

# A Historical Survey on the Church's Involvement in Peace Initiative Frameworks in Zimbabwe: Post-Mugabe Era

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## Abstract:

The article highlights that numerous peace initiative programmes have been implemented by both the government and the Church to promote reconciliation, healing, and social unity within Zimbabwe's politically charged atmosphere. Despite these efforts, political violence continued to surge during and post-Mugabe era. Furthermore, the study interrogates the role of the church in the peace initiative frameworks after the Mugabe era. Historically, the church's involvement in peace initiatives has been minimal, comparable to a mere drop in the ocean. The study posits that the Zimbabwean church could enhance its role in peace initiatives within a politically fragmented context by reinforcing to its congregants the significance of embodying the spirituality of Jesus Christ alongside African spirituality, thereby cultivating what this article refers to as 'African Christian spirituality'. The study observed that the majority of churches in Zimbabwe have not integrated African Christian spirituality into their peace initiative programmes. A spirituality with tenets such as love, tolerance, forgiveness, *hunhu*, respect for human life, and unity in diversity among others serves as a foundation for peace in a politically divided nation like Zimbabwe. A review of the literature, participant observation and interviews were used for data collection. Theological reflection and socio-historical approaches were employed to interpret the data collected.

**Keywords:** African Christian spirituality; peace initiatives; post-Mugabe era; the Zimbabwean church

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## Introduction

The paper provides a historical perspective on the Church's involvement in peace initiatives in the period following the removal of Robert Mugabe as the President of Zimbabwe in 2017. It is noted that despite the Zimbabwean church's introduction of various peace initiatives, these efforts have not halted the persistent violence and human rights violations in Zimbabwe. It seems that the church has not given priority to advocating the importance of the spirituality of Jesus Christ alongside African spirituality as a way to promote peace in the nation. Instead, the church in Zimbabwe has focused on the prosperity gospel and demonising African spirituality. We argued that the demonisation of African Indigenous spirituality has fostered disunity among many African societies. It is argued that African spirituality has been instrumental in nurturing '*hunhu*' within African communities. In the spirit of African Indigenous spirituality, one's humanity is fulfilled through community with others (Mbiti 1969, 79). Historically, African Indigenous spirituality has been shaped by African cultural, social, political, as well as economic lives (Marumo and Chakale 2018, 23). Central to this spirituality is that, from time immemorial, human life has been sacred, and a good attitude towards other human beings has been rewarded by the ancestors (Marumo and Chakale 2018, 23; Masango 2006, 938).

On the other hand, the Jesus Christ spirituality, known as the Christian spirituality, is the conscious human response to God that is both personal and ecclesial (Tang 2006,15). Christian spirituality involves the pursuit of integrating one's life by transcending oneself towards the ultimate value one recognises, which in this context is God as revealed in Jesus Christ and encountered through the gift of the Holy Spirit (McGrath 1997, 20). It is, therefore, the authors' view that merging the two spiritualities can create a blended spirituality called 'African Christian spirituality' (Musoni 2017). This type of blended spirituality is an essential foundation for peace, as its dual pillars—the spirituality of Jesus Christ and African spirituality—both emphasise unity in diversity. Hence, the study determined that for the Zimbabwean church to make a meaningful contribution to the peace initiative framework, it should promote the significance of blending African indigenous spirituality with the spirituality of Jesus Christ within a politically polarised environment.

The available literature, participant observation, and interviews were used for data collection, while the socio-historical and theological reflection approaches were employed to interpret the data collected. The article is structured into four sections. The first section concentrates on historicising the recurrent political violence in Zimbabwe during and post-Mugabe era. The second deals with the church's efforts in trying to end political violence in Zimbabwe during and post-Mugabe. The third section deals with the historicising the early church's perception of Christian spirituality for peace initiatives exemplified by Augustine's spirituality drawn from the teaching of Jesus Christ. The fourth and final section explores the significance of integrating African spirituality in peace initiative frameworks within the Zimbabwean church setting.

