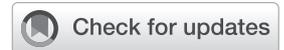


# (Dis)regarding the contemporary Church as the peacemaker in Zimbabwe

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It is life-bearing to sustain the condition and place of the Church as the salt, light and conscience of the Church in society. Contemporaneously, in the Zimbabwean context of tragic political and socio-economic conflict, the Church appears to be ineffective at fostering peace, healing and reconciliation, mainly because of corruption, state capture, factionalism and a passive approach to addressing national crises. However, disregarding the Church in peacebuilding dismisses the possible role of the remnant in national development. Meanwhile, court prophets have annexed the position of the Church in politics by prophesying selfish elitist desires at the expense of the entire nation. Thus, discarding the conciliatory role of the Church disables national transformation. Employing data from purposively sampled in-depth interviews and literature through a lens of remnant theology, this study found that destructive selfishness, conflict, disunity and other problems continue to taint the ecclesial image in Zimbabwe. How can the remnant restore the conscience of the Church for it to regain public respect, trust and its position as the peacebuilding conscience of society in Zimbabwe? This study explores restorative strategies and concludes that to save crisis-stricken Zimbabwe, the remnant should rebuild an other-centred consciousness and transformative capacity, preach and embody peace.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** This study links ecclesiology with peace studies, politics and sociology to troubleshoot national transformation in Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Church; conscience; state; society; remnant; effectiveness; peace; transformation.

## Introduction

It is a good idea to remind a conflict-stricken populace that the diaconal missionary role of the Church involves peacebuilding. The caring message of Jesus Christ, 'blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Mt 5:9), affirms God's love for His people and encourages them to inspire, build and sustain peace. Further teachings of Jesus Christ, namely that His followers are the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16), reinforce the missionary mandate of the Church to motivate, exhibit and sustain transformation. However, 'But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot' (Mt 5:13). This is reminiscent of the case of the Church in Zimbabwe. Stories of Church leaders' sexual scandals (Ncube 2015), corruption (Dube 2023), conflicts, divisions and state capture (Tagwirei 2023, 2024b) portray a loss of godliness and ability to influence, exemplify and maintain transformation. If the Church is not restored to a Godly conscience, it will become ineffective in society. Yet, in the midst, fallibility always lies some remnant of hope for restoration. It is foolhardy to conclude that all Church leaders and followers are evil, even when sinners are many. This is why the Church must never be labelled as useless in society. Acknowledging that a part of the Church has fallen into sin, thereby tarnishing the whole Church and causing a collective loss of public respect and trust, this study explores ways to restore the fallen Church to godliness and to reclaim its place to, once again, effectively serve as the peacebuilding conscience of society. Structurally, this submission begins by overviewing the remnant theology and contextualising the Church in Zimbabwean peacebuilding discourses. Then, it reviews the Church as the conscience of society, problematises the state of the Church in Zimbabwe and ends with suggestions for restorative strategies based on the views of the interviewees.

## Overviewing remnant theology

The remnant basically refers to the redemptive remains of those who are left. Remnant theology is conceptualised as a belief that God always preserves some faithful people amid widespread unfaithfulness or its consequences. According to Rosenthal (1986), the remnant can be traced to the Old Testament, which describes minorities being saved after sin and tragic wrath destroyed the majority of the people. Rosenthal (1986:n.p.) explains that 'the minority who survive the

catastrophe or judgment are the remnant' (Neh 1:3; Ezk 11:13). In the story of the flood, the continuity of all humanity amid divine judgement was preserved through the remnant of Noah's family (Gn 9:19). Peterson (2023) describes an example of God's gracious willingness to preserve the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the representative righteousness of a few people. There are several cases in the Bible that reflect remnant theology. For example, God preserved the nation of Egypt and Jacob's family because of Joseph (Gn 45:7), and God corrected Elijah when Elijah thought he was not the only remaining prophet (1 Ki 18:22). The prophet Amos declared that a small portion of Israel remained faithful and would be saved from those who would be captured by Assyria (Am 5:3–15). Even 'in non-prophetic portions of the Old Testament, the remnant is the portion of Israel that remains faithful to God' (Rosenthal 1986:n.p.).

