Uniting Divided Religious Leaders to Democratize Zimbabwe

Kimion Tagwirei

The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom 2531, South Africa; kimion22tc@gmail.com

Abstract: Following the presidential announcement of Zimbabwe’s harmonized 2023 electoral date, most Christian, African Traditional, and other religious leaders commendably resumed advocating for peaceful, free, and fair elections. However, as history usually repeats itself, the tables eventually turned. Some of the leaders regressively became divided, submitted to political infiltration, aligned themselves with oppressive politicians, betrayed their fellow leaders as well as God and humanity, and inadvertently supported totalitarianism. By employing Richard Osmer’s practical theological methodology and engaging with the existing literature, this paper reviewed the (dis)unity and (dis)engagement between Christian and African Traditional Religious (ATR) leaders. It also endeavored to address the underlying (dis)connections in view of Jesus Christ’s all-encompassing servant leadership model, diaconal mission, and the African Ubuntu philosophy. Observing that Zimbabwean religious leaders are retrogressively divided by their varying spiritualities, leadership styles, and political orientations, it is recommended to embrace inclusivity and unity amidst diversity. This can be achieved by resisting selfishness and promoting selflessness, unconditional love, generosity, hospitality, tolerance, peace-making, justice, and social cohesion. These values collectively play a role in the democratization of Zimbabwe and are imperative for its advancement.

Keywords: African spiritualities; politics; servant leadership; diakonia; Ubuntu; inclusionary; democratization

1. Introduction

After Zimbabwe’s official announcement of the 2023 harmonized electoral date, esteemed ecumenical and denominational leaders once again engaged in discussions surrounding responsible citizenship, electoral reforms, peace, and free and fair elections for the democratization of the country (Matenga 2021; Matambo 2022; Tshili 2023). Echoing these sentiments, Chief Fortune Zephania Charumbira, the then Zimbabwe’s Head of Chiefs and also President of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), “urged political and religious leaders to act as vectors for tolerant, inclusive, and peaceful societies” (PAP 2023). Likewise, reports from rural areas in Zimbabwe indicate that many leaders affiliated with an African Traditional Religion (ATR), including chiefs, headmen, and village heads, have also added their voices to these discussions (Mashininga 2018; Nkala 2019). Contrary to that, and reminiscent of historical political polarization (Magezi and Tagwirei 2022, p. 2; Mudzanire and Banda 2021, pp. 6–7), both Christian and ATR leaders usually united in words and differed in deeds (CITE 2021). Due to various factors ranging from self-unsustainability, multifarious insecurities, and desperation for economic as well as political security, some of the leaders found themselves co-opted into aligning with oppressive forces, thereby betraying the trust of their fellow citizens. Simultaneously, others chose selflessness and endured the costs, i.e., state victimization (Dube 2021, pp. 3–4; Mpofu 2022, p. 388; Dombo 2014, p. 137). Considering the above background, the article calls on religious leaders to unite themselves and their followers through Jesus Christ’s all-encompassing servant leadership model, selfless diakonia, and Ubuntu philosophy, which, together, foster cooperative reciprocity and collaboration for the democratization of Zimbabwe. It begins by providing an overview of Osmer’s (2008) practical theological methodology. Thereafter,
it examines the relationship between ATR and Christian leaders and troubleshoots their leaders’ connections and disconnections toward democratizing Zimbabwe.

1.1. Overview of Omer’s Methodology

Richard Osmer’s (2008) practical theological methodology is recognized as an efficient practical research process (Dunlop 2021, p. 299). Scholars such as Kiekintveld (2019, p. 28) and Root (2014, p. 23) aver that Richard Osmer is a widely respected practical theologian. Commendably, his methodology is broadly utilized in numerous practical theological studies (Barentsen 2021, p. 161; Woodbridge 2014, p. 90). As Espinoza (2013, n.p.) puts it, Osmer’s methodology is basically a feasible interdisciplinary approach, which addresses four practical theological tasks by “discovering what is going on, understanding why it is going on, reflecting upon what should be going on, and responding appropriately using information from the three prior tasks”. Equally, Pieterse (2017, p. 3) adds that Osmer’s methodology is extensively used in South African practical theological studies. In respect of that, and due to its comprehensive approach, which addresses historical, current, and future perspectives, this article employed Osmer’s practical theological methodology by reviewing the Zimbabwean context and unpacking the (dis)unity of religious leaders (discovering, reflecting upon and understanding what is going on), troubleshooting the identified (dis)connections (responding to the identified problems) towards democratizing Zimbabwe.

