


Chapter 6

“Prayers That Preyed”: Critical Reflections on Robert Martin Gumbura’s Church Saga in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter was motivated by the manifestations and consequences of patriarchal theology testified through the increase in the number of cases in Zimbabwe involving prophets and church leaders accused of sexually abusing their followers after promising to help them out of their problems. The research focuses on the sexual scandals of the founder and leader of Robert Martin Gumbura (RMG) Independent End Time Message Church, Robert Martin Gumbura, who was sentenced to a 40-year prison term in Zimbabwe for sexually abusing four women from his church. The chapter posits that some churches are no longer safe havens for the weak and defenseless women who fall prey to some unscrupulous church leaders such as Robert Martin Gumbura. By using in-depth interviews and documentary analysis and insights from the historical, sociological, and phenomenological approaches, the study established that Robert Martin Gumbura brainwashed some women congregants and threatened to curse them with prayers that would commit them to the devil if they resisted his nefarious demands.

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity is one of the most populous religions the world over. One interesting dimension within Christianity is the shift of the centre of gravity from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere as there are more Christians living in Latin America, Africa and Asia than in the North (Kalu, 2003). Zimbabwe is one of the African countries where Christianity claims the majority of the people. The Pentecostal movement has challenged all other religious forms. However, as churches continue to mushroom in their various forms, transparency and responsible leadership come to the fore in these New Religious Movements. This is testified by a Shona WhatsApp social media message that circulated in 2014 among Zimbabweans saying: “*Vatendi kana muchida kuenda kudenga musango namate church dzesedzese nekuti Satan ane maANGELS akewo saka tangai MAGAYA musati MAKANDIWA mugomba nekuti muno GUMBURA Mwari.*” The message is making a strong statement by playing around semantically with names of some popular church leaders who have many followers in Zimbabwe and beyond. It was also a warning to Christians and non-Christians alike not to fall prey to these leaders of some Pentecostal Churches such as Uebert Angels of Spirit Embassy, Walter Magaya of Prophetic Healing and Deliverance, Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International Church and Robert Martin Gumbura of RMG Independent End Time Message Church. These leaders tend to be cunning to the extent that they take advantage of their devotees’ gullibility where some would believe every word that comes from the ‘Men of God’ without questioning. From among these leaders who are identified in the quotation above, Robert Martin Gumbura of RMG Independent End Time Message Church is at the heart of this study.

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