So, remnant theology highlights God's faithfulness in preserving His mission and His people. Just as it is difficult to swim upstream against the current, today, many people find it difficult to live upright in the midst of increasing evil. Hence, the remnant, which is often very few people who remain true to God's will, calling and missionary service while most people fail. 'Throughout history God has had a remnant of humanity who loved and worshiped Him and whom He could call upon to act according to His purposes' (Shetler 2021:76). Even eschatologically, a remnant will be faithful to God until the second coming of Jesus Christ. According to Shetler (2021), God will continue doing remarkable things across generations through the remnant minority. Campbell (2015) states:

[H]owever imperfect at any period of history God's people actually were, in Paul's understanding [*Romans 11*] a holy remnant in Israel was the means used by God via the Spirit to transmit the faith to the next generation, thus leading eventually to the consummation of his purpose. (p. 79)

Primarily, remnant theology states that God preserves a few of His people to sustain His mission in the world. Thus, remnant theology upholds the continuity of *missio dei* and *missio ecclesiae*, regardless of human fallibility. Therefore, the Church will remain alive and continue advancing the integral mission of God through the few who remain upright by His grace and enablement. 'As well, within the global church, there exist a small percentage who carry the burden of the fulfilment of the Great Commission' (Campbell 2015:79). Considering the remnant theology, it is clear that a part of the Church in Zimbabwe will continue advancing *missio dei*, demonstrating faithfulness, portraying the *Imago Dei* and transforming and saving the nation. Because this paper is delimited to (dis)regarding the Church in peace-making engagements in Zimbabwe, the following subsection provides a contextual overview.

## Contextualising Church and peacebuilding in Zimbabwe

The issue of peace has been lamentably problematic in Zimbabwe. Before 1980, Zimbabwe was engaged in a bloody

liberation struggle against the white colonial regime of Ian Smith. 'About 80000 Africans are estimated to have died during this war, while a further 450000 suffered injuries of varying intensities' (Accord 2018). Zimbabwe was born on 17 April 1980, at the end of the war of independence and, since then, has experienced a series of tragic conflicts. The nation received freedom from British colonialism and fell into violent political, economic and social bondage under Zimbabwean black rule. Tagwirei (2023:115) narrates that, throughout the long reign of the late Robert Gabriel Mugabe, through the militant appointment of President Emerson Mnangagwa in November 2017, until today, the governing Zimbabwe National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party has led the country with violence. Zimbabwe has endured turbulent dictatorship, political instability, policy fickleness, heavy taxation, command policies and a flawed rule of law (Tagwirei 2023):

When citizens – who bear the brunt of poor governance – complain, ZANU-PF uses the military to close the democratic space, silence them and cow them into submission for selfish reasons: power, conquest and retention. (p. 115)

For example, in the *Gukurahundi* [the wind that blows away the chaff] massacres in the mid-1980s in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, ZANU-PF killed more than 20000 predominantly Ndebele-speaking people who were suspected to be Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) members who opposed the ruling ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union). The *Gukurahundi* hostility was temporarily mitigated by the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 between Mugabe, then the ZANU leader and president and the leader of ZAPU, Joshua Nkomo. Mainly because the unity pact was elitist instead of being collective (Accord 2018), it did not last, also because none of the perpetrators or ruling ZANU-PF apologised to the families of those who had been killed, surviving victims, their families and communities that were affected by the genocide. While Zimbabweans were still struggling to come to terms with this gruesome history, they had to cope with the effects of the violent fast-track land reform programme, through which, in 2000, white-owned farms were invaded and seized, and the lives and livelihoods of foreign and native people were disrupted by ruling elites and their associates. A similarly inhumane blitz was repeated in 2000, with Operation *Murambatsvina* [Clean up the mess], also known as Restore Order (Machakanja 2010:7). Through Operation Restore Order, local government officials destroyed houses on the pretext that the land had been illegally distributed; consequently, more than 700000 urbanites were displaced and traumatised (Accord 2018). Tagwirei (2023) reminds us of Operation *Wavhotera papi* [for whom did you vote] in 2008, which victimised, tortured, killed and maimed countless people who were accused of voting for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change party that was led by Morgan Tsvangirai. Violence continued before, during and after every presidential and harmonised election, a situation that keeps national conflicts fresh. Despite numerous efforts by non-governmental and ecclesiastical institutions that raised their voices to promote national healing, we echo the observation by Machakanja (2010) that:

[T]he processes of developing a framework and legislation for national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe remains fairly open on paper, whilst it appears to be devoid of a coherent, inclusive, consultative and participatory guided process. (p. 7)

The state established an organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration during the formation of the Government of National Unity in 2008 to facilitate national healing, but it was ineffective (Murambadoro 2019). The state also formed the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission, which also failed to produce tangible results (Murambadoro 2019; Muromo 2023). To this day, little progress has been made towards achieving peace, national healing and reconciliation. Therefore, 'there is no dispute that Zimbabwe's accumulated history of socio-political oppression, repression and ongoing trauma has had a profound and continuing effect on different categories of people in society' (Machakanja 2010:7).