1.2. Defining Key Terminologies

1.2.1. African Spiritualities

Spirituality is derived from the English word ‘spirit’. It stems from the Latin term *spiritus* that means soul, bravery, stamina, and breath. The concept of spirituality is literally confusing because African ethnicities, religions, and contexts are so diverse and complex. That is why, acknowledging its complexity, Lepherd (2014, p. 567) says “there seem to be almost as many definitions of spirituality as there are writers on the subject, with authors referring to the diversity of understanding the concept in such terms as ‘puzzle’, ‘nebulous’ and fuzzy”. Considering the transience of today’s globalized humanity, spiritualities are correspondingly ever changing. Generally, spirituality refers to people’s beliefs, submission, expression, and practices in, for and with God in their day to day lives.

For Masango (2006, pp. 932–35), spirituality denotes religious beliefs and practices that give meaning, bearing, illumination, transformation, moralities, and standards to life, such as the African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, people’s submission and comportment under the guidance of God through various religious mediations, i.e., African Traditional Religions (ATR), Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. In concurrence with Marumo and Chakale (2018, p. 11698), African spirituality is predominantly known as the breadth that enlivens humanity. As they put it;

“Africans believe that all things have an impact on each other and this interconnectedness and interplay is universal. There exist a cause and effect relationship to be found in all experience as well as acts and thoughts, which will inform our thinking and relation… Africans believe that all things in creation have the quintessential essence (spirit) of the creator contained within it. Whether animate or inanimate which is an essence within a human vessel given to humans by the supreme being, which is an aforementioned notion of the interconnectedness of things and a belief that a human body is just a vessel that holds the spirit and consciousness of the creator” (Marumo and Chakale 2018, p. 11698).

In this submission, African spiritualities refer to all religious beliefs and practices of Africans. Bearing in mind that 85% of the Zimbabwean population subscribe to Christianity and African Traditional Religions (Mutangi 2008, p. 530; Gaga et al. 2023, p. 69), all discussions in this article are mostly focused on Zimbabwean Christian and ATR spiritualities. With this in mind, the following sub-section conceptualizes Christian leadership.
1.2.2. Christian Leadership

Different from secular leadership, which is defined by several scholars like Rosari (2019), Jibreal (2021); Delia (2018), Ray and Ray (2012) as inspiring, influencing, mobilizing, processing change, and moving an organization and or followers to particular targets, Christian leadership is universally understood as an integrally transformational ministry of serving mankind with and through Jesus Christ’s mission of accomplishing missio Dei in and by their lives and the cosmos. Overall, Christian leadership is made Christian by submitting to the principles and conduct of Jesus Christ as is well-documented by the Bible. I agree with scholars such as Kessler and Kretzschmar (2015, p. 2) who conceptualize Christian leadership as being followed by others as one follows Jesus Christ. This is well affirmed by Paul, who declared, “Follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

Additionally, the book of John 13:1–17 heralds Jesus Christ’s model of leadership as serving others when he washed his disciples’ feet. Besides that, Hanna (2006, p. 22) gives a pneumatic view and says that “Christian leadership is the influence of the Holy Spirit, the dynamic, relational, partnership process, the implementation of servant-leadership, the necessity of a partnership to achieve a common goal”. As such, it is God-led, Christ-centered, Holy Spirit-inspired, and biblical. Correspondingly, for this article, the Christian leadership is about serving God’s people under the Trinitarian guidance, and as such, using the model which was exemplified by Jesus Christ. It encompasses God’s calling, stewardship, and servanthood. Considering that this article seeks to unite religious leaders to democratize Zimbabwe, Christian leadership is taken in light of Christly selflessness and other-centeredness. Since this submission seeks to unify religious leaders, the subsequent subdivision conceptualizes African traditional leadership.

