‘Flood this Nation with the Bible’: Rev. Godfridah Sumaili, Politics and the People's Bible in Zambia

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Abstract

Ever since the Declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in 1991, the Bible has become foundational in the public of life, and often cited in public debates. This article employs symbolic power as an analytical tool to examine Sumaili’s state theology of the Bible which politicized and reduced the Bible in the public into a state apparatus for defining, shaping, and determining the meaning and content for governing Zambia. It proposes a Pentecostal public theology of the people's Bible as a site of struggle against politics of dehumanization, oppression, exploitation, and systematic inequalities.

Keywords

politics – symbolic violence – Sumaili – state theology of the Bible – Pentecostal public theology of the people's Bible

1 Introduction

The focus of this article is not on Biblical theology; it is rather seeking to construct a Pentecostal public theology of the people’s Bible. The idea of ‘the people’ refers to the masses or the margins or the people on the underside of history and modernity, contrasted with social, political, religious and cultural
elites. The masses, especially women, are the custodians of Bible and Christian values, and yet, are the most exploited among the exploited, the most marginalized of the marginalized people in Zambia. The Bible has been hijacked by elitist preachers and politicians and often used to reproduce and perpetuate sociopolitical, religious and political status quo. The conservative hermeneutics is utilised as a veil of ignorance over the face of the mass to undermine the revolutionary intention inherent in the Bible. The Bible is literally interpreted through the dominant ideology or neo-colonial capitalist framework that marginalize the mass and clandestinely force them to subvert their own freedom and dignity. The masses have internalised poisoned or self-oppressive reading of the Bible and manipulatively enlisted as social and political forces to undermine the life-giving revolutionary transformative intention of the Bible to promote social justice and abundant life for all. The people's Bible is a substantive sacred site of God's self-disclosure in which humanity discovers God's revolutionary transformative intention for creation. It is a source of divine knowledge for conceiving existential challenges of the world rightly and as holy concerns and embrace divine praxiological wisdom for meaningful, creative and relevant engagement in and with God's world. I engage public theology as post-anthropological, post-dualistic and dynamic decolonial missional prophetic activity. The task is to create life-giving public forms of knowledge to live by and encounter the world for the flourishing of all creation. In short, the theological category of “public” is understood as the fundamental character of African Pentecostal identity. The category of “public” is understood, in an inclusive way, not in the modernistic way of dichotomising life into so-called private and public spheres and in even fragmenting the public into various autonomous, isolated compartments with their own central values and rules. The concept public rather refers to the whole of life and challenges us to have God’s public [even planetary, agapeic] love for the whole world, for all of reality, in focus when we do theology in various theological disciplines and subdisciplines.1

Public theology “reflects upon and guides, is informed and formed, strengthened and enriched, by participation in and collaboration with the practices of various spheres of contemporary societies.”2

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The Bible is one of the most significant and crucial public resources and sites of economic and political struggle in Zambian, and generally African, quest for meaning and flourishing. The reason the Bible could be described as a public resource and a site of struggle is because it is largely through biblical ideas that many Zambians think about politics and national prosperity. This uncritical soft spot for the Bible as God’s storage of answers to existential questions and challenges makes most Zambian believers vulnerable to a Bible-based manipulation. It is arguably the case that a meaningful and relevant public theology of the Bible from the margins is needed as response to public abuse of the Bible and its role in Zambia. Suggesting a Pentecostal public theology of the people’s Bible is not intended to remove the Bible from a public function because that is where it belongs. It is designed rather to reflect critically on how the Bible should function in the Zambian public domain in order to promote the common good and the flourishing of life.

The Bible has become a pervasive cultural system of meaning which often functions as the overarching and overriding principle of everyday life. It is a public cultural symbolic system of power which often is utilized to create, construct, replicate and perpetuate a particular social order or reality. The Bible as a symbolic manifestation of the invisible knowledge plays a decisive, pivotal and determining function in the daily lives of many Zambian Christians who make up more 95% of national population. Zambia is not simply a majority Christian nation; it is rather a Pentecostal nation – deeply entrenched in Pentecostal culture, religious expression and public imagination. Zambia’s Pentecostal population is about 23.6 per cent of the Christian population.

