Chapter 1

Christian and Cultural Warfare in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, 1890–1990

> The Protestant missionaries who took their Bibles to Africa in the nineteenth century . . . represent in the most acute form the prescriptions of a faith and the spirit of an age. They came from every white nation whose social and moral values had been sculpted by the descendants of the Christian Reformation in the sixteenth century. They came, significantly, in proportions approximating to purely national instincts for expansion and appetites for colonialism. Of these missionaries, it was the men and women representing the British societies who bore most of the burdens in the nineteenth century, who took most of the spoils, who were supported most extensively by their kinsmen at home. Much of Africa as we know it today, to a degree which cannot yet be assessed, is their legacy.—Geoffrey Moorhouse[1]

Between 1890 and 1990 three forces collided in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe: colonialism (1890–1979), church councils (conciliarism),[2] and two liberation wars or Chimurenga (1896–97 and 1970s) which ended with a treaty in 1979. Rhodesia was the name British invaders gave a land-locked area of

1. Moorhouse, *The Missionaries*, 18.

2. The word "conciliarism" is used here as a convenient short-hand term for the phenomenon of national and international councils of churches in the twentieth century, rather than in its narrower sense of a fourteenth- to sixteenth-century movement within the Catholic Church, or of a particular theory of church government.

southern Africa just north of the British-Afrikaner colony of South Africa.[3] British and American Christian missions contested or joined forces to proclaim the gospel and obtain a share of the land Cecil Rhodes took by force from Africans for his British South Africa Company (BSAC) in the name of Queen Victoria in 1890. By accepting land and financial grants from the BSAC, Christian missions, including the London-based Salvation Army, were entwined in political and cultural intrigues to further their religious and humanitarian causes, often to their credit, but often to their shame.

The main subject of this history is The Salvation Army, a British mission whose "pioneer column," mimicking the name Rhodes gave his military invasion force in 1890, arrived at Fort Salisbury in Mashonaland in 1891 from South Africa. In this period Christian missions were subsumed in an imperial state that both aided and stunted their work. From 1891 to 1980, the colonial period, the Salvation Army interacted with the state in the same manner as other missions. It sought land and subsidies from the government for its churches, clinics, and schools. It generally shared cordial relations with other missions, Roman Catholic and Protestant, and with white settlers. As the colonial era drew to a close in Africa in the 1950s to 1980, the Army tried to maintain apolitical neutrality during an independence war that fused in some minds, especially Americans', with an international "Cold War" conflict with international communism.

The United Kingdom, United States, United Nations, African front-line states, and Eastern European and Asian communist-bloc nations all had a political interest in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Christian conciliar movements, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Christian Council of Rhodesia (CCR), played roles that some Salvation Army leaders saw as overtly political as well as humanitarian. As a result, in the late 1970s the Army dissolved its conciliar relations with the national church coalition (RCC), and then with the World Council (WCC) in the 1980s.

For some twenty-five years beginning in the 1960s there was some disagreement between pro- and anti-conciliar movement factions of Salvation Army leaders in London, New York, and other nations. American leaders asked leaders in the rest of the Army's then eighty-six-nation ranks to withdraw the Army from the World Council of Churches, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. Their reason was the WCC's tendency not to acknowledge a "Cold War" between the West and Communist bloc nations. I propose to examine the three forces—colonialism, conciliarism, and the

3. Names for this area of Southern Africa changed after the arrival of the British South African Company (BSAC) in 1890 from Mashonaland, Manicaland, and Matabeleland to "Rhodesia," which became "Zimbabwe" in 1980. I will use the name appropriate for the period that I am discussing.

Cold War (communism vs. the West) in the context of the effect they had on Salvationists in Rhodesia in the 1890s and then again in the 1970s–80s when Shona and Matabele (Ndebele speaking) tribes initiated two *Chimurenga* (risings). In the second of these, the Patriotic Front (PF), an alliance of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) of Joshua Nkomu and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Robert Mugabe, gained support from Eastern European and Asian communist nations in their struggle against minority white rule in the 1960s and 1970s. Churches, both in Rhodesia and beyond, had to choose sides.

Rhodesia was a British colony from 1890 to 1980. Until 1923 Britain ruled through the British South Africa Company. After 1923 Britain ruled through a white settler regime until 1965, when Ian Smith's Rhodesian Front Party made a Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) from Britain. Britain did not accede to this change and worked, without success, to alter minority white rule. From 1890 Africans did not accept British rule, but challenges were muted by armed force.

In the first *Chimurenga*, a Shona warrior killed the Salvation Army's first "martyr" and member of its pioneer party, Captain Edward T. Cass. The killing took place in the Mazoe Valley north of Fort Salisbury in 1896.[4] In a second *Chimurenga*, Ndebele guerrillas killed two British Salvationist women teachers at the Army's Usher secondary school near Figtree, east of Bulawayo, in 1978. In his 2009 history of the Salvation Army, Henry Gariepy describes the latter event under the heading "Modern-Day Martyrs."[5] These deaths form historical bookends to the Army's relations with white settlers and African inhabitants of the British colonial state.

