


# Contemporary theological approaches in Zimbabwe: Navigating the challenges of the 21st century

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The challenges of the 21st century are examined as Zimbabwe's modern theological views are discussed, and responses are given and analysed in this study. In Zimbabwe, theology is changing quickly to meet the demands of the country's people in the face of persistent socioeconomic difficulties, political unrest and cultural changes. Contemporary theological debate is structured by the historical background of Zimbabwean theology, which is characterised by colonial influences and the freedom movement. These days, the discussion tackles several urgent issues: gender justice, seen through the prism of feminist theology that seeks to demolish patriarchal structures; political unrest, highlighted by a prophetic theology that challenges corruption and fosters governance; the ongoing economic crisis, arguing for economic justice and ethical leadership; and the significance of interfaith dialogue and cultural integration in a pluralistic society. This study also emphasises how important it is to address the specific issues that young people face, include contemporary digital platforms in religious activities, and involve them in theological conversation. To make theology relevant and transformational, theological views in modern Zimbabwe are distinguished by their receptivity to regional and global shifts. This study makes an overview and analysis of theological responses in Zimbabwe – the case for a theology that is both prophetic and practical one that offers long-term remedies for social change in addition to criticism.

**Contribution:** This study examines contemporary theological approaches in Zimbabwe, highlighting the adaptation of theology to address issues such as gender justice, political integrity and economic crises. It advocates for a responsive and transformative role for the church in promoting societal change.

**Keywords:** Zimbabwean theology; economic justice; prophetic theology; feminist theology; interfaith dialogue; youth engagement; contemporary challenges.

## Introduction

In light of the new dynamics that the 21st century has brought about in Zimbabwe, theologians and church leaders are being forced to re-evaluate and modify their methods. Theology needs to be relevant and responsive to the needs of Zimbabwe's people as the country continues to face political, social and economic difficulties. This article examines modern theological approaches in Zimbabwe and shows how these approaches negotiate the complex realities of the contemporary era.

Zimbabwean theology is facing a precipice in the aftermath of fast socioeconomic developments and globalisation. As the country deals with continual political upheaval, evolving cultural identities and economic instability, the church's traditional functions and theological viewpoints are being called into question and put to the test. These difficulties affect how the church interacts with and leads its adherents, and are both profoundly structural and spiritual. The historical background of Zimbabwe has a significant influence on the religious debate that exists now. The remnants of colonialism, the war for independence and the post-colonial pursuit of unity and identity have all profoundly impacted the nation's religious discourse. To provide a faith that is both historically aware and sensitive to the needs of the Zimbabwean people presently, theologians of today must traverse these turbulent historical seas.

This article aims to shed light on the many routes that the Zimbabwean church is now forging by critically examining how modern theologians in the country are addressing these complex issues. It seeks to show that Zimbabwean theology is an active and dynamic process of interpretation and action in response to contemporary conditions, not only a preservation of tradition. This investigation will shed light on the theology's capacity to reform and solve both the present-day and eternal issues facing Zimbabwe.

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## Theological context in historical Zimbabwe

It is necessary to briefly examine Zimbabwe's historical background to comprehend modern theology in the country. In Zimbabwe, religious discourse has changed dramatically, especially during and after colonialism. Western missionary teachings, which frequently ignored local beliefs and practices, had a significant effect on colonial-era theology (Chitando 2005). As a result, a theological framework was developed that was occasionally at odds with Zimbabweans' everyday realities.

A major change was brought about by the liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s when theologians started to create a theology that addressed the wrongs of colonialism and backed the fight for independence. According to Togarasei (2007), this liberation theology placed a strong emphasis on social justice, human dignity and the necessity of theological thought that was relevant to the African experience. Theologians in Zimbabwe proceeded to create contextual theologies that tackled concerns of nation-building and reconciliation after independence (Mugambi 2003).

### Theological impact of colonialism in Zimbabwe

It is impossible to overestimate the influence of colonialism on Zimbabwean beliefs. The spiritual and cultural traditions of the indigenous people were frequently at odds with the Western theological conceptions that Christian missionaries brought during the colonial era. To alter the social structures and spiritual beliefs of the Zimbabwean people, foreign religious rituals were imposed, which was not only an invasion of culture, but also a means of colonial control (Daneel 1999). Consequently, the early Zimbabwean theological framework was marked by a conflict between the rich spiritual legacy of the indigenous people and the colonial Christian beliefs.