## Methodology

For this paper a multidisciplinary approach was used. The study employed in-depth interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis in the collection of data. Participant observation took place among three ZAOGA churches in Chirumhanzu, Gutu, and Chivi, as well as the white garment church at Domboshava showgrounds and the Apostolic Faith Mission Church in Goromonzi district. The participant observation took place over six months, from May to December 2023. This was conducted to examine the types of messages delivered during a critical time for the country, spanning the pre and post-periods of the 2023 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe. Interviewees were selected using a random sampling method. Random sampling was preferred because it ensures that every individual or element within a specified area has an equal chance of being chosen. This approach enhances the accuracy of the data collected, as it provides a balanced opportunity for selection. Additionally, the researchers engaged in library research, drawing upon books and journal articles. For the analysis and description of the collected data, the study employed theological reflection and socio-historical methods.

Theological reflection involves critical thinking about real-life situations in society and critically relating them to church traditions (Trokan 1997, 6). O'Connell Killen and de Beer (1994, 5–19) characterised theological reflection through three perspectives: investigation, assurance, and conviction. Theological reflection views experience and tradition as “mutual,” each contributing to the reflective process (Dean 2002, 10; Dean 2007, 10). The socio-historical approach was utilised to analyse the church's role in the peace initiative framework in Zimbabwe after the Mugabe era. The article explores the social and historical contexts in which the Zimbabwean church functions and its possible contributions to peace efforts. This method examines the influence of the church's proclamations, particularly in a politically polarised environment. Employing the socio-historical approach has been advantageous in understanding the social and historical backgrounds that should guide the church's proclamations to contribute to peace initiatives in Zimbabwe meaningfully. Even though many Zimbabweans identify as Christians, political violence continues to occur. This situation prompts the critical question: who is responsible for these brutal acts if many of the Zimbabwe populace profess to follow Christian teachings?

## Political Situation Pre- and Post-Mugabe Era: A Historical Survey

Throughout the pre- and post-Mugabe periods, Zimbabwe experienced severe political violence and significant human rights abuses. These unrests range from the Gukurahundi massacres of the early 1980s that left more than twenty thousand people dead (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012, 4), the 2005 Zimbabwe operation Murambatsvina[Restore Order]which was designed to eradicate ‘illegal’ housing and informal jobs, that left approximately 700,000 Zimbabweans homeless (Nicolai 2006, 815), the 2008 presidential election re-run commonly known as *vaMugabe muhofisi*

that was characterised by bloodshed in the country (Macheka 2022, 21). Such a campaign was characterised by violence and intimidation to allow Mugabe to retain power as the president of Zimbabwe. The gross human rights violations did not end with the Mugabe regime. During the post-Mugabe era, ZANU PF continued using the same tactics as before. The jubilation and hope that the new regime would bring peace and social cohesion were marred because of perceived state brutality and human rights abuse in the country (Mutanda 2023). Thus, hopes for substantial democratisation were not realised because of the continuation of political violence and abuse of human rights (Mutanda 2023, 8).

Political violence and human rights abuses were perpetrated in a context where most of the Zimbabwean populace, including its political leaders, were professing to be devoted Christians. It is against this background that Wakatama, in his assessment of the role of Christianity in the socio-political affairs of Zimbabwe, posed a rhetorical question: “Are all churches in Zimbabwe Christian? If all the people, church organisations and groups who call themselves Christian in Zimbabwe were indeed Christians, this country would be heaven on earth” (Wakatama 2014, 11).

Accordingly, in Zimbabwe, where Christianity is the predominant faith, it is a common practice for the President, members of the House of Assembly, and members of the armed forces, such as soldiers and police officers, to take their oath of office while holding a Bible. This act symbolises their commitment to uphold the law and serve their nation with integrity and honour. Thus, the Bible is held as a revered symbol of the spiritual values they vow to embody in their role as guardians and upholders of justice. The symbolism of holding the Bible while taking the Oath of Office seems to suggest that political leaders will be guided by biblical spirituality in carrying out their duties. The question that persists is: Does Christian Spirituality manifest in the behaviour of Zimbabwe's soldiers, police, and political leaders as they perform their duties? Also, the transition of the presidency from Mugabe to Emmerson Mnangagwa raises questions about the manifestation of Christian spirituality in their leadership styles, especially since both Mugabe and Mnangagwa professed to be Christians (Mudzanire and Banda 2021, 10). For Mujinga (2023, 14), despite President Mnangagwa's public declaration to be a Christian and his association with the Methodist Church, Zimbabwe has continued to witness state-sponsored human rights abuses under his administration.