In striving to be the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16) and to be hearers and doers of the Word (Ja 1:22), the Church made some commendable efforts to engage with the state and society to achieve peace and national healing (Tagwirei 2023). History reports that Church engagements with the state on peacebuilding started long before Zimbabwe gained independence (Munemo & Nciizah 2014). In the early years of colonial rule, the Church was closely related to colonial settlers through missionaries. According to Hastings (1982), the Church supported oppressive colonial policies and structures that enhanced the worth of the bourgeoisie and diminished the social status of Africans (Munemo & Nciizah 2014):

The Church did not condemn colonial brutality and exploitation of the Africans but instead appeared to be a silent partner in the oppression of the African people or acquiesced to the inhuman treatment given to the black majority population until the most violent and final phase of colonialism was reached. (p. 67)

Munemo and Nciizah (2014) explain that the Church was eventually jerked into prophetic action by the bitter criticism it received from African nationalists, through the revulsion it expressed to the illegal and oppressive political order created by the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 under the Rhodesia Front Party. 'The Church began to advocate for the promotion of democracy and human rights. It castigated and challenged the repressive government of the Rhodesia Front' (Munemo & Nciizah 2014:67). In the early 1980s, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace worked tirelessly to promote healing and to end the violence in *Gukurahundi* (Gusha 2019). Bishop Ernst Heinrich Karlen of the Roman Catholic Church is remembered for confronting Mugabe about *Gukurahundi* atrocities and urging Mugabe to stop the carnage (Moyo 2025). While *Zanu-PFism* scares the Church away from national politics, ecumenical bodies such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) have been writing pastoral letters and facilitating dialogue to foster peace and conflict management, national healing and reconciliation (Tagwirei

2023). The ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ produced a document entitled 'The Zimbabwe We Want' (ZCBC, EFZ & ZCC 2006), which was censored by the ZANU-PF government before it was published, and some of the ecclesial leaders behind it were bribed and silenced (Tarusarira 2016).

Nevertheless, the remnant of the Church did not cease the struggle. Musoni (2024) says that:

Church bodies have collaborated to address the worsening social, political, and economic conditions in Zimbabwe since 2000. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) and Zimbabwe Divine Destiny (ZDD) formed the Consortium for Community Peace (CCOP). (p. 5)

According to Harris (2019:n.p.), 'church bodies in the country have come together to form the CCOP to revolutionise the process of peace-making in the country'.

However, the place of the Church in peacebuilding in Zimbabwe has been compromised by a variety of challenges. Dube (2020) argues that, instead of advancing their prophetic role by speaking up against evil and advocating for and exemplifying transformational leadership, increasing numbers of Church leaders in Zimbabwe have become regime enablers. Regardless of whether such leaders were co-opted or self-submitted to court prophecy, they compromise the peacebuilding position of the Church. 'Taking sides as a religious leader is a disastrous strategy and inhibits efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe' (Dube 2020:6).

### Reconsidering the Church as the peacebuilding conscience of Zimbabwean society

The Church is, ideally, considered as the conscience, the moral compass and the prophetic voice that speaks truth to power in society. According to Uwalaka (2021), the Church is a community of conscience whose faith is directly and indirectly professed in accordance with the redeeming mission of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, being the conscience of society involves embodying the morality of godliness, Christ-like love, care and dedication to upholding truth and good in society. According to Uwalaka (2021), being the conscience of society means promoting the integral liberation of humanity from everything that hinders individual and collective development. In the context of peacebuilding, the Church is and should be regarded as the conscience of society when she desires and enhances national peace, healing and reconciliation.

These goals have been elusive in Zimbabwe. Instead of embodying and promoting peace and transformational leadership and addressing the root causes of conflict in Zimbabwe, as the salt and light of the world, some Church leaders gave in to compromising political and financial conflicts. 'Church leadership conflicts have entangled and disrupted countless leaders and followers and distracted them from the integral *missio ecclesiae* in Zimbabwe' (Tagwirei 2024a:2). The image of the Church in Zimbabwe has been

tarnished further by bizarre stories of duplicity, controversies and charlatanry. For example, a television (TV) broadcast showed Pastor Paul Sanyangore 'talking to God on his phone' during one of his prophetic church services (Bennet 2017). Prophet Euebert Angel, who was appointed by President Mnangagwa as presidential envoy and ambassador-at-large to the Americas and Europe in 2021 and who calls himself, and indoctrinated his followers to call him, Major 1, prophet to Christianity, has been embroiled in a self-enriching gold-smuggling and money-laundering syndicate that involves the Zimbabwean president and other local and foreign fraudsters (Al Jazeera Investigative Unit 2023). Corruption is one of the major causes of national conflicts.