### Liberation theology and the independence movement

Zimbabwe's history saw significant change throughout the 1960s and 1970s as a result of a fierce fight for freedom from colonial authority. A new theological narrative that drew inspiration from the greater African liberation theology movement surfaced during this period. To promote justice, equality and freedom from colonial tyranny, this movement aimed to connect the Christian gospel with the social and political reality of African people (Gundani 2002).

In Zimbabwe, liberation theology criticised conventional missionary churches for their cooperation with the colonial government and aimed to restore Christianity as a means of achieving social justice and independence. The gospel, according to theologians such as Canaan Banana and others, is fundamentally a message of liberation, meant to set people free from all types of bondage, whether they be political, economic or spiritual (Banana 1996).

## Theological thoughts after independence

The dialogue in religious circles centred on concerns of nation-building and reconciliation after Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980. In addition to addressing the injustices brought on by colonial practices, the post-independence theologians had the difficult duty of healing the scars from a lengthy liberation war. To strengthen Zimbabwean society's feeling of unity and national identity, contextual theology, which developed during this time, sought to connect the Christian message to its unique reality (Dube 2000).

A theology that was grounded in Zimbabwe's political, social and cultural environment was advocated by contextual theologians. It was stressed that to overcome modern issues such as poverty, inequality and moral degradation, it is crucial to incorporate Christian teachings with traditional African values. Christian theology, liturgical rituals and moral precepts were re-evaluated as a result of this approach to make them applicable to the situation in Zimbabwe (Nkomazana 1998).

### Theological reactions to modern challenges

In reaction to fresh social, political and economic issues, Zimbabwean theology is still developing today. Theologians are becoming more involved in public theology<sup>1</sup> that not only serves spiritual needs but also promotes social change and justice in response to the persistent economic crisis, political unrest and human rights challenges. In Zimbabwe, the church is supposed to play an active part in public life and support laws that protect human rights, social justice and moral leadership. This is known as public theology. By attempting to adapt biblical concepts to contemporary political and social challenges, this theology promotes communication between the state, the church and society (Chitando 2013a). The transition from liberation theology to public theology in Zimbabwe presents both opportunities and challenges. It holds the potential for a more inclusive and constructive engagement with societal issues while also requiring vigilance to ensure that the core values of justice and advocacy for the marginalised are not lost.

Furthermore, new theological expressions emphasising prosperity, spiritual battle and individual salvation have been brought to Zimbabwe by the growth of charismatic movements and Pentecostalism. These movements have drawn criticism for emphasising individuality and financial gain, but they also represent a desire among many Zimbabweans for practical answers to their day-to-day problems and spiritual rejuvenation (Maxwell 2006).

The historical development of Zimbabwean theology from the colonial era to the present shows a complex interplay between politics, culture, and religion. Zimbabwe's theological discourse is dynamic and responsive, as seen by

1. In the Zimbabwean context, public theology delves into the intersection of faith and social justice, addressing issues such as governance, human rights and community welfare. It seeks to inform and inspire public discourse, guiding faith communities to engage actively in societal transformation and advocacy against oppression.

its history from a colonial theology that neglected indigenous viewpoints to a liberation theology that championed social justice, and finally too many modern forms of public and Pentecostal theology. The influence of religion on public policy and the formation of cultural values is still vital as the nation struggles with persistent issues. Faith continues to be an essential part of the national conversation in Zimbabwe because theological thoughts continue to provide answers and insights that meet the people's spiritual as well as temporal demands. Therefore, there is need for comprehensive theological responses to the economic crises caused by theological reactions to modern challenges. The next paragraph will delve into the theological responses to the economic crisis as one of the modern challenges.

### **Theological responses to the economic crisis**

The continuous economic crisis, which is marked by hyperinflation, unemployment and pervasive poverty, is one of Zimbabwe's most urgent problems at the moment. In the 21st century, theological perspectives need to address these economic realities and provide impacted people with hope and workable answers.