1.2.3. African Traditional Leadership

African traditional leadership herein refers to the custodians of African Traditional Religions in Zimbabwe, such as chiefs, headmen, and village heads. According to Adamo (2011, p. 3), African Traditional Religions (ATR), which is taken differently from one context to another either in plural to indicate diversities of ATRs, and singular when identifying a specific indigenous African traditional religion, refers to “the whole African religious phenomena, even if we are, in fact, dealing with multiplicity of theologies”. For Bonsu (2016, p. 111), ATR is not a traditional religion, but the predominant faith of African people. Accordingly, describing it as traditional appears racist, derogatory, and colonialist. However, Mokhoathi (2016, p. 5) argues that “most definitions offered by African scholars, downplay the absoluteness of this religion...” He overviews the basic components of ATR, such as the belief in the Creator, belief in the Ancestors, belief in communal life, ritual performances, and disputes ATR’s belief in the Creator, basing his argument on ATR’s veneration of human experiences while God is and must be worshipped through Jesus Christ. Despite the fact that its essential components, such as being transmitted orally, i.e., through myths, folktales, songs and proverbs, as well as by its symbolic expressions, such as art, dance and shrines, ATR remains a sacred religion which advances an other-centered humanitarian philosophy of Ubuntu through its leadership of chiefs, headmen and village heads. As it will be discussed later in this presentation, leading and contesting politicians engage with all religious leaders.

So, this article unites the ATR with Christian leaders by calling them to integrate their religious Ubuntu, Jesus Christ’s all-embracing servant leadership model and diaconal mission, respectively. Having said that, it is pertinent to define missio Dei.

1.2.4. Missio Dei

The term missio Dei is used in this article to mean the holistic mission of God on earth. Its conception relates with manifold submissions that have been offered by various scholars, for example, Harold (2018, p. 6), who proposes that missio Dei is “praxis orientated... far broader than creating individual disciples... liberation, from spiritual and social oppression”. Thomas Schirrmacher, through his book, ‘Missio Dei, God’s Missional Nature’,
conceptualizes missio Dei as the sending of Jesus Christ to the world by God, Holy Spirit by Jesus Christ, and the Church to serve humanity through the Church up to the end of time (Schirrmacher 2017, p. 12). His understanding concurs with John 17:18, which says that, “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world”, and Mark 16:15, “. . .Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Online NIV Bible Gateway: n.p.). In view of John 10:10, which says that Jesus Christ came to give humanity life in abundance, and the whole mission of the church as all-inclusive and comprising advocatory diakonia, this article uses the term missio Dei to mean the mission of God, which Christian leaders should pursue, with His Church, in their various denominations towards democratizing Zimbabwe. As missio Dei is effectuated by missio Ecclesiae, defining missio Ecclesiae is necessary.

1.2.5. Missio Ecclesiae

This term is used hereinafter for the missionary task that God commissioned the Church to exist for. That is why Youn (2018, p. 227) says that “mission does not refer merely to what the church does, but also to what the church is”. Drawing from John 15:18–19, which says that followers of Jesus Christ (the Church) belong to God, and Romans 12:2, which calls them to have a transformed and renewed mindset, the Church came from and exists to fulfill the mission of God on earth. Thus;

“the church should participate in the mission of God through the work of the Holy Spirit, who works in the world as the Spirit of God. The mission of the triune God demands that the church not only witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ by its being and life, but also participate in the Holy Spirit’s work to transform the world’s social-historical reality. As an agent and instrument of God’s reign and as an embassy (2 Cor. 5:20) “coworkers for the reign of God” (Col. 4:11), the church manifests the reign of God. God requests the church not only to communicate to the world the reconciliation that the church is now enjoying in Jesus Christ, but also to participate in God’s transforming and liberating work in the world…” (Youn 2018, p. 228).

Furthermore, Tagwirei (2022, p. 6) denotes missio ecclesiae from the Great Commission (Mathew 28; pp. 19–20) and explains that the Church is tasked to advance the mission of God on earth. Likewise, this article unites religious leaders in the view of the inclusivity of missio ecclesiae. Considering this submission’s ultimate objective of democratizing Zimbabwe, the definition of democratization is integral.