Instead of focusing on transforming lives, megachurch founders and prophets such as Makandiwa and Magaya are promoting a self-enriching prosperity gospel in Zimbabwe (Hove 2024). Even more hopelessness is inflicted on Zimbabweans by Prophet Passion Java, who declared that the incumbent president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, would never be dethroned through elections, and that he himself would commit suicide if the president lost an election (Bulawayo24 2023). Further evidence of corruption of the conscience of the Church is accusations that top executives of one of the biggest churches, the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa, sell leadership positions and foster a culture of corruption and exploitation (ZimEye 2024). Mafaro (2025) reports that churches in Zimbabwe have been rocked by several scandals involving the teaching of a self-enriching prosperity gospel, false miracles, sexual abuse by leaders of followers, power abuse and siding with oppressive political powers for personal security and related gains.

I agree with Musoni (2024:2) that the Church has not given priority to advocating the importance of Christian spirituality to promote peace in the country. 'Instead, the church in Zimbabwe has focused on the prosperity gospel and demonising African spirituality'. If the Church – which is supposed to be the salt and light of the world (Mt 5:13–16) – loses its 'saltiness' and 'lightness (activeness, influence and transformational power)' and fails to demonstrate love and care for people's lives by selflessly raising its voice on behalf of the voiceless against political violence and in search of justice, peace, healing and reconciliation, the Church will become useless and irrelevant to society. While some people still trust the Church as a peacebuilder, regardless of its commissions and omissions in Zimbabwe (Felm 2024), 'others have become increasingly sceptical of all religious leaders, leading to a broader crisis of faith that extends beyond the specific individuals involved in scandals' (Mafaro 2025:n.p.).

I agree with Mafaro (2025) that, even though the entanglements of Church leaders in scandals leave deep scars in the nation, they have also created opportunities for reflection and renewal. Can the Church remain the conscience of the society when many of its leaders and members have lost their own moral integrity? No. But, despite all the

aforsaid failures and wrongdoings, we cannot dismiss all believers. There is still a remnant of Christian leaders and followers who possess integrity and who have been preserved by God in Zimbabwe, just as He preserved a few of His people throughout biblical history. Considering that the Zimbabwean population is about 15 million, it could be possible to rebuild the fallen Church so that it becomes a massive peacebuilding conscience of a growing society in Zimbabwe.

## Rebuilding the peacemaking position of the Church in Zimbabwe

The restoration of the Church to its God-given position as the salt, light and, hence, conscience of society is critical in the Zimbabwean context. In search of restorative strategies, I conducted in-depth interviews with four ecumenical leaders: five church leaders representing different denominations and one theological educationist and peacebuilding and conflict management practitioner, from 05 to 10 July 2025. The bulk of their responses suggest that the Church should correct internal compromises, promote selflessness, prioritise integral mission, champion ethical leadership and advance peace.

### Address internal compromises

It is thought provoking that the Church is, according to the Bible, expected to live in the world while demonstrating that it is not of the world (Jn 17:14–18). Considering that the world is full of evil, being in the world yet not of the world means that, while Church leaders and members live and engage with society, they should not engage in sinful conduct. All four interviewees engaged in this study concurred with the state of Zimbabwe, as described from the beginning of this paper, namely that the Church in Zimbabwe is entangled in worldly wrongs such as factionalism, poor governance, state capture, sexual immorality, tribalism and financial and material corruption.

The ZCA's national programmes officer, Pastor Shadreck Ncube, suggested that the Church 'promote a culture of open communication and encourage honest, respectful dialogue in meetings and congregational life to deal with its prevailing problems'. He emphasised that the Church is problematised by conflicts, and he recommended biblical conflict resolution. 'The Church should emphasize Matthew 18:15–17 as a model for addressing offenses privately before involving others. Offer regular sermons, teachings, or workshops on forgiveness, reconciliation, and humility'. One of the peacebuilding coordinators of EFZ, who requested to be identified as an Advocate of the Church, said that there is a need for the Church to stress believers' common identity in Jesus Christ. 'Continuously remind members that despite their differences, they are united by the Gospel and belong to the same spiritual family (Gl 3:28, Eph 4:5)'. To reinforce unity, she added that the Church should cultivate humility and mutual respect: 'Encourage members to value others above themselves, be completely humble and gentle, patient, and bearing with one another in love' (Phlp 2:3–4, Eph 4:2). In arguing that the Church cannot unite the nation in peace

while it is divided, she advises the Church to embrace a diversity of gifts and functions (1 Cor 12):

'Recognise and celebrate that, like the human body, the Church is comprised of different parts, each with unique strengths and functions, all contributing to the unified whole.' (Advocate of the Church)

Furthermore, she stated that the Church should prioritise relationships and community:

'Acknowledge the innate human need for community and actively work to foster strong, supportive relationships among believers. Engage in shared prayer and theological reflection: Pray together for unity and engage in discussions that deepen understanding of shared faith and mission. Promote reconciliation and forgiveness: Actively work to bridge divides and heal past hurts through dialogue, understanding, and forgiveness.' (Advocate of the Church)

In addition to the above-mentioned views and suggestions, participants of this study offered various proposals that the Church could consider to restore its peacebuilding conscience and position in Zimbabwean society.