One may argue that the growth of prosperity theology in certain Zimbabwean churches is a reaction to the country's economic problems. It has been argued that this strategy may be used to take advantage of the desperation of the impoverished and provide oversimplified answers to intricate economic issues (Chitando & Manyonganise 2016b). On the other hand, some theologians support an economic justice theology that prioritises moral leadership, fair resource allocation and the empowerment of underprivileged people (Mlambo 2014). This strategy aims to promote a more equitable and sustainable economic system by bringing theological contemplation in line with the requirements of the general public. Economic crisis in the country led to the emergence of the gospel of prosperity whereby some pastors spend most of their time preaching about giving for one to be blessed. Prosperity theology has taken centre stage as one of the modern challenges in Zimbabwe.

### **Theology of prosperity and economic justice in Zimbabwe**

Prosperity theology, which is frequently connected to charismatic and Pentecostal organisations, asserts that one may become wealthier materially via giving to charitable causes, speaking positively and having faith. Such beliefs have found a fertile place in Zimbabwe, where economic hardships are prevalent. By promising material benefits and miraculous affluence, churches that promote this doctrine frequently draw sizable congregations. Prosperity theology is criticised for encouraging the poorest believers to donate what little they have in the hopes of receiving money benefits from God, which some claim can lead to financial exploitation of these believers while simultaneously drawing attention away from the systemic causes of poverty (Maxwell 2006).

On the other hand, an increasing proportion of church leaders and theologians in Zimbabwe are advocating for a theology of economic justice (Chikanda 2016; Moyo 2020). This religious viewpoint pushes for reforms in laws and customs that create a more just society while criticising the current system that upholds economic inequality. The focus of economic justice theology is on systemic reform, which includes fair pay, equitable resource allocation and universal access to basic services for all people, regardless of their financial situation (Ncube 2012). This approach goes beyond charitable giving.

The impact of the theology of economic justice is shown in the active participation of churches and other religious institutions in community development initiatives including microfinance schemes, educational scholarships and health clinics that work to improve the community's overall economic standing (Gundani 2002). Additionally, theologians who advocate for economic justice frequently take up causes and oppose laws and unethical practices that uphold inequality and poverty.

### **Theological analysis of economic decisions**

Additionally, a complex understanding of the relationship between poverty, corruption and government is necessary for a theological critique of Zimbabwe's economic policies. Scholars such as Gutiérrez (1988) have maintained for some time that theology has to confront the underlying causes of poverty and the systems of power that produce economic inequality. This entails addressing the incompetence and corruption that have made Zimbabwe's economic situation worse. Churches have a part in teaching and inspiring people to demand accountability and transparency from their leaders in addition to offering aid. Advocates for economic policies that promote the common good may benefit greatly from the prophetic voice of the church, which is grounded in biblical principles of justice and stewardship (Kairos Document 1985). A theological analysis of economic justice can only be complete if there is an integration of faith and economic practices whereby the church participates in a holistic way to meet the spiritual and physical needs of its members.

### **Integration of faith and economic practices**

The church must take a comprehensive approach to the growth of its members to integrate faith with business operations. This involves empowering oneself academically and economically in addition to growing spiritually. Churches can sponsor company development, ethical entrepreneurship and financial literacy seminars and workshops. These subjects are important in a nation where official job prospects are few (Daneel 1999). Additionally, as a result of a growing awareness that economic empowerment is essential to the gospel message, Zimbabwe's theological education institutions are starting to provide courses on religion and development, ethics in business and social entrepreneurship (Kretzschmar 2008).

Although there are many obstacles to overcome, Zimbabwe's economic crisis also offers chances for theological involvement. The differing perspectives of a theology of economic justice and prosperity theology highlight the nuanced role that religion plays in resolving economic challenges. A theology of economic justice encourages equality and sustainability over the long term, whereas prosperity theology provides short-term consolation and optimism. The way the church responds to Zimbabwe's economic conditions will be critical in determining the attitudes and behaviours of the society towards wealth, poverty and economic justice (Zimunya 2018). The church may effect significant social and economic transformation in addition to spiritual regeneration by coordinating theological contemplation with the demands of the general public. As a result of the integration of faith and economic practices, one would not ignore the issue of prophetic theology and political instability in Zimbabwe.