1.2.6. Democratization

Democratization can be simply grasped as the enablement of democracy. Alumona (2010, 96) says that “while democracy is the state of existence or being, democratization is a process that brings democracy into being and also allows it to take the strong hold of the society”. According to Raveloson (2008, p. 4),

“the word ‘democracy’ is a term that comes from Greek and it is made up with two other words demos= People and kratein= to govern, to rule. “Democracy” can then be literally translated by the following terms: Government of the People or Government of the Majority. Democracy, as a State form, is to be distinguished from monarchy, aristocracy and dictatorship”.

Contextually, according to Chikwanha-Dzenga et al. (n.d., p. 6), democracy is widely perceived in Zimbabwe as “a preferable system of government to a vast majority Zimbabweans”. They explain that democracy advances various freedoms such as multi-partyism, rule of law, independent justice, independent economy, independent and pluralistic media, equal treatment of citizens by the State, freedom of political and religious association, respect and protection of citizens’ rights (i.e., right to life, right to vote, right to education . . .). It is well notable that democracy does not fully fit within the spiritual frameworks of Christianity, which is based on theocracy, and ATR, which appears somewhat dictatorial.
However, democratization matters because it is inclusive and needful for Zimbabwe which accommodates all faiths. In the Zimbabwean situation, where incumbent leaders claim to be democratic while democracy is elusive as well-outlined below, this article uses the term democratization with reference to enabling the abovementioned inclusivity.

1.3. Reviewing the Zimbabwean Context

"Context", in this paper, is understood as the specific situation(s) of and place where this research is conducted. As Alshumaimeri (2022, p. 51) aptly says, contexts are dynamic and ever-changing. Hence, in order to position this research, it is important to review the current Zimbabwean situation. Several scholars, including Bryman et al. (1996), along with Tagwirei (2022, p. 9), concur that the context is fundamental for effective learning and understanding. Hence, the following sub-section provides an encompassing view of Zimbabwean politics, economics, and religion, recognizing that these three elements significantly shape the trajectory of the nation’s democratization process.

Historically, prior to 1980, before Zimbabwe gained independence, she—then known as Rhodesia—mainly struggled with colonization, foreign exploitation, and related evils. While White missionaries were tainted by colonialists who gave them land and silenced their prophetic voices on issues that affected natives, Mujinga (2018, pp. 250–54) uncovers that local church leaders, such as Bishop Patrick Chakaipa, Canaan Banana, and Abel Muzorewa, voiced and influenced churches to speak out against colonial, political, and economic vices. Other researchers such as Moyo (2018), Dzirutwe (2019), Hoyes (2020), Winter (2019), and Keane (2017) highlight that after independence up until the present day, the ruling government under the then President Robert Gabriel Mugabe led the nation into a dictatorship, which endured until his ignominious departure in 2017. Of course, Mugabe started well in 1980 as a Prime Minister and won local and international accolades as he oversaw heavy investment in Zimbabwe’s social, educational, and medical services (Muchena 2017, n.p.).

Conversely, “by the end of 1982, Amnesty International was receiving reports of human rights violations and abuses by state security agents in Matabeleland. Anyone suspected of sympathising with Mugabe’s political opponents was targeted. The military crackdown across Matabeleland and Midlands provinces that ensued in the following years was bloody and brutal. Known as Gukurahundi—a Shona word for “the early rains that washes the chaff before the spring rains”—it claimed the lives of more than 20,000 people...After assuming the elevated position of Executive President in 1987, Mugabe further cemented his power following the election of that year...” (Muchena 2017, n.p.)

Eventually, Mugabe’s administration ruined Zimbabwe by institutionalizing, protecting, and promoting intolerance, maladministration, inconsistent policies, and faulty rule of law.

The country correspondingly witnessed a cascade of multifaceted crises, leading to citizens succumbing to abject poverty (Manyonganise 2022; Besada and Moyo 2008). Opposition political parties tried to offer citizens alternative governance, but out of selfish attempts to stay in power, the Zanu–PF party turned intolerant, violent, and destabilized the political terrain (Oosterom and Gukurume 2023).

