of the movement's churches in South Africa and Mozambique.

5. In Cabo Delgado Province, Mozambique, the movement takes a predominantly rural form amongst the Makonde.

6. ZAOGA has its own official histories which are auto-hagiographies by the leader, Ezekiel Guti, or hagiographies commissioned by him: Guti 1989 & 1995; Erwin n.d.; Takavara n.d..


8. ZAOGA Archives, Waterfalls (henceforth ZAW) file, Statistics, Target 2000 Church Research Form 1995. This is a serious exaggeration. In 1994 ZAOGA had 125,889 committed members. There are numerous others in assemblies (perhaps two thirds) who do not take out membership. The movement is probably numerically as large as Zimbabwe's Catholic Church but by no means as powerful. ZAW, file, Statistics, Central Statistics 1994.


10. A striking comparison is the Brazilian based Universal Church. See Freston 1996.


12. It is clear that Guti learnt a good deal from his association with Bhengu's movement in the 1960s. See Mayer 1961: chapter 12.

13. Discussion with Mrs Manzou (Guti's sister), Mutare, 31 October 1995.


15. For example, ZAW, file, Histories, 'Not I but Christ' chapter 16, unpublished ms. ca. 1977 & Ezekiel Guti, Sermon, 10th June 1979.

16. Bonnke did conduct crusades earlier in the 1980s but these had a far lower profile.


18. The letter dated 9 March 1987, was published in The Herald on the 19th March. The letter was signed by leaders of some of Zimbabwe's largest born-again churches: Ezekiel Guti of ZAOGA, Langton Kupara of the Apostolic Faith Mission, Richmond Chiudza of the Glad Tidings Fellowship. The letter was penned by Ngwisa Mkandla of Faith Ministries. With his focus restricted to the agency of predominantly white American and South African preachers Gifford failed to grasp the significance of the black response to Mahoney which was animated by a Zimbabwean nationalism still very pervasive in the mid 1980s. He merely footnotes the African response (1991: 79 fn. 82).
19. The Mahoney issue was a cause of regret and reflection within ZAOGA. ZAW, file, Sermons, Ezekiel Guti, 'Understanding the Third World Mentality,' 10 April 1989.


21. Other black proponents of the prosperity gospel were Bertril Baird and James Bell from Trinidad. Interviews, Ronnie Meek, Smyrna, Tennessee, USA, 24 April 1997; Gayle Erwin, Cathedral City, California, USA, 29 April 1997.


26. Ibid.

27. Sermon, Eunor Guti, Mt Pleasant Big Sunday, University of Zimbabwe, 8 October 1995.

28. Ibid.

29. For comparisons regarding the prosperity gospel in Asia see Northcott 1990.

30. My research shows that although African autonomy has been a paramount concern there has been a good deal of unacknowledged American input into the movement.


32. This idea of God promoting his faithful was extremely prevalent.


34. Zimbabweans have, however, exhibited a fascinating suspicion towards the material form of money itself, particularly with changes in the style of currency, (Burke 1996: 212).

35. While urging people to give towards the costs of a Benny Hinn Healing Crusade hosted by ZAOGA, Eunor Guti told the crowds that they remained poor because they were not generous enough, Rufaro Stadium, 28 February 1996.

36. For a useful synthesis of work on the meaning of modernity see essays by Hunter and Sampson in Sampson, Samuel and Sugden eds., 1994. By 'carrier' I mean those institutions such as the modern state, modern technologies, industrial capitalism in which the values of modernity are embedded. See Sampson 1994.

37. I am grateful to Ruth Marshall for discussion of this point.

38. When defending Guti's nepotism to a journalist from Parade, Chadoka took a precedent from the world of business 'If we look at all these companies, are there no managing directors' relatives?' Parade, August 1996.


41. On Shona patriarchy see Beach 1994.


43. 'The Pastor,' memorandum to Ezekiel Guti, 22 February 1996. This document is in my personal possession.

44. Parade, August 1996 & September 1996.