### Prophetic theology and political instability

Instability, disputed leadership and governance problems have characterised Zimbabwe's political environment. As a result, some theologians have adopted a prophetic theology that opposes governmental corruption and promotes equity and human rights. This strategy calls for the church to be a prophetic voice in society, drawing on the heritage of liberation theology but modifying it to meet current political concerns (Chitando 2019). In Zimbabwe, prophetic theology places a strong emphasis on the church's responsibility to hold government figures responsible and to push for laws that safeguard the weak (Zimunya 2021a). This strategy frequently entails working in tandem with civil society groups and other religious communities to tackle concerns such as election integrity, corruption and violations of human rights (Chitando & Manyonganise 2016a). The following section will highlight the development of prophetic theology in a historical context.

## The development of prophetic theology in historical context

In the previous section, the author dwelled much on the prophetic theology and political instability. In Zimbabwe, the history of resistance to colonial power is firmly ingrained in the notion of prophetic theology, with churches playing a pivotal part in this process. Theologians and religious authorities supported the freedom movement both spiritually and morally throughout this time. Following independence, the church's position changed to become an advocate for democracy and openness as new issues with corruption and governance emerged (Daneel 1999).

Reorienting theology was necessary for this shift. A theology that addressed the persistent problems of post-colonial governance, as well as the emancipation from colonial oppression, started to be articulated by theologians. Critiquing the new elites who occasionally continued colonial-era corruption and exclusionary practices was part of this

(Gundani 2002). The church can do much to bring political change in the country through its prophetic role. The next section will discuss the church's function on political change.

### The Church's function in political change

The way that the church has responded to political challenges in Zimbabwe has varied greatly throughout time and across various denominations. While some churches have actively supported reform, others have adopted a more neutral position in politics. Some of the church's most outspoken members have organised peace-building projects, opposed unfair laws and policies, and informed the public about their rights and obligations by using their platforms (Raftopoulos 2004).

The task of prophetic theology is to expose injustices and offer a scripturally sound analysis of contemporary problems. Political authorities and church leaders have become tense as a result, particularly when the church's message questions the status quo. Notwithstanding these obstacles, prophetic theology has been a vital voice, especially during periods of extreme political turmoil, such as the 2008 election violence (Chitando 2019). The church voiced much about political through working together with civil societies.

The church's capacity to collaborate with other societal groups frequently determines how well prophetic theology works in bringing about political change. To increase their influence, churches in Zimbabwe have occasionally teamed up with civil society organisations. These partnerships have taken many different shapes, ranging from cooperative lobbying efforts to involvement in civic education programmes and election observation trips (Chitando & Manyonganise 2016a). In an atmosphere where the political climate can be unfriendly to lone voices of dissent, these kinds of alliances are essential. The church may make sure that its prophetic message is part of a bigger, more potent demand for justice and reform by forming alliances with a wider coalition (Ncube 2020; Togarasei 2011). The church's function in the political change of the country faced some problems. Some of the challenges and remarks will be discussed in the following paragraph.

### Problems and remarks

Prophetic theology is not without its detractors, even though it has been quite influential in Zimbabwe. Some contend that the church's participation in politics exposes it to political exploitation or jeopardises its spiritual mission. Concerns exist regarding the prophetic message's consistency as well, especially in light of the possibility that certain church leaders have political agendas that coincide with their own (Mukonyora 2007). Furthermore, outside factors such as government persecution and the politicisation of religious settings sometimes restrict the influence of prophetic theology. Maintaining the church's prophetic integrity in the face of these intricate dynamics is difficult (Raftopoulos 2004).



In Zimbabwe's theological and political scene, prophetic theology is still very important. The church's function as a prophetic voice is becoming more and more crucial as the nation deals with concerns of governance and human rights. Prophetic theology not only influences state policy but also steers the country towards a more just and equitable society by denouncing injustices and promoting moral leadership. Feminist theology and gender justice is one of the major challenges encountered in the church's prophet voice.