### On conflict, tribalism and factionalism

The Church in Zimbabwe is divided by multiple factors, from hermeneutical, theological and doctrinal to political, economic and social differences. In an email interview, Pastor Samuel Kalizi, who is also the national director of Scripture Union Zimbabwe, said that the church must not be run like a sole trader's business. He said that the Church needed a well-crafted, balanced and impersonal constitution that clearly spells out the way it must be run:

'Leaders must provide a detailed and practical way for the Church to resolve its own conflicts. Sadly, the past decade or so has seen the Church in Zimbabwe's conflicts spilling into the courts of law.' (Pastor Samuel Kalizi)

He cited several examples of churches involved in court cases, such as the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe, the Evangelical Church, the Mugodhi Apostolic Church, the Marange Apostolic Church, the Family of God Church and the Church of Christ, whose leaders sued each other when they failed to resolve their differences. The churches ended up splitting.

The faith and development coordinator for World Vision Zimbabwe, Pastor Kilton Moyo, said that the Church is and must live as one upright and missionary Body of Christ:

'As it stands, the Church is corrupted by its leadership who compete and craft their own doctrines and force church to be what they want and not what Jesus wants. As long as the church is man centred and not Christ centred, she is own her own and losing and conforming badly to the pattern of the world.' (Pastor Moyo)

Pastor Kalizi stated that heads of churches succumb to conflict and fail to set good examples for the world, 'the Church must be able to deal with its own challenges and

conflicts before it can deal with national challenges.' In addition, the Church is challenged to:

'[G]et back to the gospel of the kingdom. Get back to the mission. That is all. Restoration will come if the Church submits in obedience to Christ, the builder of the church.' (Pastor Moyo)

The Advocate of the Church, who was from EFZ, added that the Church must 'acknowledge and repent of any complicity, silence, or pursuit of prosperity gospel that has diluted the Church's moral authority'. Pastor Moyo agreed and said that the Church can regain its position as the peacebuilding conscience of Zimbabwean society if leaders and members get back to the sense of the Church as one body of Christ:

'Unless the Church recognises who she is, repent and turn back to God and the Gospel, they will continue eating each other and bringing the Name of Jesus to disrepute.' (Pastor Moyo)

He elaborated that it is painful to see the Church walking in ignorance of who she really is:

'The Church is not all these denominations and labels that we see. I normally say there is nothing in God's kingdom called the white or black Church. There is nothing orthodox, Roman Catholic, Adventist, Baptist or Pentecostal about the Church. These are all earthly labels that divide the Church. The CHURCH is one entity and off course meeting in various places.' (Pastor Moyo)

A senior pastor in Harare who requested anonymity supported this viewpoint and held that the Church must pursue godliness, exemplariness and peace to help society. The pastor underscored that the Church cannot expect to help society find peace while it fails to sustain its own peace. These views concur with Matthew 7:3, which forbids us to look for the speck in someone else's eye while paying no attention to our own.

Pastor Kalizi said that, as restoration, 'denominations must establish well-defined grievance handling structures and procedures, which can be held accountable for their decisions'. In addition, he added that the Church must develop internal capacity to manage conflict so that its conflicts do not end up in secular courts of law. Pastor Ncube said that it is, therefore, important to 'conduct listening sessions or surveys to uncover the underlying concerns behind Church conflicts. Promote spiritual disciplines such as prayer, self-reflection, and humility'. He added that the Church can also mentor emerging leaders and church members in servant leadership and Christ-like character. In doing so, the church could 'teach conflict as part of spiritual growth – not just a problem to be solved'.