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7 Throughout this chapter, the terms Pentecostal, Pentecostals, and Pentecostalism are used in reference to the broader, multiple and diverse communities that identify with the movements (classical, neo-Pentecostalism, and charismatics [both Protestant and Catholic]) who stress the ongoing missional activity of the Holy Spirit in the world.
national population. These statistics are confirmed by Operation World, which cites the number of charismatics in mainstream Christianity as 25.8 per cent and Evangelical-Pentecostals as 25.7 per cent. According to these figures, if charismatics in mainstream Christianity were included, then over half of Zambia’s population would subscribe to a Pentecostal form of spirituality. It can be argued that these statistics do not just indicate unparallel growth of Pentecostalism, but rather, they demonstrate a radical shift in the character, nature and spiritual orientation of Zambian Christianity.

In what follows, I engage scholarly view of the role of the Bible in African Pentecostalism. Then the attention is turned to consider how the former Minister of defunct Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, Rev. Godfridah Sumaili, during her tenure (from 2016 to 2021), mobilized, deployed and utilized the Bible in the Zambian public as symbolic power to legitimize the nationality of power. I argue that the public Bible in Zambia has been deployed and utilized as a total system of symbolic death, and citizens experienced this monotheistic ideological system as a totalizing, monopolizing, ultimate, imposing and pervasive frame of understanding and articulating Zambia as a nation embedded in a unified meaning. Sumaili’s pentecostally constructed politics exhibited what Achille Mbembe describes as necropolitics or the ‘politics of death’, meaning death as literal and as a metaphor of injustice and violence. Sumaili saw herself as a goddess of Pentecostal politics with power to define who matters and who does not, who is Zambian enough and who is not, which religion was Zambian and which was not. The final section suggests a theology of the people’s Bible as a site of struggle against politics of dehumanization, oppression, exploitation, and systematic inequalities.

2 The Bible and African Pentecostal Publics

The African Pentecostalism are described as ‘rooted in older religious revivals, is another phase of the quest for power and identity in Africa.’ However,

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African Pentecostal Christians describe themselves as biblical Christianity. They staunchly believe that their faith is pure and unadulterated biblical and Christ-centred and seek to apply that faith literally in public spheres. This tendency of describing themselves as a biblical Christianity is rooted in the affirmation of a radical continuity between early or apostolic Christianity in the epistle of Acts and their own Christianity. The events of the Bible, both Old and New Testament, are perceived as still happening today. Naomi Haynes observed how Zambian Pentecostals engage with the Bible by reclaiming and reconstituting the memory of the biblical events in the present through typological-participatory hermeneutics. These events are not conceived to be in the past but rather are regarded as ongoing kairos moments. Similarly, Paul Gifford confirms, for African Pentecostals the Bible ‘is not primarily a historical document at all.’ It is a locus of mysterious workings and ongoing interactions of God with the community of faith; it is a spiritual gate or portal through which the believer can access the reality of the living God in the nowness. The promises of God in the Bible are also available and accessible through faith. For Pentecostals, to believe in the power of the Holy Spirit, sometimes requires uncritically and literally interacting with the Bible as the word of God.

The African Pentecostal approach to the Bible is in continuum with indigenous hermeneutics of vital participation in the whole of community of life: it includes both the living and the dead. The relevance of a Pentecostal approach to the Bible stems from the fundamental theological affirmation that in Christ, and through faith-union with Christ in the Gospel, [they have] become “the seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise”, that is, the promise of Abraham and therefore ‘heirs together with Israel, members together of one body’.

In Christ African Pentecostals have been born again into ‘an adoptive past’: this self-understanding lends itself as a consequence to a radical ontological bondedness of an indigenous past and the whole history of Israel from

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Abraham the father of faith to ‘the entire past of the people of God’. Through this line of approach an African Pentecostal hermeneutics of vital participation in the spiritual realm of Christ establishes the relevance of the Bible as an adopted sacred text that has opened the way for an African appropriations of the whole Scriptures and its mysteries. African Pentecostals are thus often described as ‘Bible people’. They have an absolute love for the Bible and are at home in the Bible. Some perceive ultimate spiritual power as residing in the Bible which leads them to place it under their pillows at night as an act of faith in the God of the Bible.