### **Feminist theology and gender justice**

In Zimbabwean society, where women are still marginalised, discriminated against and subjected to violence, gender justice is still a pressing concern. A major strategy for tackling these issues is feminist theology, which promotes women's full participation and empowerment in the church and society at large (Mugari 2020).

Zimbabwe's feminist theologians criticise church practices that uphold gender inequality as well as patriarchal readings of the Bible. According to Mawere (2019), they demand that theological concepts be reinterpreted in a way that upholds the rights and dignity of women. To safeguard women's rights, this strategy also calls for social and legislative changes as well as opposition to cultural norms that injure women.

This section focussed on the challenge of feminist theology and gender justice. The backdrop of Zimbabwe, with its deeply ingrained sexism, poses particular difficulties for feminist theologians. In Zimbabwean history, males have tended to hold positions of authority and privilege, with cultural and religious standards frequently serving as justifications for gender inequality. Within the religious sphere, this discrimination is sometimes evident in the male-dominated leadership and decision-making roles in churches, where women are often placed in lower capacities (Kanyoro 2002). Because of all the challenge highlighted precedingly, the author will now discuss the issue of interpretation and criticism of theology as one of the problems which needs to be taken care of.

### **Interpretation and criticism of theology**

Biblical passages that have previously been used to support gender inequality are reinterpreted by feminist theologians to question these established roles. Through feminist readings of Scripture, they illuminate and advance concepts of justice, equality and respect for one another. According to Dube (2001), this theological effort is essential for destroying ideas that have supported the subjugation of women and for encouraging a broader interpretation of Christian morality. In the Genesis account, for instance, the creation story – which is frequently used to demonstrate male dominance – is retold to highlight equality and collaboration. In addition to being intellectual exercises, these reinterpretations are effective advocacy tools that enable women to question and reframe their positions in the church and society at large (Togarasei 2005).

## **Social reform and advocacy**

Feminist theologians in Zimbabwe actively advocate for practical concerns impacting women outside of theological debate. This includes initiatives to improve the presence of women in church leadership and governance institutions as well as campaigns against gender-based violence, which is still pervasive. Feminist theologians seek to change laws and customs that have a direct bearing on the lives of women by supporting groups dedicated to women's rights and taking part in public discussions (Chitando 2018).

In addition, they work with academic institutions to incorporate gender studies into theological education so that upcoming church leaders are aware of gender concerns from the beginning of their study. The cultivation of a new generation of clergy who are champions for gender equity depends on this educational strategy (Phiri 2003).

## **Difficulties and opposition**

Feminist theology in Zimbabwe encounters strong opposition despite these attempts. Feminist readings of Scripture continue to elicit scepticism from certain church leaders and congregations, who see them as challenges to conventional Christian principles. Moreover, the larger social milieu, in which patriarchy is firmly established in cultural and economic frameworks, frequently opposes modifications to gender standards (Mapuranga 2010). The difficulties that feminist theologians face must be carefully navigated, striking a balance between the necessity of maintaining theological integrity and the practical reality of enacting change in a conservative setting. To use our combined power and have a greater influence, frequently entails forming strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations and individuals both inside and beyond the religious sector.

Deeply ingrained patriarchal institutions in the church and society are being challenged by feminist theology, which is a vibrant and transformational force in Zimbabwe. Feminist theologians make substantial contributions to the campaign for gender justice by reinterpreting religious concepts, promoting social changes and training future leaders. By advancing ideals of equality and respect across gender boundaries, their work not only attends to the urgent needs of women but also contributes to the development of a more fair and equitable society.

## **Conversations across religions and cultural identity**

Africa's ancient faiths, Islam and Christianity are among the many diverse cultures and religious traditions that call Zimbabwe home. In order to promote interfaith understanding and tolerance, modern theological methods in Zimbabwe must traverse this varied environment. The conflict that exists between Christianity and indigenous African faiths has always existed. To incorporate indigenous African beliefs into Christian worship and practice, some theologians have advocated for a theology that values and acknowledges

their significance (Gunda 2010). To foster harmony and understanding among the many religious communities in Zimbabwe, some people stress the significance of interfaith discussion (Chitando 2013a).