### On sustaining unity

To sustain unity, interviewees recommended that the Church should continuously preach and teach unity. 'Regularly emphasise biblical teachings on unity and its importance for the Church's witness and mission', said the Advocate of the Church. She added that Church leaders must foster a culture of open communication and dialogue. 'Create safe

spaces for members to express differing opinions and concerns, and to engage in constructive conversations'. Furthermore, there is a need to practise restorative justice. The Advocate of the Church proposed that the Church 'implement processes that seek to heal relationships and restore brokenness when conflicts arise, rather than simply punishing offenders'. She also recommended that churches invest in leadership development: 'Equip leaders with the skills to foster unity, manage conflict, and model servant leadership'. Partnerships can also help the Church; the Advocate of the Church recommended that the Church engage in joint initiatives and ministries: 'Encourage different denominations and congregations to work together on shared projects, community outreach and social advocacy, building bridges through shared purpose'. In that way, the Church can nurture a blended spirituality:

'As suggested before, the Church should explore ways to integrate the spirituality of Jesus Christ with positive aspects of African spirituality, fostering a deeper sense of shared identity and cultural relevance.' (Advocate of the Church)

In addition, Pastor Kalizi recommended strengthening and empowering umbrella bodies such as the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations through constitutional provisions to unite the members so that they can act as the mouthpiece of the Church. The Advocate of the Church remarked that the Church must 'adopt robust conflict resolution mechanisms: Implement clear, biblically based processes for addressing disagreements, including mediation, reconciliation, and disciplinary measures where necessary'. In addition, she suggested that the Church should promote servant leadership, 'Encourage leaders who prioritise the well-being of the congregation over personal ambition, power, or property disputes'. She believed that there is also a need to foster spiritual maturity by 'equipping members with vital spiritual skills, emphasising humility, forgiveness, and love, which are essential for navigating differences constructively'. In her experience, the Church has not addressed the root causes of conflict, which is problematic. 'The Church must identify and confront underlying issues such as poor ethics, doctrinal disagreements, power struggles, or historical grievances'. In reconsidering restoration, she added that the Church should embrace diversity, 'Recognise that unity does not mean uniformity and celebrate the diverse gifts and perspectives within the body of Christ, while maintaining a common identity in Jesus'. She had observed that some ecclesial leaders lacked mentors, and she recommended that the Church invest in pastoral care. 'Provide support and guidance to leaders and members experiencing conflict, helping them to recognise their spiritual identity and address emotional and spiritual needs'. In turn, Pastor Moyo lamented:

'[I]t looks like we are still so comfortable in our tribal and cultural tags, so much that we still want to gather as church, tribally and racially. This is no good to the mission of the Church. The Church must deliver herself from these patterns of the world in order to be united.' (Pastor Moyo)

Pastor Ncube enunciated that, 'the Church must lead by example. Church leaders must model transparency, accountability, and reconciliation. Leaders who admit mistakes and seek forgiveness foster a healthy, humble and united church culture'. Because conflict often recurs in contexts of partisanship and favouritism, the Church leaders must:

'[H]andle every case impartially, seeking fairness and restoration rather than winning. They should develop conflict management policies, and clarify how their churches manage conflicts. That should include timelines, steps for mediation, escalation procedures, and the role of elders or external advisers. Leaders should also pray and rely on God's guidance. Involve the whole Church in prayer for unity and healing. Seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in discerning the way forward, especially in deeply rooted conflicts.' (Pastor Ncube)

### On poor governance and state capture

Pastor Kalizi said that the Church must define itself, 'otherwise without such a definition we would not know who constitutes the church'. There has been an increase in partisan and divisive ecumenical groupings in Zimbabwe. In addition to the predominant ZCC, EFZ, ZCBC, ZCA, Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches, Bishops Andrew Wutaunashwe and Nehemiah Mutendi, who are considered to have been captured by state ideology, formed the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches in 2020; another group of pastors formed Pastors4ED (meaning pastors in support of President Mnangagwa) (Tagwirei 2023). Therefore, Pastor Kalizi asked, 'Why does the Church seem to be as divided as political parties are? What makes it difficult for the Church to be united and to speak with one voice?' In light of the notion that partisan ecclesial groupings speak in support of, while apolitical bodies challenge the status quo, Pastor Kalizi observed that even churches that seem apolitical are divided among themselves, and it is difficult to identify who is who in the Church. He suggested that 'the Church must deal with its own identity crisis, get united and only then will it be able to address state capture'. Moreover, Pastor Kalizi said that the Church is dissatisfied by evidence of poor corporate governance and failures to conduct its own electoral processes, which proceed in the same way as national elections in Zimbabwe. Between 1980 and 2023, presidential and harmonised elections have been reported to be fraudulent, unfree, unfair and disputed (Chigora & Chilunjika 2016; Loanes 2023). Therefore, Pastor Kalizi believes that the Church can only be exemplary if 'its leaders are elected through transparent, fair and credible elections. Elected office bearers must serve for a well-defined and limited period to give others opportunities to lead as well'.