There is a way, then, that in many African Pentecostal contexts, the Bible appears to be trapped between neocolonisation and decolonisation. It is not just an imperial or colonial text but also an anti-colonial and liberation text. It is a postcolonial and anti-neo-colonial text and at the same time a text for reconstruction, struggle for fullness of life and the flourishing of all creation. The Bible is locked in-between as a site of struggle for decolonial resistance and simultaneous as a religio-political apparatus geared to perpetuate the status quo. The Bible in the hands of the neo-colonial states has been utilised to reenchant an enchanted world. The result is that the Bible in the public manifests as a symbol of power which sanctions a web of violence which included systemic, epistemic or symbolic violence over the citizenry. The neo-colonial sovereign power, therefore, manifests itself as anti-life force or the “death-world” – “social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead.” All this may happen while many African leaders have turned a blind eye to foreign corporations’ economic exploitation of local people, and enrich themselves at the expense of the wider prosperity of the nations.

However, there is another aspect to African Pentecostal conception of the Bible. Scholars affirm that African spiritualities are the ‘common font of inheritance or the environmental air that African Pentecostals breathe and thus inform’ and shape their view of the Bible, theory and practices of inter-

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18 Ibid.
20 The Bible has a controversial history in Africa. For a detailed discussion see Gifford, ‘The Bible in Africa’, *West, The Stolen Bible*.
interpretations. Ogwu Kalu underlines, ‘Pentecostalism has produced a culture of continuity by mining primal worldview, reproducing an identifiable character, and regaining a pneumatic and charismatic religiosity that existed in traditional society.’ While this spiritual ‘common font of inheritance’ informs most African Pentecostals’ spiritual discernment, it does not seem to matter to the Pentecostals themselves, because this is not what they believe they are. For them, it is an opinion of those who are deemed to be outsiders and intellectuals. In their self-understanding they see themselves as modern Biblical Christians who love the Bible, who have radically broken with the spiritual and cultural ties of their indigenous religions and have unashamedly embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Personal Saviour. This position of faith, enables African Pentecostals to think of themselves as being a part of the special revelation of God through the Bible. Hence, the Bible is utilised as a public moral censure and policing constraint. That is especially the case in matters of gender and sexuality. They perceive their God-given mission as extended to public life, matters of national concern and claiming nations for Christ. Birgit Meyer notes the such movements assume ‘a public presence instead of remaining a matter of private belief.’

Pentecostalism is thus the most visible and profound aspect of religious change in Africa: it is a social force that straddles cultural, economic, and political spheres. In Zambia, Pentecostals are likely to perceive themselves as offering an alternative social order to neo-colonial nationalism and politics which continues to receive popular dissatisfaction and resistance. They per-
ceive their biblical Christianity as having the power to transform the nation away from its pervasive sinfulness which perpetuates cultures of evil in Zambia. For them injecting the born-again consciousness (the mightiest of all weapons) into the nation is the hope for the integral emancipation of Zambia. The born-again ideology is a spiritual weapon for confronting human imaginations and spiritual strongholds in the nation, ‘demolish[ing] arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and [taking] captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ’ (2 Corinthians 10:3–5 NIV). In this way, Pentecostalism offers a Christ-shaped imagination that has the potential for national liberation and reconstruction.28

Its vision begins, first and foremost, with liberation and reconstruction of the inner spirit/self from its fallenness (original sin): thereafter, the new found life in Christ will affect and transform social institutions and political structures.29 This emphasis leads Paul Gifford and, some other scholars to argue that Pentecostalism’s conservative and literal interpretations of the Bible may be impeding transformation of political institutions, social institutions and their moral orientations.30 Adriaan van Klinken has also noted that Pentecostal interpretations of the Bible sometimes tend to take monolithic fixity of the Bible that ignores that, ‘from a global perspective, there are strands within Christianity that adopt different interpretations of the bible and that, even in the Zambian context, there are dissident voices.’31 He laments how this approach is ‘used normatively to define the social and political character of Zambia as a Christian nation’32 with continuous calls for national moral purity especially with regard to sexuality. An example of such is the way in which the Pentecostal Assemblies of God in Zambia recently argued that an ‘LGBTQI ideology is in direct contradiction to these noble ideals [African family – rights of protection of the family, strengthening of family] and for

29 Most Pentecostals believe that the inner self of a non-born-again person is dead (Eph. 2:1 NIV).
32 Van Klinken, “Homosexuality”, 265.
that reason stands rejected.\textsuperscript{33} By way of contrast Dena Freeman suggests that were the Pentecostals' profound and unparalleled influence in public spheres channelled positively, they would have contributed to radical relational, social, economic and political transformation in Africa.\textsuperscript{34}