To place inverted commas around "martyr" and "martyrdom," with reference to either Edward Cass in the first *Chimurenga* or Sharon Swindells and Diane Thompson in the second is not to discount either the value of their missionary endeavors or the tragedy of their deaths.[6] Rather, it acknowledges that they died primarily because they were caught up in social, political, and national circumstances wider than simply the defense of their faith per se. At the same time, many African Salvationists died for the same reasons, regarded as "sell-outs" because of their involvement with the Salvation Army, and in some cases specifically because they would not deny their faith. As Major Misheck Nyandoro records, "On occasion, Salvationists

4. Post-majority rule, the spelling of many African place-names has been altered to better approximate their correct pronunciation. Hence "Mazoe" is now "Mazowe." Spelling and place-names current in the times being discussed will be used in this book.

5. Gariepy, *Christianity in Action,* 230.

6. The names of Sharon Swindells and Diane Thompson are enrolled in the Chapel of the Saints and Martyrs of our Time, in Canterbury Cathedral, Kent, England.

were visited by night, ordered to put on their Salvation Army uniform, and then inhumanely beaten or hacked to death."[7] Over four and a half thousand Salvationists were reported to have been killed in the long conflict.[8]

After the Patriotic Front forces of Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo obliged the Rhodesian government to accept a negotiated settlement in 1979, Africans set up their state of Zimbabwe in 1980. As a protest against the Salvation Army's colonial rule from London, in 1981 an estimated 200 African Salvationists marched through the streets of Harare (the new name of the capital, formerly Salisbury), to ask Salvation Army leaders in London to cancel their decision to withdraw the Army from the World Council of Churches. During the conflict the WCC had helped to seal a bond between Christian churches and the new African state by offering humanitarian aid through a Program to Combat Racism. The Salvation Army, mainly its American leaders, saw aid to the Marxist-led movement as aid to atheistic communists. African Salvationists saw the aid as humanitarian-political sympathy for their liberation struggle.

In 1904 Rhodesia's Christian missions had begun a conciliar movement by joining in a Missionary Conference to deal with the government on matters of education and health. This produced comity agreements that determined how missions would divide Rhodesia's districts and land among the Christian denominations. They also encouraged Bible translating that reduced African languages to writing. Africans organized a separate Southern Rhodesia Bantu Christian Conference in 1928. During the Second *Chimurenga* (1964–79) a bi-racial Christian Council of Rhodesia (CCR) with ties to the World Council of Churches tried to stem rising tensions over majority rule and minority rights. The Salvation Army was a reluctant member of the RCC. In 1979 the RCC became the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and joined with the Roman Catholic Church in order to speak with one voice to Prime Minister Ian Smith's government. The ZCC opened ties to the All Africa and British Councils of Churches.

From the late 1960s to 1983 the Salvation Army increasingly disliked what it termed "liberal" tendencies in conciliar organizations. Tensions between the Army and the WCC, RCC, and ZCC strained relations among the Army's international leaders. After the killings at its Usher Institute (girls' school at Figtree near Bulawayo), US Salvation Army leaders reacted

7. Nyandoro, *A Flame of Sacred Love*, 122.

8. Gariepy, *Mobilized for God*, 20, notes that an estimated 4,600 Salvationists, mostly African, also died during the Second *Chimurenga*. However, this figure may have been based on a simple comparison of Salvation Army Soldiers' numbers before and after the *Chimurenga* and does not indicate how many had died, or show responsibility for those deaths.

with outrage to a WCC humanitarian grant to support the Patriotic Front nationalists and urged the Army's leader in London to sever WCC ties. In 1978 General Arnold Brown, a Canadian, suspended the Army's membership and made the split final in 1981. The African Salvationists' reaction to withdrawal was a protest march on the Army's headquarters in Harare to denounce General Brown for leaving an organization that supported their liberation with humanitarian aid. They also opposed the sale of land at Pearson Farm that Cecil Rhodes had given the Army as a patrimony for its African church.

A third force, international communism, supported majority African rule and an end to Western colonialism. Eastern European and Asian Marxist states had armed and trained Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) Shona guerrillas led by Robert Mugabe, and Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) Ndebele forces. African nationalists, including Christians, accepted this support for their struggle. After all, colonial powers did not offer them financial or military aid, although they had assisted the Soviets in World War II. Salvation Army leaders, especially in the U.S., were adamantly anti-communist, all the more so in the wake of the US defeat in Vietnam.