Contemporaneously, the Advocate of the Church said that the Church can and must maintain prophetic independence: 'resist co-option by political powers and avoid becoming an instrument of the state or any political party'. For her, advocating for constitutionalism and the rule of law matters. 'The Church must uphold and demand its own leadership

and membership adherence to democratic principles, transparency, and accountability in governance from its all levels of leadership'. By doing so, the Church can promote national democratic and economic justice. Considering the importance of inclusivity, the Advocate of the Church recommended that the Church empower grassroots communities. 'Mobilise and educate congregants and the wider community on their rights and responsibilities, encouraging active civic participation'. To strengthen its efforts, the Church should also establish ecumenical and interfaith alliances. 'Work collaboratively with other Christian denominations and religious bodies, as well as civil society organisations, to present a united front against state capture and advocate for systemic reform'. In concluding her view, she said that the Church should offer moral authority and prophetic witness. 'Fill the gap created by repression of media and civil society by bravely confronting those in authority with theological indictments against unjust policies and practices'.

### On sexual, financial and material corruption

The Church is also encouraged to reform its conduct so that it is above public reproach. Pastor Kalizi said that 'the Church must work on its own integrity by acknowledging and dealing with its own shortcomings, conflicts and weaknesses'. In arguing that some ecclesial leaders fall into corruption because of poverty, Pastor Kalizi added that 'the Church must have an equitable pastors' welfare system so that all pastors, regardless of position, are well taken care of as they participate in *missio Dei*'. Overall, it is clear that Church leaders can recover their Christian identity by submitting to and being transformed by stewardship, servanthood and prioritisation of God's transformational gospel and grace. Considering Tagwirei's (2022) overview of stewardship as referring to the trusteeship or guardianship of all ministries, human, financial and material resources, it is possible that, if leaders are enlightened that they are God's custodians and servants, and not masters, they can advance the peacebuilding mission of God with humility, integrity and seriousness. Church leaders can overcome the temptations posed by sexual, financial and material corruption by embracing the principles of stewardship and advancing *missio Dei* through applying and ministering the gospel diligently. Paul teaches leadership as being followed by others as one follows Jesus Christ (1 Cor 11:1) and serving others (Jn 13:1-17); in the same way, Church leaders must emulate this example and seek and serve God and others, instead of serving their own selfish interests.

In the Zimbabwean context, where moral, material and financial corruption is endemic and involves multiple Church leaders (Dube 2023; Mbofana 2025), the remnant can save the Church by ministering about repentance to those who have sinned and by yielding themselves and everyone to the transformational gospel of grace. If the remnant Church leaders continue preaching and pursuing the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Mt 6:3), God can, eventually, redeem those who have fallen. The repentance and

redemption of sinners will reconfirm that the Church remains the agent of God's restorative and transformative mission. Falling can be concluded as failure only when one stays down and keeps sinning. However, repenting and rising back to godliness and *missio Dei* will lead to resistance to corruption and will reposition the Church in its peacebuilding place in society.

### Promote selflessness

In an interview in Bulawayo, pastor and educationist, Dr Ray Motsi, who is the president and principal of the Theological College of Zimbabwe and a respected peacebuilding consultant in Zimbabwe, explained that Jesus Christ used salt, light and yeast metaphorically as emblems to demonstrate the role and significance of the Church in the world. It is critical for the Church to understand and live out its transformative positions in Zimbabwe. Dr Motsi said that the Church should draw selflessness from the metaphorical teachings of Jesus Christ: the more the light shines, the more it loses oil, or power, it uses. Similarly, the more salt and yeast work, the more they are consumed:

'What is common among these three emblems is one aspect which is being expended. They are being used up as they give to others. These emblems were used in order to demonstrate the manner Jesus Christ Himself was going to be doing ministry here on earth. He was going to give himself as a ransom for many. The key lesson for the Church today is that Jesus was self-sacrificing, but the Church today is on self-preservation mode. Jesus worked for others to benefit, while the Church in Zimbabwe today works for selfish benefits. Church leaders and members cannot be peace makers when they are more concerned about themselves than others.' (Dr Motsi, Interview)

Dr Motsi explained, furthermore, that the Church must remember that the Bible teaches that 'blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God' (Mt 5:9). 'One cannot be a peacemaker when you are more concerned with your own protection and welfare than [that of] others'. In expanding on this view, the Advocate of the Church said that the Church must champion selfless ethical leadership and responsible citizenship. 'Encourage Church members to be exemplary citizens who contribute positively to the society. Demonstrate honesty, conscientiousness, and morality in all spheres of life'. In her view, it is critical for the Church to reclaim its authentic status. 'The Church must shift from being a cold, sleeping, and dying giant to a vibrant, engaged, and transformative force in society'.