3 Rev. Sumaili’s State Theology of The Bible

The Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation (hereafter, the Declaration) by Frederick TJ. Chiluba in 1991 gave rise to the process of politicization of the Bible. Zambia is the only nation in the world which has openly declared and defined itself a Christian Nation by Constitution. The Constitution of Zambia states, ‘We, the people of Zambia: Acknowledge the supremacy of God Almighty; Declare the Republic a Christian Nation while upholding a person’s right to freedom of conscience, belief or religion.’\textsuperscript{35} This Declaration was grounded in a conservative Pentecostal understanding of the Bible as the document of God’s covenant with and commitment to the believer, the community of faith and any nation that fears the Lord.\textsuperscript{36} On 18th October 2015, the former President Edgar Lungu re-affirmed the Declaration; in 2016 he created the now defunct Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs and appointed Rev. Godfridah Sumaili, as its Minister. Sumaili saw her vocation and position of power as one which sought to utilise the Declaration as a covenant between God and the nation in order to bring the Bible to the centre of political governance as a way for transforming political ideals and culture. It imagines the rise of a biblico-political consciousness that could transcend human sinfulness and lead to national prosperity.\textsuperscript{37} A Christian nation is defined by the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs as:


\textsuperscript{36} Kaunda, The Nation That Fears God Prospers.

\textsuperscript{37} Frederick TJ. Chiluba, ‘Zambia Christian Nation Declaration by President Frederick Chiluba’, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhFX5kyvwCs [accessed 2 May 2017];
Nation that acknowledges the Divine Lordship of Jesus Christ over all its affairs. The Holy Bible guides the beliefs and values that its people espouse in family life and apply appropriately in Government and all sectors of society for enhanced welfare, peace and unity. God’s principles of Righteousness and Justice are the foundation for the rule of law and governance for sustained social order and morality.\textsuperscript{38}

Sumaili is tapping into the Pentecostal religious imagination: the Bible is regarded as God’s covenant and has critical implications for life in its various dimensions and underlies victory, health, wealth, hope, prosperity for Zambia.\textsuperscript{39} The Declaration is a biblico-political discourse that seeks to define and, in some ways, to determine the religio-political atmosphere, the public consciousness and political cultural imaginations of many Zambians from the top-down and the bottom-up.\textsuperscript{40} The Ministry made it clear through Sumaili, that ‘the Bible, the Word of God brings transformation of lives, hope and peace to people’\textsuperscript{41} The question of LGBTQ has been the key pressing issue. Sumaili’s approach was one of political suppression within an authoritative and moralistic framework. She determined that ‘discussions on pervasive sexuality such as homosexuality, lesbianism, [and] transgender are not welcome because such practices are illegal and an abomination in a Christian nation.’\textsuperscript{42} Sumaili sought to reinforce public rejection and hatred of homosexuality which she constantly described as ‘a crime in Zambia’. She called Zambians to guard against foreign influences. In Zambia we do not condone gayism and this is a crime and inviting such people means we are slowly

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\item Speech by the Hon. Rev. Mrs. Godfridah Sumaili, MP Minister of National Guidance and Religious Affairs at the 49th Annual General Meeting Held at The Cathedral of the Holy Cross (24th June 2017).
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accepting this vice. We must guard against such foreign influences as they pose a risk of disturbing our social fibre as a Christian nation.43

Her main concern for the nation was for the ‘country [to] uphold ... Christian values as enshrined in the Bible’ in order to resist ‘wizardry and satanism ... secularism’.44 This biblicist imagination is rooted in what may be described as a nationality of power. This political idea refers to how the state deploys specific technologies of subjectivation or domination to control or police its citizenry.

The Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs was deployed as an apparatus of nationality of power which utilized the Bible as symbolic power through which ‘persuasion and consent [was] sought without necessarily parking the machine of violence’.45 The Bible was used as subliminal or objective violence which was manifested into two forms.46 The first was through the symbolic violence embodied in biblical language used in the public sphere to discriminate and institutionalise specific forms of discrimination. Sumaili described ‘homosexuality and lesbianism [as] an abomination in Zambia. The Bible does not allow that and it is very clear that Zambia will not be entertained that’.47 She insisted that ‘LGBTQI rights are NOT Human Rights.’ She called upon Zambian people ‘to take a resolute and strong stand against LGBTQI. This wanton plan to distort our Christian identity and expose our people especially young people to destructive, unnatural and queer sexual orientation has no place in our culture and our Christian nation.’48 According to her, ‘The Word of God, the Bible is our foundation, Standard and anchor from which we cannot depart as a Covenant nation. It is also an abomination

48 Ibid.
before God Almighty and attracts curses on the land and judgment against those promoting it. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah.’ Citing Leviticus 18:22 she declared that ‘It is an abomination ... It is hypocritical to acknowledge Zambia as a Christian nation and yet permit abominable behaviors and practices that are alien and contrary to our Christian faith and values. It is also a terrible betrayal to the people of Zambia.’

In the light of such rhetoric it was no surprise that there should be a crackdown on LGBTQ behaviour. One gay couple was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment for what was described as ‘crimes against the order of nature’ or an ‘offence of sodomy or having sex against the order of nature contrary to the laws of Zambia.’49 This came after a human rights activist was detained for publicly calling the decriminalization of same-sex relations. The South African artist and socialite, Somizi Mhlongo was refused entry into the country on account of his sexuality. Sumaili announced that he was not welcome in the Zambia because he is homosexual. Anyone with ‘questionable’ character was not welcome in Zambia.50

The Bible in the hands of Sumaili was reduced into a political tool of symbolic violence. Sumaili insisted on reversing all the progress women had made in their struggle for gender justice and equality. She used the Bible to revitalise and reinforce relational power dynamics between women and men. She introduced the house concept in which the nation was defined as a home with the president as the father and citizens as children. In this understanding of the nation reduced into a heteropatriarchal home, Sumaili appealed to Ephesians 6:1 which urges, ‘Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.’ The expectation was effectively created whereby Zambian citizens were likened to children who were to ‘submit passively to the president in the same way some conservatives expect their wives and children to submit to fatherly authority in their homes. This alliance of religio-political power that projects Lungu as the father and president of the nation promotes housenization of the nation.’51 Some women’s agency which were characterized as questionable. Sumaili called for banning of miniskirts as promoting immorality. In 2018,

the popular dancer Zodwa Wabantu was detained at the airport upon arrival in Zambia and sent back on another flight to South Africa: her dances were deemed to be ‘immoral’ and ‘unchristian’. She was described as ‘the highest priestess of immorality who should not be tolerated in any civilised society especially Zambia, a country that prides itself as a Christian nation.’

Sumaili’s vision was to construct a Bible-based nationality. She called on the Bible Society of Zambia to ‘flood this nation with the Bible. The holy Bible … outlines the values to guide us to fulfil the agreement with God.’ At the same time, she launched a restriction on the sale/purchase of sex toys, even threatening jail terms for anyone caught in what she termed as ‘a very unnatural thing.’ She emphasised the point that ‘God created man and woman for sexual satisfaction – but for a man or woman to use a lifeless object is immoral.’ She took issue with what she described as ‘indecent dressing and provocative dancing which she viewed as displeasing before God.’ She cited the Scripture (John 4:23), saying, ‘God is looking for worshippers who will worship in spirit and truth. We have to present ourselves in an honouring manner and should not be offensive to him and other worshipers in how we worship.’ In many ways, Sumaili perceived herself as the spiritual guardian or spiritual mother of the nation. Too all intents and purposes, Sumaili was constructing what the Kairos Document described as ‘a state theology’ – that is, ‘the theological justification of the status quo with its neocolonization, patriarchy, heterosexism, homophobia, corruption, subjugation, domination and despotism.’ In effect, Sumaili was ‘misusing theological concepts and biblical texts for … political purposes.’

Instead of promoting the prophetic voice of the church as a social consciousness of the nation, Sumaili used the Bible as a tool for neutralizing popular
dissent in the church and society. The policy adopted defined the church as ‘[a] group of believers in the Lordship of Jesus Christ whose primary source of doctrine is the Holy Bible and registered as such under the Zambian Law.’

Conceived in this way is consistent with Carsten Laustsen’s conviction that those who do so ‘wish to change the political rules of play in order for’ their truths claim to become constitutive of the political. As such Sumaili’s understanding of the Bible became a hidden tool of violence ‘to control the masses, not in order to make sure that they really participate in the business of governing the nation’ but to remind them constantly that Zambia is a Christian nation: citizens are expected to obey the government as appointed by God to mediate intangible blessings to them.