So, the question to further discuss is: what does it say about the Christian message in an African church if its adherents partake in atrocities? Recognising that a majority in Zimbabwe profess to be Christian, it is posited that professing to be Christian without the demonstration of the spiritual values of Jesus Christ is trivial. It is also asserted that the dismissal of African indigenous spirituality by the church has fostered a culture of disrespecting elders by many youths who claim to be Christians. It is therefore argued that the manifestation of a hybrid spirituality that accommodates both African spirituality and the spirituality of Jesus Christ in the believers may be realised if the church emerges from dormancy and reorients its followers towards a church that

embraces African Christian spirituality. However, in the history of Christianity in Zimbabwe, colonisers have influenced African Christians to view their indigenous spirituality — a spirituality that is integral to their true humanity — with disdain. This is so because the evidence shows that the church in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Southern Africa deliberately decided to demonise African spirituality, and in the process, the cornerstone of African morals and ethics is losing grip among most African societies (cf. Frahm-Arp 2010, 107 –109; 116–117; Anderson 1993, 30 –31; Nkomazana 2015, 19 –30). The subsequent section illustrates the church's attempts to halt political violence, which have not produced positive outcomes.

### Historising Christian Churches and Peace Initiative Programmes in Zimbabwe.

The study has noted that the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC), and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) have put in place platforms to promote peace and development in Zimbabwe (Manyonganise 2020, 16). These church bodies have collaborated to address the worsening social, political, and economic conditions in Zimbabwe since 2000. They sought to address the lived realities of citizens while holding the political elite accountable (Manyonganise 2020). Together, they mapped out a shared national vision in “The Zimbabwe We Want”, which sought to challenge the abuses of state power (Manyonganise 2020, 15). Wakatama (2014) characterised the intention behind the document as noble, but it never yielded any tangible fruit. It was not able to make a difference in the issues it identified as crucial for peacebuilding in Zimbabwe. In the same vein, on 15 March 2019, the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) and Zimbabwe Divine Destiny (ZDD) formed the Consortium for Community Peace (CCOP). This peace initiative framework was formed to foster a violence-free environment and promote sustainable peace in Zimbabwe (Harris 2019). Harris, quoting the Chairperson of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), Retired Judge Justice Sello Nare, emphasises that Christians have a duty to champion peace in conflict-ridden countries.

However, the church's peace initiative project faced both challenges and limitations, leading to less-than-desired outcomes. The church leaders correctly diagnosed Zimbabwe's problems, suggesting a prescription for healing. Unfortunately, they failed in the administration of their proposed remedy (Magezi and Tagwirei 2022, 11). For example, the above-mentioned church organisations failed to speak with one voice. Within those church organisations, churches like the white garment Vapositori and the Zion Christian church, among others, were seen uncritically supporting the ZANU-PF party, which resulted in Mugabe remaining in power for too long (Musoni 2019). Since the era of former President Robert Mugabe's reign, partisan gospel ministers and churches have emerged. The partisanship spilt over to the new dispensation, where some ministers publicly declared themselves to be Pastors for ED (Pastors for President Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa). Church leaders such as Prophet Walter Magaya,

Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, Apostle Andrew Wutaunashe, Prophet Uebert Angel, and Prophet Pasion Java were uncritically supporting and campaigning for ZANU PF publicly in their churches (Tagwirei 2024, 6).