While Zimbabwe changed her presidency through a coup in November 2017, Cook (2017, p. 1; Masunungure and Bratton 2018, p. 1) discerned that her political, economic, and religious situation became more militarized, intolerant, and worse than before. According to Dendere and Taodzera (2023), the Zimbabwean state continued to victimize dissent, while concurrently suppressing civil society and ecclesial institutions. In this context, Magezi and Tagwirei (2022) observed that the church yielded to state-sponsored divisions, experienced co-option, fragmentation, weakening, and compromised her prophetic engagements. Although some ecclesiological voices, especially Catholics, have continued to call for democracy despite the intense state repression (Dube 2021), the majority of others took what Togarasei (2018, p. 33) refers to as a “Salvationist, quietist, and indifferent position,
expressing unquestioning submission to authority”. Against such a milieu, uniting the leaders counts.

2. Uniting Religious Leaders in Zimbabwe

Besides the aforementioned state-schemed factionalism, African spiritualities have been predominantly divided by their varying indigenous, evangelical, and Pentecostal identities, spiritualities, and affiliations. As well-conceptualized by Agada and Attoe (2022, pp. 291–92), African Traditional Religions (ATR) and thought advance two parallel and divisive philosophies of an unlimited, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent Supreme Being as well as a limited deity that cannot eliminate evil in the world. Nevertheless, it should be noted that ATRs commonly value culture and *Ubuntu*.

As such, indigenous mainline African religious ministers take great pride in contextualizing the gospel message, showing deep respect for and willingness to integrate with their cultural heritage. They openly criticize evangelicals and Pentecostals for demonizing ancestors and culture. However, “the independent churches have gone as far as mixing Christianity with practices from the African traditional religion. They have practiced ancestor worship and have condoned going to diviners for help with spiritual problems” (Mashoko 2005, p. 19). This is precisely why Musoni (2017, pp. 71–73) identifies boundaries between spiritualities, contending that African Independent Churches (AICs) may have over-contextualized their theology, potentially leading to a dilution of their theological foundations through the integration of ATR elements, thereby raising questions about the authenticity of their theology. Meanwhile, evangelicals openly assert their dedication to accurately interpreting, preaching, and practicing their faith based on scriptural foundations. They emphasize the importance of grounding their beliefs and actions in Scripture, and they criticize Pentecostals for what they perceive as emotional displays devoid of substantive scriptural grounding. As Mayrargue (2008, p. 3) aptly observes:

> African Pentecostalism is an expression of evangelical Christianity…The importance attached to the Holy Spirit distinguishes Pentecostalism from other evangelical Churches. The Spirit is supposed to manifest itself amongst us here and now, particularly through gifts (of healing, prophecy, and so on). The baptism by the Spirit is the outpouring of the Spirit, that is to say the descent of the Spirit on an individual. Miracles are expected; religious practice is emotional and expressive, using the body and the soul. Deliverance is practised—a spectacular process intended to extract the malicious forces possessing an individual.

In contrast to Pentecostalism, Zimbabwean evangelicalism is widely recognized for its conservative beliefs. It is characterized by strategic engagement in missions and evangelism, proclaiming a lifelong personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and a commitment to submitting to the authority of the Bible as the fundamental basis of believers’ faith. In essence, local evangelicalism aligns with the broader global nature, which Yadav (2023, n.p.) described as firmly rooted in Scripture. Pentecostalism, on the other hand, places significant emphasis on a multifaceted expression of the Holy Spirit’s presence, which includes phenomena like glossolalia, healing, prophecy, and the liberation from demonic influences (Yadav 2023, n.p.).

Thus, problematized by such variations, Zimbabweans, and most African Pentecostals, set themselves apart to live according to the Scriptures through tangible demonstrations of their faith in the power of God, transcending mere words. This divergence leads them to draw a distinction from and sometimes even criticize evangelicals, whom they perceive as lacking in faith and the manifestation of divine power. As observed by Baloyi (2022, p. 55), the church in Zimbabwe has also undergone division through the establishment and growth of distinct ecumenical bodies, each dedicated to advancing their unique spiritual orientations. For example, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, which was formed in 1964 for indigenous and mainline denominations; the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, which was founded in 1962, initially for evangelicals but was later joined by Pentecostals; the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference (ZCBC) was also established in 1962 but
for Catholics; the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA), which was formed in 2005 for humanitarian and diaconal advocacy; the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), which was formed in 1993 to address development issues of common concern for Apostolic and Zionist churches; and finally, the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC), a partisan body formed in 2020 for indigenous churches.