Gifford’s classification of Zambia as ‘[a] corrupt and uncaring Christian nation’ is legitimate. Sumaili’s reading of the Bible increasingly devalued and left the poor and marginalized behind. Its main function was to impart legitimacy to Lungu’s presidency, by seeking to impose a Pentecostal monotheistic framework within which the day-to-day life and practice of Pentecostal-politics were being reproduced and perpetuated in the public spheres. The Bible in her hand was ‘symbolic power entrenched with invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it.’

4 A Pentecostal Public Theology of the People’s Bible

The Bible has been described as a prophetic site of struggle against dominant ideology, political repression and material concerns. This struggle aims at a fundamental reconstruction and decolonisation of neo-colonised African humanity to give rise to a new humanity. This new humanity is premised on Jesus Christ as the paradigmatic template of the more-than-human and embodiment of redemptive objective, method and praxis of the struggle for flourishing. However, what we are learning from the analysis above, demonstrates

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61 Gifford, African Christianity, p. 205.

that for the Bible to become an effective weapon and site of struggle for the margins, it must be liberated, redeemed, reclaimed, and reconstituted as the people’s Bible or the public Bible of the people. There is a pressing need for the Bible to be understood and embedded within historical experiences of the masses. For this to happen there must be a rethinking of how the Bible is to function within the Zambian public spheres. I am arguing that Zambian Pentecostalism in general must rediscover the gospel as a decisive force in history’s march to the fore. In a context in which dominant and dominated peoples are locked in confrontation, [the task of people’s Bible consists in incarnating] Jesus the Liberator in a faith practice and gospel rereading [with and by the community] that will truly concretize the solidarity of the church with the poor and oppressed.63

This is an invitation to spiritual discernment as Jean-Marc Ela insists:

Wherever creation is on the road, wherever the kingdom of God is the goal of a quest, wherever the new universe is under construction – not a new world in the sense of a world beyond, but in the sense of a different world right here, a world being gestated in the deeds of the everyday.64

Contrary to Sumaili’s state theology of the Bible, the people’s Bible must be perceived and engaged as a public, social, ecological, educational and political resource for concrete struggles of Zambian citizens. It must be regarded as postcolonial tool for decolonising minds, reconstructing lives and empowering the mass to forge an alternative destiny for their nation within definite historical and material conditions.65 Such a way of perceiving the Bible is consistent with the hermeneutical tool for a public theology that flows from the ‘everyday struggle of the masses’. It also sits well with Miroslav Volf’s claim that the Bible is a locus of ‘compelling visions of flourishing’.66 The Bible in Zambia does not only belong to elitists, biblical scholars or pastors but ordinary people

64 Ibid.
65 Mosala, Biblical Hermeneutics.
as an account “of and reflective engagement with lived faith.” The majority of the masses are conviction that the Bible is the only concrete source of hope for liberation from the abyss of poverty and dehumanization, violence and subjugation and the locus of God’s unfailing commitment to promoting a dignified and humane life for them. Thus, the Bible is perceived as embodying an alternative God’s agapeic redemptive vision, approaches, methods and praxes for actualizing and realizing abundant life. Therefore, the Bible as ‘the word of God’ is not merely perceived in an ontological manner but in a functional materialistic or pragmatic imagination. Functional materialistic perceive God’s action as embedded in the material world, or more specifically, the political order, forward into new existential possibilities that constitute the history of radical resistance against disorder and the creation of life-giving socio-political order. This means for a Pentecostal public theology to reclaim the biblical vision of critical/revolutionary transformative intention of flourishing of all creation, it needs to affirm the Bible as the pulse of life among the masses.