The formation of church organisations to address political violence in Zimbabwe was a commendable step. However, it is argued that church leaders did not effectively utilise their pulpits to transform the attitudes of their congregants towards fostering peace in a politically divided Zimbabwe. We argued that church ministers' sermons are always perceived as divine, prompting congregants to act on the messages delivered by these leaders. Furthermore, the critique of church leaders' unquestioning endorsement of ZANU-PF includes concerns that they may focus on promoting a gospel that seems to praise political leaders instead of emphasising the teachings of Jesus Christ and African Indigenous spirituality as the basis for harmonious living in a politically fragmented country like Zimbabwe.

### Appropriation of Christian Spirituality for Peace Initiatives in the Zimbabwean Political Landscape.

The history of Christianity shows that its spirituality is rooted in the belief in God's immanence, His active presence in the world, and His work through individuals (Sheldrake 2005). Saint Augustine, who lived from 354 to 430 CE, was a key figure in the history of Christianity, and his spirituality continues to serve as a model for true Christian spirituality among believers (Quicke 2022). Augustine's spirituality was marked by a focus on love, which appears more frequently than faith or hope in his writings (Quicke 2022, 2). Augustine considered love to be the melody of the New Testament, shedding light on the entire Gospel. He advocated for hospitality over hostility or suspicion towards others, embracing guests, imparting wisdom, and acknowledging the divine in every individual (Kearney 2024, 2). This perspective suggests that God is profoundly central to our existence and is also found in every person we meet (Quicke 2022, 4). Augustine held friendship in high regard, believing that true friendship is the union of souls with a common purpose, particularly when that purpose is Christ. He stated, "Without a friend, nothing in the world seems friendly" (Kearney 2024, 4). Augustine experienced solace in God's presence through his intimate friendships (Quicke 2022, 9). For him, community was vital to his spiritual life. He viewed humanity's longing for connection as a mirror of God's communal essence (the Trinity) (Quicke 2022). To love the members of Christ was to love Christ Himself, and he stressed the significance of harmonious relationships with others as an indication of our bond with God (Kearney 2024, 6). In a nutshell, St Augustine understood Christian spirituality as Christianity on the heart, whereas Christian Theology as Christianity on the mind. Thus, for him, Christian Theology is theoretical, whilst Christian Spirituality is practical (Burrige 2001).

Christian spirituality, as conveyed by Augustine of Hippo, was predominantly a spirituality of practice rather than theoretical abstraction. Historically, Christian

spirituality has embraced a relational and emancipating awareness of God that honours creation and views humans of diverse nationalities as equal members of the global community (Tang 2006, 15). This relational, liberating God-consciousness is rooted in the experience of God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (Thatcher 1992, 55). Christian spirituality, therefore, can be seen as a process of spiritual formation of followers of Jesus Christ for an authentic and fulfilled Christian life in the present world, involving bringing together the fundamental tenets of the Christian truths and the experience of living in God's presence, grace, and love in our daily life (Holt 2005, 14).

Also, in the history of Christianity, Jesus Christ's spirituality is exemplified in His teachings, acts of peace, compassion, love, respect, and forgiveness (McGiffert 1949, 66). This spirituality manifests when human beings consistently choose to yield to the Holy Spirit's ministry (Cheslyn, Wainwright and Yarnold 1986, 18). Accordingly, the Parable of the Good Samaritan is selected to exemplify the importance of embracing the spirituality of Jesus Christ for peace initiatives in a polarised political environment in Zimbabwe.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have' (Luke 10:30–35 NKJV).

The Parable of the Good Samaritan is a well-known story in the Bible that teaches about compassion and kindness. In this parable, a man is robbed, beaten, and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest and a Levite, both of whom were religious figures, passed by that man but did not help him. This raises the question: why did they not help him?

For Zimmermann, the priest and the Levite may have been concerned about becoming ritually impure if they touched the man (Zimmermann 2008, 274). This would have prevented them from entering the Temple for a time, so they chose to maintain their ritual purity (Zimmermann 2008, 273). Thus, the Priest and the Levite must have weighed the law of loving one's fellow man against the law of cultic purity and decided to be on the safe side by avoiding conflict and going by on the other side (Zimmermann 2008, 278). This, therefore, suggests that the law of Moses was a large barrier to their rendering him assistance. It is also possible that the Priest and the Levite were afraid to stop and help the man. The Jericho Road was known to be dangerous, and they may have feared that the robbers were still around (Rau 2012, 1). Rau, quoting Martin Luther King Jr.'s sermon, suggested that they may have also thought the man was faking his injuries to lure them into a trap (Rau 2012, 4). In any case, the actions of the Priest and

the Levite stand in stark contrast to those of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to help the man despite the risks involved. The Samaritan's actions demonstrate the importance of compassion and kindness, even when it is difficult or dangerous to do so.

