

Intersectional hermeneutics in Zimbabwe's Anglican Church, Diocese of Harare (2008–2025)

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The Anglican Diocese of Harare (CPCA) church's hermeneutical lenses intersected economic, political and social distress from 2000, with the emergence of Pentecostal denominations and/or ministries birthing new hermeneutics and phenomenon. Zimbabwe experienced unprecedented political tensions, social upheavals and economic downturns. Life values plummeted into social distress. The Church's hermeneutics reacted at that intersection. The period witnessed the proliferation of Pentecostal churches exhibiting Pan-Africanism bent towards advancing the much needed solace and promoting individualistic hope. The churches and ministries introduced the prosperity gospel, one-on-one healing and deliverance, miracle monies and babies, wristband and anointing oils. Their followership surged as congregants felt their socio-economic problems were being addressed. The said congregants flourished because they dovetailed existential and survival needs of citizens within the economic, social or political duress to their hermeneutics. The traditional, communal and sacramental Anglican Church, which upholds the Book of Common Prayer (BCP), the creeds and the 39 articles that inform the theology and hermeneutics, intersected with Pentecostalism and the changing socio-political environment. The church, at the intersection, drifted towards neo-Pentecostalism, undermining the BCP, creeds and the 39 articles. The intersectional hermeneutics inquiry showed diverse dimensional Bible exegesis confirming altered hermeneutics and *modus operandi*. The intersectionality reveals that Pentecostal preachers '*pentecostalised*' Anglican preachers.

Contribution: The article reveals unique drivers to biblical exegesis, theological convulsions to the changing socio-economic changes and changes in religio-political contexts. The article shows how multiple social identities interact with created community complexes.

Keywords: intersectionality; drift; communal; socio-historical; hermeneutics; Anglican Church.

Introduction

The traditional Anglican Diocese of Harare (CPCA) hermeneutical lenses intersected socio-economic and political distress from 2000 to the present, with the emergence of Pentecostal denominations and/or ministries birthing new hermeneutical contours. The hermeneutical lenses of the church reacted to the recessions at that intersection. Zimbabwe experienced unprecedented political tensions, centred on increasing tendencies of authoritarianism on the state and its supporting structures (Kabonga 2020:2), rule of law and election result contestations. The country witnessed social upheavals, rise of unemployment and economic downturns. As a result, the poor became pawns in the hands of the political elite. They became poorer, while the rich became richer and corrupt. Life became a roller coaster of crisis after crisis or struggle after struggle, a free fall state (ICG 2001:ii). The Ubuntu philosophy, 'a person is truly human through others' (Nyabola 2025), lost its centre. Corruption, gullibility, selfish wellness and insincerity spilled into the streets of every institution, private or public. Christian institutions were not spared. The vulnerable faithful congregants were exposed to more insincere pastors and prophets seeking self-extravagance over the gospel of social transformation. The power that be lost their sincerity, social values were compromised and poverty rose sharply. The biblical hermeneutics and the socio, economic and political turbulences intersected, producing new hermeneutical lenses.

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The Anglican Church in Zimbabwe

The Anglican Church came through the exploratory trip of the Anglican missionary George Wyndham Hamilton Knight Bruce. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG), according to Welch (2008:21), offered a grant of 1000 pounds a year for the first 7 years to support missions in Africa. The SPG invited Knight-Bruce to be the first bishop of Mashonaland. The faith settled, supported by colonial politics ideology, after the cleric obtained a concession from Lobengula in 1888. Bishop Knight-Bruce, formerly Bishop of Bloemfontein, South Africa, moved inland and established the first Diocese of Mashonaland (1891) in Salisbury, today Harare. The provincial synod of CPSA in 1888 had accepted the motion and resolved to establish a Diocese in Mashonaland. He founded the mission station in Penhalonga, *Umtali*, Mutare, St. Augustine.

The Anglican Diocese of Harare (CPCA) was formed in 1891, initially as the Diocese of Mashonaland (1891), then the Diocese of Southern Rhodesia (1915) and later reverted to the Diocese of Mashonaland (1952). Today, it is the Diocese of Harare (1980). According to Chawarika (2017:32), the Diocese was an extension of the Diocese of Bloemfontein. It covered Zimbabwe, parts of Mozambique, Botswana and northern South Africa. Currently, the Diocese stretches from Macheke in the East to Chegutu in Mashonaland West. The other stretch is Beatrice in the South, about 40 km from Harare, to Muzarabani in the North. The church has a membership of more than 25 000, with about 80 active clergy.