The biblical vision of revolutionary transformative intention promotes a ‘life marked by love for God and neighbors, flourishing human life, is the end;’ the life-giving hermeneutics of the public Bible is a means that is ‘valuable insofar as it enables us to achieve that end.’ This accent on flourishing is repeated by Justin Crisp in a manner that can support an authentic Pentecostal public theology of the people’s Bible. He writes, it ‘should take as its point of departure a holistic vision of flourishing, joyful life, rather than simply reacting to the manifold crises of human living as they come.’ The Bible in the public square is, as Volf argues, an instrument for articulating ‘a vision of human flourishing, of the self, social relations, and the good, and provides ways to mobilize people’s feelings and wills and to stabilize their character so as to live in accordance with that vision.’ It is then possible for the public Bible to inspire and help guide public engagement without turning into mere markers of identity and instruments of political power. To avoid inspiring and legitimating violence, religions should (1) nurture a healthy sense of independence from either established or aspiring political authority, and

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68 Ibid., p. 16.
70 Ibid., p. 190.
(2) resist reconfiguring religion so as to reduce it primarily to a political and cultural resource.\textsuperscript{71}

The people's Bible is never neutral, but political with unswerving revolutionary intention to offer people ‘alternative ultimate allegiances and ways of life’\textsuperscript{72} which often clash with the dominant political order. It is a subversive tool for reordering of public imaginations, public gazes, public minds, public bodies, public discourses and ultimately public reality.

This also suggests that the people's Bible should be embedded in the public prophetic criticism. The prophetic task of the people's Bible as Walter Brueggemann argues, ‘is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.’\textsuperscript{73} It always calls into question the dominant reality constructed by human beings. The humanly reconstructed reality, however good it may be as a novel, is always provisional and always in need of prophetic stirring toward the divine reality of the fullness of life for all. The people's Bible is the prophetic impetus of the marginalised which nourishes and energizes hope in their continuous struggle because it always points to God’s reality of abundant life for all. Hence, the people's Bible is embedded in the hope for abundant life in the here and now rather than in the idea of scarce and eschatological deferment of the fullness of life. It is in this sense that the Bible could be conceived as the word of God coming alive for humanity to discover and rediscover its divine agency, make sense of its own existential questions in the world and seek to live life-givingly in the broken world. The Spirit poured in the world is the divine force of agency distributed in the world. The people's Bible is a pneumatological metaphor – ‘a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language.’\textsuperscript{74} It is the super-but-natural or extra-ordinary conceptual system which frames what and how to think, act, understand, interpret and interact with others, God and the world. The people's Bible is not just a matter of the intellect: it is intended to govern the believer’s ‘everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details.’ It 'structures what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people.'\textsuperscript{75} As a metaphorical conceptual system, the Bible there-

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Walter Brueggemann, \textit{The Prophetic Imagination: 40th Anniversary Edition} (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2018), p. 3. Italics as found.

\textsuperscript{74} George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen, \textit{Metaphors We Live By}, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 4.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
fore, is primed to play a central task in defining everyday prophetic life of the believer.

Since the Bible functions as religious conceptual system, it is also a metaphorical system for creating an overarching meaningful structure. It creates a frame of reference. Edward Taylor argues that such frames ‘are best understood as cultural paradigms, large interconnected beliefs, assumptions, values that, quite literally, structure how people view and engage with reality.’ They ‘are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual’s tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions.’

The people’s Bible as God’s agapeic love is public love. It is the symbol of divine creative and creating love which bears witness to the revolutionary transformative intentionality and radicality of the ‘mission as God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate.’ The public agapeic commitment of God to the world forms the basic foundation and the prerequisite for authentic understanding and prophetic presence of the people’s Bible in the public spheres. The intention of the people’s Bible in the public is as Koopman underlines:

Reflecting on the contents, rationality and implications of God’s love for the whole world, especially for those whose dignity is violated and who suffer exclusion, exploitation and expandability, and for a creation that is killed by greed and consumerism ... And this reflection on God’s love for the world, this growth in knowledge, does not only help us to understand reality better, it does not merely illuminate reality, but this reflection and knowledge indeed help to transform reality so that it can increasingly reflect the redemptive, renewing and dignifying impact of God’s love.

78 Ibid.
5 Conclusion

This article argues that Zambian Pentecostal deployment of the Bible in public sphere has promoted symbolic domination of the citizens in a nation that describes itself as democratic. The Bible has become a site of incontestable political power, a medium of exploitation and a tool for political agenda that silence the voice of the masses. In response, I have proposed the people’s Bible as a prophetic site of struggle against ideological domination, political repression and economic exploitation. If Zambian Pentecostalism genuinely ‘seeks to be anything more than an effort to swindle a mass of mystified blacks,’ it must ‘rethink the whole question of understanding and experiencing’ the Bible in everyday human struggle with an existential wound. It must honestly and critically look at its public theology of the Bible for the sake of God and God’s people.