We contended that the Good Samaritan recognised his own humanity in the injured and broken man, extending a helping hand. This encounter stirred a profound compassion within him, prompting an act of kindness. Through this gesture, the Good Samaritan affirmed the inherent humanity of the stricken man. His selflessness was evident, as he could not be certain if the man's plight were a ruse to deceive him. Despite their ethnic differences, their shared humanity, fashioned in the likeness of God, remained central.

Therefore, in terms of peace initiative frameworks, the parable of the Good Samaritan, which demonstrates Jesus' spirituality, has been proposed to be the framework the Zimbabwean church can use to transform the country for the better in a polarised political environment. Jesus used this parable to show that saving human lives is more important than protecting and valuing religious norms and political territories. The Samaritan's actions demonstrate the importance of compassion and kindness, even when it is difficult or dangerous to do so. The parable demonstrates how Christian spiritual tenets, such as love, forgiveness, brotherly kindness, and tolerance, can be integrated into peacebuilding within a polarised political environment in Zimbabwe. These spiritual elements cannot be directly perceived by our senses, but their effects can be deduced or inferred by our actions (Schneiders 2007). For example, Jesus is referred to as the 'Prince of Peace' (Ephesians 2:14–17) because he makes Jews and Gentiles one, breaking their dividing wall of hostility and reconciling them (Peck 2012).

Taking a cue from the Good Samaritan, it is posited that the sustainability of peace initiatives, especially in politically divided nations, can be achieved when individuals first find reconciliation within themselves. The Good Samaritan pursued peace with a stranger by first reconciling within himself, setting aside the longstanding animosity between Jews and Samaritans. The authors contend that self-reconciliation is a prerequisite for reconciling with others. For Cherian (2019, 103), genuine reconciliation involves coming to terms with the past, not just concealing issues and acting as if nothing occurred. Peace will remain elusive in the country unless the church in Zimbabwe reaffirms the pivotal role of the Spirituality of Jesus Christ, exemplified by the parable of the Good Samaritan. Additionally, we suggest that this spirituality of Jesus Christ could be harmonised with African spirituality to establish a sustainable peace framework in Zimbabwe.

### **Appropriation of African Spirituality for Peace Initiatives in a Polarised Political Environment in Zimbabwe.**

Like other Sub-Saharan African communities, Zimbabwean peoples share a form of African spirituality that stems from the country's extensive history of kinship, totemic bonds, and marital ties (Mtapuri and Mazengwa 2013, 1). This spirituality highlights

the importance of interconnectedness, compassion, communal prosperity, and collective accountability for transgressions. Consequently, every community member is expected to uphold the communal norms and values. Traditional Africans hold the spiritual dimension of life in high esteem, recognising the influence of invisible forces, spirits, and ancestors on everyday existence (Banana 1991, 14). Thus, the foundation of African spirituality is entrenched in historical oral stories, myths, and legends (Zegeye and Vambe 2006, 329), which establish the core of identity, ethics, and understanding of the universe. Rituals, ceremonies, and community gatherings are essential in passing down indigenous African spirituality through the ages (Podolecka 2021, 111). This viewpoint promotes harmony, honours ancestors, and marks significant life events. It highlights the need for balance and harmony between humans, nature, and the spiritual realm (Podolecka 2021, 113). Mnukwa encapsulates this concept with the phrase "I am because we are," signifying that an individual's well-being is intertwined with the community's (2023, 23). African spirituality imbues everyday life with meaning, linking individuals to their heritage, forebears, and the earth (Olupona 2011). Thus, losing this spirituality would mean losing a historical lens through which Africans have found meaning, resilience, and sustenance for centuries. However, Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) seem to argue that the transmission of African spirituality was once feasible when individuals traditionally resided within their tribal communities. With the onset of industrialisation and urbanisation, this transmission has disintegrated, resulting in the decline of African spirituality in many African nations. For Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013, 29), African spirituality only worked well in traditional rural societies and has no place in a modernised and industrialised environment. This is because the recitation of traditional myths and legendary stories, which were once the main platforms for transmitting such spirituality, has ceased.