The European missionaries partnered with colonialism, and at the intersection misread the African religious values, imposing derogatory hermeneutical terms, calling Africans totemists, savages, fetishists or pagans in need of civilisation. Their perceptions, borne out of prejudice, influenced the hermeneutical lenses that contradicted African sociocultural values of Ubuntu. The hermeneutics justified colonialism as a form of reciprocation. Mhuriro (2019:182) said that the missionaries promoted Empire Theology, whose hermeneutics exalted Western culture over African culture. The confrontations and confusions birthed resistant African Independent Churches (AICs) and new hermeneutical lenses to address the socio-economic, religious and political hegemony that the missionary churches failed and *modus operandi* fuelling a multi-religious faith nation. The failure to understand or speak into the local culture fuelled the dichotomy between the mainline missionary churches and the local African churches. The new hermeneutics fuelled the cultural splits.

At this intersection, Christianity and African values met, confronted and challenged the social, religious and relational landscape through the biased hermeneutics in the establishment of Christianity. Nzenza (2012) observed

a deepening crisis in the Christian spiritual identity of the Anglican Church, because of the religious schizophrenia where modes of prayers and players are continually reproduced and new religious movements and prophets arise each day. Nzenza's argument agrees to the impact of the hermeneutics and the resultant crisis that persists.

Hermeneutics of protest and transformation

The Bible, through the persuasions and emphasis of European missionaries, became the ultimate source of hope, inspiration, norms, values and social transformations. In pursuit of belief, the authority and infallibility of the Bible, the book was exalted pre- and post-independence in socio-religious and cultural contexts. The biblical hermeneutics became *sina qua non*, necessary, thus its exegesis. Vengeyi (2013:78) observed that 'the bible in Zimbabwe became a weapon which not only conquers the power of the devil, but any problem as poverty, diseases, or HIV/AIDS'. The Bible for Chitando, Gunda and Kugler (2013b:10) became the repository of the sacred truth; its invocation designed the final truth, fortified the truth and protected those embarking on a journey. With the increase in exposure, the book became an instrument of change, protest and addressing societal ills or promoting an ideology. As such, any scriptural interpretation became authoritative.

The authority of scripture went into the circular courts, where offenders would plead innocence or guilt while holding the Bible in the right hand. Presidents and members of parliament swore holding the Bible. How did the hermeneutics intersect with socio-economic turbulence? The onset of prophetic ministries and churches transported the hermeneutical lenses. Their biblical hermeneutics upheld individualist restoration. Scripture must be authoritative, dictate lives and foster transformation. Any retrogression in life, sickness or distress was a sign of unbelief. However, the kerygma became more egocentric and self-fulfilling.

Hermeneutics and intersectional hermeneutics

What does hermeneutics mean? Gadamer (2009:2) said 'Hermeneutics is a practice, and the art of understanding'. Coggins and Houlden (1990:283) define hermeneutics 'as a theory of interpretation and an art of understanding any written text'. Hermeneutics becomes an art of scripture interpretation that seeks to make sense of any text for the people in a given context. Thus, any hermeneutical lenses, the transmissive optical device, are always contextual, initiative-taking and reactive. The hermeneutical lenses find wings in socio-external circumstances amid human desperations. Any hermeneutical lenses herald new contours, programmes, doctrines and practices. The preacher speaks into the prevailing circumstances.

How does intersectional hermeneutics operate? The intersectional hermeneutics analyses the resultant impact at the intersection of class struggles, racial discriminations or ideologies. In this context, it is the intersection of socio-political changes, the rise of Pentecostalism with the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Harare. One wonders whether, in a religious context, this reflects God finding relevance in the life struggles and challenges of communities. The intersectionality of the hermeneutical lenses within a given *Sitz im Leben* [setting in life] births a new phenomenon with contours and hermeneutical lenses, thus making biblical hermeneutics relevant to the community.

Understanding Anglican hermeneutical lenses

The Anglican Church's hermeneutical theology and story, since 2000, is no exception to being reactive, initiative taking and contextual. Traditionally, the Anglican Church scriptural hermeneutics are sacramental or mysterious, espoused in the community through the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) shapes the 39 Articles of Faith, the creeds and the fundamental declarations. The Parliamentary *Act of Uniformity of 1552* created the BCP. The Act required all clergy to conform and administer sacraments in the prescribed manner. Sermons for the parishes came from the same source, pushing identity. The Act uniformised clergy practices, enforced religious conformity and suppressed dissent.