Although they collectively united under the umbrella organization known as the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) in 2007, informal conversations among ecumenical leaders, despite lacking documentation, indicate that a number of evangelicals hold the belief that the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) has been influenced by Pentecostalism to a significant degree, and as a result, is no longer representative of pure evangelical beliefs. Besides that, others publicly say that the umbrella ZHOCD has been infiltrated, spied on by state security agents, and is not effective in engaging with democratization matters because members are seized by fear of victimization. Thus, although still subscribed to EFZ and ZHOCD, some members are contemplating forming splinter groupings, which may further their divisiveness. That is why Gaga et al. (2023, p. 65) assert that “the divisions and differences that have bedeviled the ecumenical body, especially with regards to the generation of newer and opposing ecumenical organisations that leaned too closely to ruling and opposition parties, pose a challenge to the prospects of the church’s contributions towards public life in Zimbabwe . . .”.

In agreement with Baloyi (2022, pp. 71–72), the church needs unity to speak with one voice and serve collectively. “The theological identity of the Church must fit Jesus Christ’s prayer, ‘that they may be one’ (John 17:10), which calls for unity”. Similarly, ATR leaders, such as chiefs, headmen, and village heads, are equally divided on their own side. While they all share the same African traditional spiritualities, they glaringly differ on politics. Some of them have been co-opted to advance Zanu–PF’s selfish power conquest, retention interests, and sell out their prophetic voices, while others have chosen to remain a sound conscience of society. According to Fayayo (2018, n.p.), the Zimbabwean elections have been characterized by the following continuities and discontinuities:

...While many chiefs continue to support Zanu-PF, a growing number has stood their ground and refused to partake in the repression of their people. In Matabeleland, a growing number of chiefs have been at loggerheads with Mnangangwa’s government. In July, three prominent chiefs from Matabeleland won a court order against the Minister of Home Affairs, Obert Mpofu who they allege was interfering with their work. In Midlands Province, a number of traditional leaders addressed their subjects on the need to maintain tranquillity during the electoral season. In Manicaland Province, chiefs have castigated politicians from most political parties for fanning divisions among their subjects based on political affiliation. Other traditional leaders have even defended their subjects by simply ruling that they would not tolerate political violence in their chiefdoms...

Beyond Gaga et al.’s (2023, pp. 68–69) call for ecumenical unity, this article goes a step further by involving ATR leaders in a joint effort to advocate for democracy. Together, they can form a powerful religious leadership alliance, reunite citizens, and realize progressiveness as well as effectiveness in diversity to foster responsible citizenship and democratization. While they can retain their identities to continue serving their predominant spiritualities, spiritual leaders must live out interfaith dialogue, converge to democratize Zimbabwe together as a strong force in respect to Jesus Christ’s inclusive model, ecclesiological diakonia, and Ubuntu philosophy. Mindful of that, the subsequent sub-section delves into addressing the (dis)connections among religious leaders concerning the concept of democratization.

3. Troubleshooting the (Dis)Connections of Religious Leaders to Democratize Zimbabwe

Having depicted the significance of unity and retrogressive disunity between Christian and ATR leaders before, it is important to discuss some models that they can learn from.
Considering that 85% of the Zimbabwean population profess to be Christian (Gaga et al. 2023, p. 69), the impact and influence of Christianity in politics is substantial. With Christianity tracing its principles and actions back to the teachings and examples set by Jesus Christ, his political model holds immense value. Consequently, it is both relevant and deserving of careful consideration within the context of Zimbabwe.