Nevertheless, Marumo and Chakale argued that African spirituality is not fixed but responds to changing circumstances, cultural shifts, and historical contexts (Marumo and Chakale 2018, 17). African spirituality presents African traditional religion (ATR) as a dynamic and multifaceted religion that defies rigid boundaries (Mabvurira 2016). Unlike some organised religions with fixed creeds, ATR remains open and adaptable and does not pass judgment on other ways of knowing (Masondo 2018, 209). Throughout history, African Traditional Religion (ATR) has evolved in response to external factors such as colonialism, slavery, and globalisation (Aderibigbe and Falola 2022). This explains why Africans, even those taken into slavery, continued to practice ATR on the plantations where they were enslaved (Alexander 2011, 22). It is believed that African spirituality remains ingrained in the subconscious of Africans, even those who convert to Christianity and other religions. Therefore, Zimbabwean church leaders should consider revisiting pre-Christian traditions that have supported African communities for generations. Such an initiative was undertaken by the late founder of ZAOGA, Ezekiel Handinawangu Gutu. Gutu wrote:

Every person should be honoured; every person must be a Christian in the speech. We must learn how to talk. Just as our elders of long ago used to do. They could understand

the language of animals and birds. They would be told that there is honey over there, over there, there are wild fruits because they learned manners. They would say, “Greetings my Lord.” They would do this to everyone they meet. In the rural areas if you go you will hear old people saying, ooh my Lord!!, how are you, my lord? This is what our fathers would do. This is why they were respectful and dignified. Sometimes they would find Sadza (Zimbabwean Staple food) under a tree; do you think you will find it with your noisy behaviour? They would not say when they see a baboon, Hey baboon, *ha, ha, ha*, and laugh. They would not do that. They were people who had values. Now these modern ways of yours. You will never become a white person; you are an African. You are learning the ways and culture of other people who are having problems with that culture (Guti 2003, 18–19).

The quotation above demonstrates that Gutu appears to value African spirituality as a framework for building a peaceful and socially cohesive society. It is a blueprint that can be used to formulate a framework for an enduring peace in Zimbabwe. His teachings aim to reintegrate his followers into the ancient African spiritual traditions. Gutu bases his teachings on respect, drawing from a pure collection of traditional African myths and stories that are pivotal to African cultural heritage and spirituality. Gutu believes that black African Christians should cease to mimic Western culture, which prioritises individualism over their native culture that underscores respect for all. He also instructed that respect should be extended to animals and birds, as God often employs certain creatures to send messages to humans regarding impending dangers or fortunes. The authors posit that the dissemination of teachings from Gutu's writings serves as a foundation for a peace initiative in a politically divided Zimbabwe. In alignment with Gutu's theological views, a participant expressed: “The ongoing droughts afflicting our country are a sign of the ancestors’ wrath, a reaction to the widespread loss of innocent lives caused by political violence.” (Interview 03/12/2023).

The Shona ethnic groups in Zimbabwe have a longstanding belief that killing an innocent person summons avenging spirits. One interviewee expressed this sentiment: “Growing up, we were taught that the act of killing an innocent person would bring the avenging spirit, or *ngozi*, into the community. These days, people are killing each other indiscriminately” (Interview 03/11/2023). This raises critical questions about our societal evolution and the factors contributing to such changes. It appears that Africans have drifted from their ancestral customs and values, leading to a decline in morality. The paper suggests that colonial influences have appropriated and distorted key African philosophies, such as Hunhu, stripping them of their original meaning and purpose. The colonial system managed to create a sense of self-hate for black Africans, as witnessed by black Africans killing each other in what is commonly known as xenophobia (Olivier 2019). Also, Africans who are trained to be Pastors in our churches are taught to demonise African religions and epistemologies and to appreciate everything Western as holy and pure (cf. Frahm-Arp 2010, 107–109; 116–117; Anderson 1993, 30–31; Nkomazana 2015, 19–30).