The theology emerged out of the shifting theology and politics of 16th-century Europe and from Reformation (Spencer & Galgalo 2023:1). The political needs and ambitions of a succession of monarchs from Henry VIII, Edward VI, Elizabeth I and the Parliament of Charles II – and the evolving theological convictions of the leaders of their national church, Thomas Cranmer, John Jewel and Richard Hooker – were catalysts for shaping the church's identity. As the Anglican Church spread its wings globally, its theology became local and contextualised, in Zimbabwe, decolonising from its colonial masters.

What were the theological tenets that convulsed with the coming of Pan-African Pentecostals? The Book of Common Prayer (BCP) shapes the theology and belief of Anglicans through structured liturgical worship, expressing belief, lost centrality in the church. The sacraments diminished in relevance. Sacrament, from the Greek word *mysterion*, refers to a sacred and mysterious sign to convey grace to souls. These include confession, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, ordination and the unction of the sick. Sacraments reflect the theology, identity and hermeneutical stance of the church.

Anglican hermeneutical lenses drifted from heaven ward to earthly prosperity gospel, from closed walls to the mountains and from prayer book-centred prayers to individualistic prayers. The hermeneutical lenses introduced a clergy-centred approach; posters depicting the parish of priests and

photos of Rev. & Mrs ... of all-night, deliverance services, atypical of Pentecostal style surfaced. The marketing drive of the programmes resembled circular advertising. The back-to-sender and prophecy motifs entered the sanctuary. As the political turbulent winds blew, the winds catapulted prophetic and deliverance ministries, akin to *sangomas*, so were the hermeneutics contours. The winds ushered Pentecostal players amid the socio-economic and political declines.

This led to research interest to explore the understanding of the hermeneutics of intersection, where the Anglican hermeneutical lenses nuances with the socio-economic and political realities. How do Anglican congregants relate with the neo-Anglican hermeneutical lenses in the unpredictable and unstable socio-political environment intersected with the rise of neo-pentecostalism 2008 context to the present? How is the episcopacy or synodical model inherited impacted? The neo-Anglican teaching should be interpreted from the financial pressure, the surrounding environment pressure or the new-faith expectation pressure. The Pentecostal phenomenon was a breeze to distressed citizens. The individual exegetes watched the developments and patched the Pentecostal hermeneutical lenses with the new phenomenon in their traditions.

Hermeneutics of intersectionality in Zimbabwe

The period from 2008, which amplified the 'unending crisis' (Manyonganise 2022:3), witnessed the formation of the new Pentecostal denominations and/or ministries, 'initiated by young, predominantly male charismatic leaders' (Chitando et al. 2013a:153), such as Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International Church (UFIC), Eubert Angel Mudzaniri, Tawonga Utawashe, Walter Magaya of Prophetic Healing and Deliverance (PHD) ministries, Passion Java, Apostle Chiwenga, Paul Sanyangore and Pastor Freddy.

As this happened in the Christian arena, we acknowledge the growing cases of seeking a quick fix through other means. Popular is the rise of traditionalists, such as Sekuru Mudungwe, Manjuzu and many other *sangomas* – *nzujuju* [fetishism] in Zimbabwe. Young entrepreneurs like Genuis Kadungure (Ginimbi) and other social media personalities took the storm with unknown sources of businesses (Zhakata 2025). The economy went into recession: shops emptied, schools closed and hospitals ran out of no medicine. Many Zimbabweans left the country for greener pastures in the region or internationally as economic and political refugees or asylum seekers. Poverty rose and unemployment peaked at 90%. The local currency nosedived and wiped out because of inflation, fulfilling the economic principle – bad economics breeds bad politics (Skidelsky 2025). Since 2005, Zimbabwe has eight currencies as legal tender, none of them its own (Hungwe 2025).

They introduced the 'Gospel of Prosperity', *gosprenurship*, the art of making money like circular entrepreneurs. This is the new wave of taking money from members of the church. According to Togarasei and Biri (2013):

... the prophets did not address structural issues that many identified as having caused the crisis corruption, lack rule of law, human rights abuses, and others. They concentrated on individual sins, prayerlessness and not tithing, and not believing in God following traditional religion and witchcraft. For them these were the cause of crisis Zimbabwe was experiencing. (p. 82)

For the new Pentecostal preacher, poverty signals that your worship was unacceptable. A genuine God would not allow his children to be sick, barren, poor or lacking. These preachers stepped up when the Zimbabwe dollar was almost extinct.