3.1. Jesus Christ’s Inclusive Model

Building upon the teachings of Jesus Christ, which underscore the notion that his followers should serve as the salt and light of the world, this paper aligns with the perspective of Magezi and Tagwirei (2022, pp. 8–12). They derive insight from Matthew 5:13–16, where Jesus metaphorically implores Christians to exert meaningful influence and effect holistic transformation upon the world. This influence is likened to how salt both enhances the flavor of food and prevents its decay. Furthermore, he summoned them to do away with evil and transform the world as light dispels darkness, i.e., exemplarily speaking out and curbing corruption, political intolerance, dictatorship, and violence. A closer examination of the Gospel of Luke, specifically focusing on chapter 4, verses 16–20, unveils the foundation of selfless politics. This foundation is deeply rooted in the sovereignty of God, as evidenced by his act of bestowing his Spirit upon Jesus Christ. Through this divine empowerment, Jesus models the embodiment of good news for the marginalized, liberation for captives, relief for the oppressed, and the outpouring of God’s favor upon his people. Religious leaders are herein called to live Jesus Christ’s model in view of the Zimbabwean dictatorial predicament where countless dissenting voices are victimized, and the law has been weaponized. For example, according to Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights’ report (ZLHRR 2023), former Zengeza West constituency legislator, lawyer, and main Opposition Citizen Coalition for Change (CCC) party stalwart Job Sikhala clocked one year in jail without trial on 14 June 2023. Meanwhile, Sambiri (2023, n.p.) wrote that “CCC spokesperson Promise Mkwananzi has been forced to seek refuge outside the country following attempts by the Harare regime to arrest him for denouncing Zanu PF hooliganism”.

As such, Jesus Christ’s liberating leadership, exemplification of love, servanthood, inclusivity, and contextualization helps. Engaging with Matthew 20:25–28, Luke 22:24–27, and John 13:1–18, I agree with Katola and Nyabwari (2013, p. 3) who note that Jesus Christ loved humanity, humbled himself, embodied other-centeredness, served people, and exemplified godly leadership. His disciples were all different as they included realists like Thomas who doubted his resurrection until he saw the wounds (Jn 20:25); circumstantial Peter who would deny him when intimidated (Matt 26:34); and corruptible Judas Iscariot who would sell him out to be crucified (Jn 6:70–71). In light of Jesus Christ as the greatest of all prophets (John 6:14), it is observable that he knew the characteristics of his disciples but did not divide them in search of irreproachable loyalists. Out of inclusivity, Jesus Christ harnessed their negative and positive variances for the advancement of the kingdom of God. Unlike our incumbent divisive religious leaders who quickly parted ways when they faced differences and disloyalty, Jesus Christ remained loving, gracious, forgiving, and embracing. Instead of demonizing Jewish cultures, he contextualized his gospel and successfully reconciled sinners with God. Observing his sermon on the mount (i.e., Matt 5:17–48), he actually admonished his followers to obey the Jewish law unwaveringly.

Arguably, if leaders from both the Christian and ATR communities were to come together and reshape their leadership approaches in alignment with this shared vision, they could effectively stand alongside the citizens. By forging partnerships and uniting their voices, they would be better equipped to advocate for the democratization of Zimbabwe in a concerted manner. As Katola and Nyabwari (2013, p. 5) say, “…the traditional African leadership and that of Jesus Christ complement one another. In traditional Africa, a leader had to be a loving and practical servant of the people”. Taking a leaf from Jesus Christ, who accommodated Judas Iscariot and Thomas to fulfill his mission with them, regardless of their shortcomings, religious leaders can serve humanity triumphantly if
they accommodate each other regardless of their differences. It is tenable that Thomas' disbelief in the resurrection of Jesus necessitated the presentation of Christ’s scars. Similarly, although the act of betraying Jesus Christ for crucifixion was undoubtedly malevolent and consequential, it paradoxically aligned with God’s divine plan for the merciful salvation of humanity. That way, as God also uses the unwanted traits of people to advance his mission, effective leadership does not only require faithful and loyal members. Thus, while Christian and traditional leaders hold distinct spiritualities, they should unite, work together, and speak and stand up for common national democratization because that will demonstrate liberating leadership and effectuate holistic missio Dei. The disheartening and tragic reality that some of the leaders may occasionally harbor disbelief or betray one another mirrors the schismatic doubts of Thomas and the deadly betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas. As eventually, Judas remorsefully hanged himself for selling out Jesus Christ (Mathew 27:3–5); it is discernible that no one should try to sabotage the mission of God. Hence, taking democratization as part of diakonia, which cannot be realized without unity, religious leaders should come together and pursue it collectively for the ultimate well-being of God’s people.