### Prioritise integral mission

Interviewees also suggested that the Church should advance the holistic mission of the Church, which includes *diakonia*:

'The Church has a biblical mandate to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel of Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. Therefore, the Church must move beyond mere proclamation of the gospel to demonstrating it through tangible actions of social justice, care for the marginalized, and responsible citizenship.' (Advocate of the Church)

This view relates to Tagwirei (2024a), who said:

[I]f the Church rises as the salt and light in every facet of life, it can oversee, undertake, and contribute to the transformation of its holistic missionary being in national and international socio-economic, political, and environmental life in Southern Africa. (p. 7)

The Advocate of the Church concurred and said, furthermore, that the Church must live out its prophetic mandate consistently. 'Be a consistent voice for truth, justice, and righteousness, even when it is costly. This means denouncing corruption and injustice regardless of who is perpetrating it'. To embody the gospel and demonstrate integrity, she advised that the Church practise what it preached and 'demonstrate integrity, transparency, and accountability in its own financial dealings and leadership structures. Address internal corruption and moral flaws decisively'. In the same way, the Church should engage holistically with societal issues. 'Be actively involved in addressing the socio-economic and political challenges facing Zimbabwe, moving beyond just spiritual proclamations to tangible actions that alleviate suffering and promote development'. Furthermore, she recommended that the Church stand in solidarity with the oppressed. 'The Church should be seen advocating for and mobilising provision of the needs of the poor, the marginalised, and those whose human rights are violated'.

### Advance peace

'The Church is called to be a beacon of peace and unity in a divided world. By taking proactive, humble, and biblical steps to manage conflict internally, the Church not only preserves its witness but also models the very reconciliation it preaches.' (Pastor Ncube)

In view of the contemporary state of the Church in Zimbabwe:

'[I]t is debatable whether the Church is still building peace in Zimbabwe. However, individual churches and umbrella church bodies have played different roles historically in peacebuilding for example, Roman Catholic church, EFZ and ZCC.' (Pastor Kalizi)

It is clear that Pastor Kalizi believes that the Church in Zimbabwe 'still has a huge task to attain a peacebuilding position. To do that, it must be united, deal with its own shortcomings, conflicts and weaknesses'. The Advocate of the Church said that the Church can retain its peacebuilding position by actively promoting reconciliation and healing: 'Facilitate processes for dialogue, understanding, and forgiveness among communities fractured by political violence and historical grievances'.

For context and intensification of *diakonia*, the Advocate of the Church said, the Church should reinforce the spirituality of Jesus Christ alongside African spirituality:

'Emphasise core tenets of love, tolerance, forgiveness, *hunhu* [Shona word meaning *Ubuntu*], respect for human life, and unity in diversity as foundations for peace. Empower members for peacebuilding: Equip congregants and communities with

knowledge and skills in conflict resolution, human rights, and non-violent communication.' (Advocate of the Church)

Moreover, the Advocate of the Church said that the Church should advocate for justice as a prerequisite for peace. 'Recognise that true and lasting peace cannot exist without justice. Therefore, the Church must actively advocate for an end to human rights abuses, political violence, and impunity'. To cement the peacebuilding process, she suggested that the Church provide safe spaces for dialogue: 'Offer itself as a neutral and trusted platform where diverse stakeholders, including political actors, can engage in constructive dialogue'.

Considering that the Church has been wavering between peacebuilding and politicised provocation, the Advocate of the Church stated that the Church needs to re-examine its own role. 'The Church should reflect on past instances where its involvement in peace initiatives has been minimal or ineffective and learn from those experiences to enhance its future contributions'. For sustainable engagement, she recommended that the Church collaborate with other peace actors. 'Work in partnership with civil society organisations, traditional leaders and other religious bodies to amplify peacebuilding efforts'.

## Conclusion

Having observed that the place of the Church as the peacebuilding conscience of society has been compromised by prevailing conflicts and the entanglements of some Church leaders and members in corruption, state capture, factionalism and other worldly evils, this study explored restorative strategies for ecclesial reformation and national transformation in Zimbabwe. In view of the remnant theology and the recommendations of interviewees, it became clear that it is possible for the Church to correct internal compromises, promote selflessness, prioritise integral mission, champion ethical leadership, advance peace and transform the Church and society in Zimbabwe. Church leaders and members who fell into sin can be restored through repentance and redemption, hence the importance of sustaining the peacebuilding role of the Church to resolve Zimbabwe's political and socio-economic crises.

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