The intersection brought convulsions in the Anglican Church. The lifestyle of the neo-Pentecostals preachers, their hermeneutical lenses, places of worship and general outlook, became the envy of the church preachers. The outcome shows the challenges of intersectionality in biblical hermeneutics at any given time. The research helps understand the impact of the socio-economic and socio-political nuances on being church in Zimbabwe. This has created innovative Anglican hermeneutical lenses, new to the Anglo-Saxon tradition known since the inception of the Anglican Church in 1880. The adopted hermeneutics by the Anglican clerics brings to surface the value of a hermeneutics of intersectionality, which provides a new reading of scripture and doing of theology and mission in relation to the ensuing socio-economic and socio-political situations.

Understanding socio-historical methodology

The 20th century is a critical hermeneutic period (Petruzzello 2025). It saw emergence of new biblical and theological interpretation tools celebrated as critical, social, scientific (empirical), decolonial, innovative and indigenous methods of inquiry. This critical period birthed social scientific methods that challenge the traditional Westernised interpretative methods and redefine the liberative hermeneutics of the past in relation to the current pressing social existential issues. The critical period used social science to interpret scriptures. North, Summerhill and Weingast (2000:5) argues, Auguste Comte asserted that societal disorder could be understood historically and overcome in the future 'using the same methods of inquiry ... that proved so successful in the natural sciences'. This article adopted the social scientific method. The question to answer now is: What is the social scientific method?

Ehrman (2000) defines socio-historical method as an exegetical method concentrating on the history and social context of the world of the text, whether this is the world referred to in the text or the world in which the text was written. Duling and Perrin (1994:24) opine that

socio-historical criticism focuses on describing the specific historical environment and how early Christians responded to it. Rhoads (2006:119) calls the eclipse of biblical orality, the response of the ancient performance. This is the source into which interpretations are assessed and critiqued, into which Rhoads (2006:119) calling the contemporary performance as a method of research into the meaning.

Socio-historical reading interprets the text from the world behind the text or the world within the text that informed the interpretations. The process is dynamic. The changed economic, political and social landscape changed the way Bible readers viewed the Bible. In this research, socio-historical reading recognises the evolutionary nature of hermeneutics across generational timelines. The rationale is that biblical hermeneutics change from one generation to another. What worked before may not necessarily work effectively in 2008 because of societal changes.

Application

One must appreciate that developing and adapting to a new theological thinking and hermeneutical contours in a turbulent environment are hard. More so maintaining a hermeneutical persuasion in challenging times. The Anglican Church is a sacramental church. The sacramental theology and hermeneutics emphasise the communion of saints. The oneness diminished, exalting individual faith for the quick fix. The communion of saints refers to the members, both living and dead, of Christ's Mystical Body, partaken during the Holy Communion. In the Holy Communion service, during the breaking of bread, just before communion, the congregation responds: *Though we are many, we are body, because we all share in the one bread.*

The Holy Communion creates the mystical union of both the living and the dead and is confirmed by the church during the First Vatican Council and Second Vatican Council. The minister begins by saying: *We break this bread to share in the Body of Christ.*

The healing effect of the Holy Communion comes from partaking of the one bread. The Pentecostal/Denominational churches introduced healing and deliverance services epitomising personal healing, negating the Holy Communion. In the individual healing, 'seed money'. enhances and increases chances of God responding and opens the door to receive healing. On one occasion, Makandiwa of UFIC defended the hermeneutics, saying:

Those who are not members of this congregation (UFIC) and do not believe in seeding must keep quiet and stop interfering in the governance of this ministry. They (critics) must know that each house has a father who determines what is right or wrong for his children or what relish the family will eat, it is your choice, and neighbours must just mind their own business. I have led an honest life and if I receive a word from God concerning this ministry, I will simply let you know, for I have no obligation to withhold such information. (Pindula 2017:n.p.)

These independence and hermeneutics drove the Anglican minister to envy the *modus operandi*. The approach removed Communal, Ubuntu philosophy from the Anglican Church, promoting self. The Anglican service has the inclusive 'we' terminology found in confession, absolution, bible readings, prayers and petitions. The priest offers petitions; however, Pentecostalism advocates each could pray for themselves for their own needs.