3.2. Interfacing Diakonia with Ubuntu

Diakonia is an essential dimension of missio ecclesiae, compelling Christians to engage in acts of compassion, caring for the less fortunate, and embracing values such as love, generosity, justice, and peace that extend to all individuals (Lee 2019, p. 23; Recepcion 2014, p. 71; Nemer 2016, pp. 27–28). Rooted primarily in biblical principles through Jesus Christ's teachings and exemplification of selfless love, grace, and servanthood, it is commendable for religious leaders to augment the concept of diakonia with the sociological tenets of Ubuntu. This synthesis bolsters humanity, African identity, societal unity, peace, justice, tolerance, and freedom—core tenets that underpin the crucial ideals of democracy (Cuellar 2009). This perspective aligns harmoniously with Nzimakwe’s (2014) conceptualization of Ubuntu as a traditional African philosophy encompassing values of love, unity, hospitality, empathy, mutual giving, dignity, harmony, and shared humanity. This philosophy is oriented towards fostering the creation and nurturing of a strong and interconnected community. “It is a way of life and stresses the importance of community, solidarity, sharing and caring. As an ideal, Ubuntu means the opposite of being selfish and self-centered. It promotes cooperation between individuals, cultures, and nations. Ubuntu thus empowers all to be valued to reach their full potential in accord with all around them” (Nzimakwe’s 2014, pp. 31–32). Likewise, if religious leaders bear an Ubuntu style of leadership, they will live out godly, human, and African love, collectivism, reciprocity, cooperation, harmony, and dignity. This viewpoint is also professed by Nussbaum (2003, p. 21) who sums it up well as follows:

Ubuntu calls on us to believe and feel that:
Your pain is my pain,
My wealth is your wealth,
Your salvation is my salvation.

Furthermore, Breed and Semenya (2015, p. 7) provide supportive evidence by affirming that Ubuntu plays a defining role in the ways it serves to empower and uplift individuals within the community. Consequently, as well-delineated by Nzimakwe (2014, p. 38), the “Ubuntu-oriented leadership style do[es] not only include teamwork down to [the] grassroots level, but also the encouragement of the team members or followers to sacrifice their personal gains/goals for the gains/goals of the group”. Consequently, when religious leaders embrace a comprehensive understanding that merges diakonia with Ubuntu, they gain the potential to collaborate beyond their circles to include non-religious leaders effectively. This collaboration can encompass raising influential voices, pooling resources, fostering unity, providing education, motivation, and encouraging citizens to participate in responsible voting and engage constructively with leaders. By partnering with forward-thinking civic organizations, these leaders can collectively drive efforts towards the democratization of Zimbabwe, leveraging their diverse perspectives and geographical reach.
4. Conclusions

In conclusion, this article called religious leaders to unite themselves and their followers by Jesus Christ’s all-encompassing servant leadership model, selfless diakonia, and Ubuntu philosophy, which collectively promote cooperative reciprocity and collaboration for the democratization of Zimbabwe. It showcased that disunity is retrogressively destructive and unity is progressively constructive. Considering that the divisions among these leaders arise from diverse perspectives, and with the acknowledgment that the majority of Zimbabwe’s population identifies with Christianity and ATR, it is advisable to advocate for complete submission to the inclusive and other-centered model exemplified by Jesus Christ. This entails embracing selfless diakonia and the Ubuntu philosophy that is so deeply rooted in African tradition. All in all, religious leaders possess the potential to become a potent force in driving the democratization of Zimbabwe. Evidently, this collaboration holds a dual role in promoting both reform and democracy by fostering the values of unconditional love, tolerance, humaneness, peacemaking, justice, and social cohesion.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

References


Dunlop, Andrew. 2021. Using the ‘Four Voices of Theology’ in Group Theological Reflection. *Practical Theology* 14: 294–308. [CrossRef]


Jibreal, Sadik. 2021. A theoretical difference between leadership and management. *Journal of Social Sciences and Education* 12: 304. [CrossRef]


Mashongwe, Gift. 2021. A theoretical difference between leadership and management. *Journal of Social Sciences and Education* 12: 304. [CrossRef]

Mashongwe, Gift. 2021. A theoretical difference between leadership and management. *Journal of Social Sciences and Education* 12: 304. [CrossRef]


Mudzainire, Suspicion, and Collium Banda. 2021. Mocking the Just God? A Theological Critique of President Mnangagwa’s Use of the Name of God to Justify His Rule in Zimbabwe. Verbum et Ecclesia 42: a2218. [CrossRef]


Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.