### **Historical and cultural bases**

The religious landscape of Zimbabwe has been shaped by its historical context. The introduction of Christianity during colonialism frequently resulted in conflicts with native religious customs. The division that this colonial heritage produced between traditional and Christian ideas still affects how people of different religions relate to one another. Modern theologians who are attempting to heal these rifts must acknowledge this historical background (Dillon 1999).

### **A theology of recognition and inclusivity**

By appreciating the variety of religious expressions found in Zimbabwe, an inclusive theology aims to get beyond these historical divisions. According to theologians such as Gunda (2010), incorporating aspects of traditional African faiths into Christian activities can enhance the spiritual journey and increase the relevance of Christianity in the community. One way to promote a stronger feeling of cultural identification and belonging among Christians is to incorporate traditional music, dance and rituals into Christian worship (Gunda 2010; Mukonyora 1999).

In Zimbabwe, there is actual practice of interfaith communication through several projects, rather than merely theory. Engaging in dialogue between Christian denominations and other religious groups, such as Muslims and practitioners of traditional African faiths, has been made possible in large part by organisations such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. According to Chitando (2013b), these conversations are meant to dispel preconceptions about one another, promote mutual respect, and work together to address societal concerns including education, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and poverty.

Theological education is a prerequisite for participating in interfaith discourse. World religions and interfaith relations are increasingly becoming common courses in seminaries and religious study programmes. This gives aspiring religious leaders the information and abilities they need to interact well with members of different faith communities. For Zimbabwe's many religious communities to develop a foundation of mutual respect and collaboration, this educational strategy is essential (Phiri 2004).

### **Opportunities and difficulties**

Interfaith communication has advanced, yet problems still exist. Conservative members of religious communities might be a barrier to dialogue because they believe that talking to people of different religions will weaken their own. Furthermore, religious tensions can be heightened by Zimbabwe's political and economic unrest, which makes

interfaith collaboration both more challenging and imperative (Moyo 2017). These difficulties do, yet, also provide possibilities. Religious communities can come together for a single goal because of the necessity for cogent social action in response to Zimbabwe's social and economic problems. Religious organisations may demonstrate the usefulness of interfaith communication by working together to address national issues in a meaningful way (Chitando 2013b). There is need for the church to open up more platforms for women to participate in interfaith discussions so that they can air their views without any hindrances.

### **Women's place in interfaith discussions**

In Zimbabwe, women's leadership positions in religion and their contributions to interfaith discourse are receiving more notice. Women frequently emphasise social justice and reconciliation in their interfaith work, bringing fresh viewpoints and methods to the table. Women are often major players in community and family health, education and stability; therefore, increasing their participation in interfaith discussions can improve their efficacy (Kanyoro 2005).

The ability to navigate Zimbabwe's diverse religious environment calls for both an inclusive theology and a dedication to interfaith conversation. Theologians and religious leaders may promote a more peaceful and cooperative society in Zimbabwe by acknowledging and incorporating the various cultural and religious traditions that exist there (Zimunya 2021b). Notwithstanding the difficulties, the continued initiatives in interfaith collaboration, education and conversation demonstrate how beneficial religious diversity can be for peace and national progress.

This section focussed on women's place in interfaith discussions; the following section will focus much on the issue of engaging youth and innovation in theology. The issue of innovation is one of the five pillars of Education 5.0 in Zimbabwe, especially in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development (Dube 2023).

### **Engaging youth and innovation in theology**

Zimbabwe's young comprise a large share of the population, and their involvement in the church is essential to the development of theology in the nation. The issues and goals of youth, especially those related to mental health, education and unemployment, must be taken into consideration by modern theological perspectives. The use of social media and digital platforms for evangelism and discipleship are examples of innovative theological approaches that are popular with young people. These strategies also entail setting up areas where youth may discuss their beliefs and voice their worries, resulting in a more vibrant and inclusive church (Chitando 2013b).

The church's theological practice and discourse must address the specific issues that young people in Zimbabwe experience.