A debate had begun in the 1950s between African Christians and Western missions that had evangelized, taught, and healed them. Ties between white-led missions and colonial governments, dating from 1890, were hard to break and protagonists on neither the Christian right nor the Marxist left would yield to divided loyalties. State treason was religious heresy in much the way it was when Europe's medieval state and church had bonded together. Neither white Rhodesians nor African liberationists would relinquish Euro-Christian or Marxist-nationalist creeds. African Christians who welcomed communist aid for their nationalist cause did so for reasons similar to the Americans' acceptance of French aid in their 1776–81 revolution.

Prime Minister Ian Smith's Rhodesia Front maintained minority rule up to the day the United Kingdom and United States joined to force Smith to negotiate with African nationalists in 1976 at Geneva. Smith portrayed himself as Christian and staunchly anti-communist. He was upset that churches did not see his regime as a savior of Western Christian civilization. To be Christian was, in his mind, to be white, European, and anti-Marxist. His vague notions of Christian and Marxist ideologies were born in a post-World War II world of dying imperialism. He liked to say that Rhodesians were "more British than the British" in their fight for the empire.[9] But Professor Anthony J. Chennells argues that there were "many more Christians

9. Smith, *The Great Betrayal*, 9.

in the nationalist [African] leadership than there were in [Smith's] cabinet." And that "there is little evidence . . . that white Rhodesians ever perceived themselves as being engaged in some civilizing mission, let alone as agents of Christianity—white missionaries were in fact regarded as dangerous subversives and black Christians appear in many novels as political subversives."[10] Furthermore, Smith was no democrat. "One man one vote" had no part in his political philosophy.

The ideological heritage of Africans, since most had been educated in mission schools, was largely Christian. Which Rhodesian leader—Robert Mugabe, Joshua Nkomo, Methodist Bishop Abel Muzorewa, or Ian Smith—would win the prize as the most Christian? Can there be any doubt that Africans who favored majority rule honored a Western heritage that they had learned in mission-run schools? They were grateful to the Protestant conciliar movement and the Roman Catholic Church for supporting their freedom fight, but they also had a debt to communist benefactors whose military aid helped release them from a white racist regime. Africans were debtors, in St. Paul's words, to "Greek and barbarian," to churches and communists. Many Africans recognized that Christianity, conveyed to them in mission schools, churches, and hospitals, had formed their values, including that of freedom.

After independence in 1980 missionaries learned to work with their schools' African alumni. White Zimbabweans came to terms with church-state and conciliar alliances. But the post-independence period was hard for churches like the Salvation Army which had opposed the independence movement's leaders and had been slow to install African leaders for their churches before 1980. But historically the Army had thrived on adaptability. Fortunately for its mission, its international leaders in London, and its principal source of funds in the US, gradually learned to accept the grace and wisdom of African officers and soldiers.

In the 1890s, the BSAC intrusion meant altered place names, demeaning of native culture, including language and religion, theft of land and minerals, all blessed by Queen Victoria's charter issued to the Company. Britain vested power in Rhodes' BSAC whose interest in Rhodesia was purely financial. He expressed no interest in the natives' welfare. Professor T. O. Ranger observes that "Rhodes' biographers have disputed as to whether he regarded Africans as children or as animals, [and] did not really pay much regard to Africans at all. As a result he felt no need to evolve any continuous native

10. Chennells, "White Rhodesian Nationalism—The Mistaken Years," 124.

policy."[11] Instead Rhodes turned to white settler farmers and miners to rule for him, while he devoted himself to aggrandizing wealth.

With that mercenary goal the BSAC made alliances with white settlers and agencies that would further its end, including Christian missions. Colonizers claimed that their intrusion into African polity and culture was done to give Rhodesia European free enterprise and Christian faith. The mix of those two cultural accoutrements they labelled "Western civilization." The new culture also included proper dress, English language and tea preparation, and Western medicine, drama, music, religious sectarianism, and dance. European settlers dubbed everything African as "heathen" or "pagan" and referred to anything Western, including a capitalist economic system that had commenced only a century earlier, as civilized and Christian.

After the Salvation Army arrived in Mashonaland in 1890, it interacted with the BSAC and white settler governments. In this relationship the Army proved to be impressively imperial, with a pragmatism that mimicked that of Cecil Rhodes. In adjusting to colonial regimes the Army secured its position in relation to those who held state authority.

The Army was not courageous. It took few stands that would antagonize the colonial state. Roman Catholics, Methodists, and even Anglicans were more prone to chastise the state for denying Africans the franchise and for taking African land. The Army was a resilient survivor in the midst of better-heeled missions with better-educated leaders. A few Salvationists showed courage that allowed the Army to claim "martyrs," a claim that it granted only to Europeans. Africans whose courage deserved the appellation "martyr" did not receive it from the Army, either because their views did not coincide with those of the Army's leaders or simply because they were African. What criteria did Army historians and journalists apply to those whom they found to be deserving of an investiture of sainthood? That is the story we begin in 1891 with the initial Salvation Army interaction with Rhodes' BSAC.

11. Ranger, *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–97*, 51–53.