Following Guti's theology, the African church should embrace African traditional spiritual tenets that promote peace, tolerance, respect, and brotherly kindness in a polarised political environment. African spirituality facilitates respect for human life because it does not focus on abstract realities [eternal punishment in hell]; rather, it emphasises the punishment for sin that happens in the here and now (Magesa 2014, 220). Ancestors are responsible for punishing the evil doers. Also, the punishment for sin, according to African Indigenous knowledge systems, affects the perpetrators themselves and their families.

In the African spiritual worldview, sin is indeed perceived as a collective phenomenon. It intertwines with the fabric of community life, affecting not only the individual but also the entire group and the environment. The repercussions of wrongdoing ripple through communal bonds, impacting relationships, harmony, and balance. Thus, the punishment for sin is borne collectively, echoing the belief that the well-being of the group is inseparable from the well-being of an individual. This notion of collective punishment for sin leading to collective responsibility for sin had some positive traits leading to individuals in the community policing one another in fear of collective punishment. For Magesa, the African spiritual worldview does not hold as its primary objective the achievement of a specific goal by an individual for an individual. For him, if there is a goal in the perception of African spirituality, it is to totally experience the "good life" and to completely avoid the "bad life" for the community (Magesa 2014, 221). Concurring with Magesa's view, another respondent in an interview had this to say:

A child was born for the whole village, and it was the responsibility of the whole village to raise a child. Children used to respect elders. But nowadays young people are terrorising old people in rural areas, forcing them to vote for a certain political party against their will. Some old people were beaten during election campaigns, mostly in rural areas. We appeal to political leaders and church organisations to teach these youngsters good morals (Interview:06/06/2023).

It is proposed in this paper that the Zimbabwean church would bring a significant contribution to the peace initiative framework if it realised the importance of African traditional spirituality. The argument maintained throughout this article is that age-old African religious spiritual qualities which involved sincerity, honesty, selfless service to humanity, forgiveness, tolerance, respect for everyone, and collective punishment for sin appear to be a better alternative for building a progressive and sustainable society (Ibenwa 2014, 26). As noted by Ibenwa (2014) we argue that any society that does not anchor its values on above referred qualities is associated with hate, resentment, and gross violation of human rights. In the case of Zimbabwe, this study emphasised that although Guti championed a theology that incorporated African spirituality into the church, some Zimbabwean church leaders have remained impartial, persisting in vilifying African elements while considering European influences as sacred and impeccable.

## Conclusion

The article sought to reevaluate the historical role of the Zimbabwean church in peace initiative programmes after the Mugabe era. It observed that despite the creation of platforms for peace initiatives by church organisations, the anticipated results were not realised. The paper contends that divisions within the church community, especially due to certain church leaders' public endorsement of the ZANU-PF party over preserving the church's neutrality to mediate political crises, have contributed to the persistence of unresolved political conflicts in the country. The article pointed out that the church's minimal involvement in a peace initiative project stemmed from its intentional disregard for the spirituality of Jesus and African spirituality as essential foundations for peace. We contended that the church could make a substantial contribution to peace initiatives by redirecting its sermon teachings towards principles that can alter congregants' attitudes to embrace forgiveness, tolerance, love, and unity in diversity, as exemplified by the parable of the Good Samaritan taught by Jesus Christ. We also emphasised that the church could make a lasting impact if its leaders guide members towards African spirituality. Even though Africans have embraced Christianity, African traditional religion remains ingrained in the African subconscious, serving as the foundational theology in Africa. Africans often interpret the Bible through the lens of their indigenous traditions. The article concluded that until the Zimbabwean church fosters a spirituality that incorporates both Christian and African spiritual values, political violence will persist despite the majority of the population identifying as Christian.

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