Many young people feel disillusioned and cut off from conventional forms of religious practice and communal life as a result of high unemployment rates and unstable economic conditions. In addition, the educational system falls short of meeting everyone's demands because of resource constraints and accessibility problems, which further distresses the youth population. The prevalence of mental health problems is also rising, which is being made worse by social and economic pressures (Dzimiri 2015).

In light of these obstacles, the church has a chance to reconsider its strategy and create fresh theological viewpoints that actively include youth in forming the conversation as well as speaking to their circumstances. Adopting new communication techniques and technology that suit how young people engage with the outside world and one another is part of this (Ndlovu 2022; Zimunya 2023). The church can embrace the youth by evangelising and educating them through the use of digital media. One essential way to engage young people is through digital media because it is user-friendly to this group. To reach a larger audience and engage with the young in settings that are comfortable and familiar to them, churches in Zimbabwe are increasingly turning to social media, podcasts and online videos. By offering materials for spiritual development and community building that are available whenever and wherever, these digital technologies not only help evangelism but also discipleship (Moyo 2016).

Youth can participate in religious activities even when they are unable to attend church in person thanks to resources such as online Bible study groups and virtual prayer gatherings. To bridge the gap between conventional religious rituals and the contemporary concerns of young people, religious leaders also utilise social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to provide daily devotions, inspiring messages and comments on current events (Ndlovu 2023).

Beyond internet interaction, the necessity of tangible, interpersonal settings where youth may openly explore their religion, and voice their concerns is becoming increasingly acknowledged. To better meet the needs of their diverse clientele, youth ministries are expanding their scope beyond religious instruction to include conversation platforms on relationships, career counselling and personal growth of all within the framework of theology (Ncube 2017).

These areas frequently make use of imaginative and participatory techniques, such as theatre, music and art, which appeal to younger audiences more. These methods assist young people in recognising the value of faith in addressing their day-to-day difficulties and goals, in addition to keeping them engaged and interested in church events. Although the focus of this article is about the contemporary approaches in Zimbabwe through navigating the challenges of the 21st century, the churches can do much to increase the agency of the youth in the transformation of the contemporary theological approaches through innovation in theology.

The next and final section of this article will be mainly focussed on the issue of faith, social and civic participation, all together. In order for the church to fine-tune her contemporary theological approaches, there is need for the integration of the three to work harmoniously.

### **Faith and social and civic participation together**

Establishing a link between religion and civic and social duties is another important part of involving kids in theology. Incorporating theological education with community service and social justice efforts is one way that the church may help young people who are seeking concrete ways to make a difference in their communities (Munetsi 2019).

Young people respond strongly to programmes that integrate the study of biblical ideas with real-world applications, such as working as volunteers in the community, taking part in environmental conservation projects or starting social justice campaigns. These initiatives assist young people in finding a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging to the community in addition to offering opportunities for active and engaged faith (Dube 2022).

For the church to remain vibrant and relevant to the next generations, young people in Zimbabwe must be engaged through creative theological methods. The church may meet the particular needs and goals of young people by using digital platforms for evangelism and discipleship, establishing forums for free speech and connecting theology with social and civic involvement. These initiatives will not only help the young grow spiritually but also provide them with the tools they need to become engaged members of their communities and obedient guardians of their values.

### **Conclusion**

In Zimbabwe, modern theological perspectives are distinguished by a close attention to 21st-century reality. These initiatives aim to connect theology to Zimbabweans' everyday realities, whether they are focussed on youth participation, gender justice, political instability, economic challenges or cultural identity. The importance of religion in promoting social change, fighting for justice and providing hope is undeniable as the country navigates increasingly difficult issues.

Zimbabwean theologians are beginning to understand that to create a theology that is both contemplative and proactive, it is necessary to address both local and global influences. Embracing a wide range of topics is necessary for this – from social inclusion and interfaith harmony to political ethics and economic development. By doing this, they are promoting the greater benefit of society as well as the spiritual health of individuals. Theological discourse is always changing to address new issues because of the constant communication between the church, academics and community leaders. For this reason, Zimbabwean religion serves as a force for good and a source of inspiration for the next generation to work for a society that is more just and equal.



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