

## GOOD JESUIT, BAD JESUIT

"IN LIGHT OF IGNATIUS' "TWO STANDARDS" AND "THE MYSTRIES DONE FROM THE GARDEN TO THE HOUSE OF ANNAS", AT ANY MOMENT WE CAN BE JUDAS OR PETER, A CHRISTIAN LIFE CAN BE A FINE LINE."

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2007

### Zimbabwean Jesuit On The Excommunication Of Mugabe



#### Mugabe church donation raises eyebrows

By Jacob Nhlanhla in Bulawayo

Gesture comes as surprise to those who thought he had cut ties with the Catholic Church  
AMID escalating calls to excommunicate him from the Roman Catholic Church, President Robert Mugabe has donated a large sum of money to it. After damaging stand-offs between the Zimbabwean ruler and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference, ZCBC, as well as highly regarded critic Archbishop of Bulawayo



Pius Ncube, some analysts see the 300 million Zimbabwe dollar donation (one million US dollars at the official exchange rate and just over one thousand US dollars on the black market), made late last month to a women's Catholic Church grouping, the Marian Association, as more of an electioneering stunt than a way of making amends with the church. Mugabe describes himself as a devout Catholic who attends Sunday mass regularly. However, fellow Catholics maintain he should have been excommunicated long ago from the church that raised him, for failing to respect human rights and good governance.

But Father Oskar Wermter, a Jesuit missionary priest who has lived in Zimbabwe for over 30 years, said calls to excommunicate Mugabe were "old hat" and were unlikely to be heard.

*"This was mooted years ago. It was explained then that this was no longer done today. At any rate, excommunication in a strict legal or canonical sense is a measure applied only in certain circumstances defined by church law,"* he said. Wermter, based in Harare, said that while excommunication had been evoked in the past to deal with political leaders - heads of governments, kings and emperors - who violated human rights abuses, the phenomenon was rare in the 21st century. *"We no longer live in the Middle Ages. The local bishops do not even have that power. It would have to come from the Pope himself,"* explained Wermter.

But he added that renewed calls for Mugabe to be excommunicated were indicative of people's growing desperation to see a resolution to the crisis that has gripped Zimbabwe for the past ten years. Ecumenical efforts to find solutions to Zimbabwe's woes under the faith-based Christian Alliance and the Save Zimbabwe Campaign banners - groupings of local Christian denominations and pro-democracy activists - have been snubbed by both Mugabe and his ruling Zanu PF party. Early this year, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his support for the ZCBC after it issued its most vocal pastoral letter since the crisis set in, blaming Mugabe for the escalation of human rights abuses and for destroying a once-vibrant economy.

While Catholics here continue to call for Mugabe's excommunication, the president insists he is just an "ordinary Catholic who goes to Mass every Sunday". Mugabe was educated by Jesuit missionaries but made a shift from alter boy to radical nationalist when he joined the nationalist movement in the early 1960s, which he then led in a bitter guerrilla war against Ian Smith, then prime minister of Rhodesia. The war culminated in the country's independence from Britain in 1980. Calls for Mugabe's excommunication

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