The Anglican Church is liturgical. The word liturgical comes from the Greek word *λειτουργία*. The editor Bryne (1974:197) simplifies the word to mean, 'a public worship that honours God, teaches people and lead them to deeper faith and greater holiness'. It becomes the 'religious service' (Provane 2009:79), public work for the people in the worship service. It means Anglicans honours God following a given uniform worship, offering service to the people enacted since Elizabeth I's settlement (1559) during the reformation. The *Act of Uniformity* went through parliament to endorsement, stipulating the manner of worship. The order of service and administration of sacraments are in the BCP, and several other books authorised through episcopacy. Clergy on their ordination swear canonical obedience to the bishop and the use of no other form of worship except that authorised by the bishop. The clergy offer petitions and prayers, while the people offer responses and chant hymns (The Divine liturgy:1). However, amid the economic and social crisis, the coming of Pentecostal ministers and their rise, juxtaposed with the desire to increase congregates, the clergy downplayed the essence of the BCP, its hermeneutics and increased individualistic outdoor prayer sessions, *kugomo*, *gathering congregants at Ngoma kurira in Domboshawa and Bernard Mizeki Shrine in Marondera. The mountain experiences emphasise personal encounter in search of breakthrough and physical healing*. One other baby born are the 10 days of fasting (*Maten days-Shona translation*) enacting through the Pentecostals. The days stipulate that at the beginning of the year, every person must fast during the first 10 days so that Yahweh blesses the year. The money saved from fasting in some sections ends up in the hands of the minister.

The 'Deeper Friday'¹ service in Glen Norah and Budiriro replicates the Judgement Night, one-day conference by Emmanuel Makandiwa. On the Judgement Night, God passed his judgement to quickly fix the individual and national problems. People throng to receive prophecy and problems judged and sentenced (UFIC 2025). The target is the individual healing, the greater numbers to attend and the financial result of the programme. Emmanuel Makandiwa of the UFIC reportedly reached a record of 175 000 members, according to the spokesperson (Kakore 2025), undoing of some traditional Christian practices, compromising some practices.

1.This informal service, hosted by Rev S.K. Madzime of the Anglican Church, invites all Christian members, regardless of denominational affiliations. The liberal nature of the service, like UFIC Makandiwa services, serves the worshippers individual healing, prophecy and faith, as one seeks a quick fix to their woes.

Chitando and Biri (2016) observed the nuances of the hermeneutical lenses of the Pentecostal church and ministry. They argued:

There is a notable shift from the missionary messages which focused on heavenly prosperity to the experience of prosperity in the material present. The young, upwardly mobile, and image-conscious Pentecostal prophets criticize missionary Christianity for having placated and soothed a restive African population by promising heaven in the 'sweet by and by'. (p. 75)

The church adopted, 'the-receive-it-and-I-receive-mentality' of the Pentecostal preaching to material wealth, through what Biri in Chitando, Chikowero and Madongonda (2015:182) calls, 'prophetic imagination'. The mode is individualistic. Prophetic imagination analyses the present crisis, reality and projects a brighter future through their spiritual gifts. The gifting aided the shift from the heaven-focused Anglican hermeneutical lenses to the daily issues. The socio-economic circumstances were the push factors to adopt that mindset.

The Anglican Church ministers merge the new phenomenon neglecting the essential ingredients to adopt the novel approaches. This assimilation caused unsettlement, questions and queries of identity in the church. The laity felt the drift as the winds of change swept through the church and the unstable environment.

The ministry of the Anglican is hierarchical, not congregational or individual as with the prophetic Pentecostal or ministries and congregational churches. The prophet or ministers employ elusive and changing hermeneutical lenses' exegesis to accommodate emerging trends, desires or to subvert socio-political tensions. Since the ministry mostly is individually owned, changes depend on the minister. The Anglican Church stands on the opposite line; any change needs hierarchical or episcopal or synodical approval. The name episcopal answers to the processes of adaption to new contours. 'Episcopal' is a Greek derivation of *επισκοπικός* equivalent to an overseer or watcher from the top. The church derives its authority from the top, which is bishop. There is an appeal centre or the tradition of the elders. So, the breaking of the ranks is not uniform. It justifies how the drift is selective, and the elusive approach witnessed between 2008 and the present trend.

Conclusion

The article presented the fate of the Anglican church Diocese of Harare at the intersection within the changing socio-political environment, the rise of Pentecostalism and the resultant hermeneutics. The changes reflect the power and influence of the rising forces, seeking a quick fix to humans socio-political needs and challenges in Zimbabwe. The article also highlighted the forces that altered the hermeneutical lenses at the intersection. Of note are the nature of the church programs, pulpit messages and the marketing strategies of the church and self satisfaction in church. At the end, the hermeneutics of the Anglican church Diocese of Harare altered the honour bestowed upon the episcopal leadership of the Anglican Church.

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Author's contribution

D.M. is the sole author of this research article.

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