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## **The Relevance of Ecumenism in Zimbabwe: A Theology of Identity**

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### **Abstract**

This article seeks to explore the relevance of ecumenism or ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe as a form of theological identity. The ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe began in 1964 with the formation of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches. The formation of this ecumenical council was to fulfil the need for the gospel of Jesus to bring all believers of different denominations together. The sole purposes of this movement were to bring back the unity of the church, justice, and evangelism. From the beginning the ecumenical movements were formed to make sure that the church is witnessing together, acting and organizing together, and responding together to the ensuing political and socio-economic challenges. This article will argue that some of the ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe are no longer committed and focused to their original mandate because of the dynamic and diverse growth of ecumenical movements in the country. The review is based on the relevant literature review as a research methodology and lived experiences and observations of the author concerning the relevance of ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe. This article intends to highlight ecumenical movements under theological pressure due to divergent views of the upcoming ecumenical movements which are proponents of some political parties instead of being apolitical in order to foster unity in the church and the country.

## **Introduction**

Christianity is one of the most fragmented of all religions in the world, including Zimbabwe. In fact, more new denominations are being added to this number day by day, from a global perspective. Although multiple expressions of Christianity could have existed before the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the serious disagreements of the 16th century resulted in separations that propelled different traditions of Christianity in different directions. The establishment of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948 was an effort to institute meaningful ecumenism. In the same spirit, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) was also formed in 1964. Ecumenism was formed with the purpose of restoring oneness among Christians and churches. The main agenda was and is still aimed at fulfilling the mission and work of Jesus Christ to the entire world. However, apart from the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Zimbabwe has other ecumenical groups that include the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA), the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA), the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC), and the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations, among others. It is therefore the intent of this article to deliberate on the relevance of ecumenism in Zimbabwe, particularly looking at the issue of unity of the church, justice, peace, and reconciliation in church and society. A brief background of each of the ecumenical movements will be given before concluding this article.

## **Unity of the Church**

Ecumenism refers to the coming together of different denominations that are separated as a result of doctrines, beliefs, traditions, and practices. Kessler (2004:280) defines ecumenism as “the variety of efforts within and among the Christian churches to give visible expression to their unity in Jesus Christ, in response to the Holy Spirit, through diverse acts of reconciliation to heal all their divisions, and through common witness and service to the world.” The central theological affirmation for the ecumenical movement is established in the search for the full visible unity of the church and its common witness to the world as rooted in the scripture, namely in Christ's prayer for his disciples

“that they may all be one” (John 17:21). This verse refers to the restoration of unity among Christians which is the church.

According to Pillay (2015:636), the unity of the church is an embracing unity which promotes the reception of unity in diversity, unity amidst a diversity of doctrinal positions, socio-economic background, gender, cultures, age groups and political affiliations. Unity is not selective but it embraces people from all walks of life. This is one of the major components of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, ecumenism will only be relevant if different denominations can accommodate one another without taking into consideration doctrinal differences.

Sakupapa (2018:2) advances that ecumenical movements seek organisational unity among denominations. According to Kessler (2004:279) churches agree that the term “‘ecumenical’ embraces the quest for Christian unity, common witness in the worldwide task of mission and evangelism, commitment to Diakonia and to the promotion of justice and peace”. Therefore, ecumenism could be regarded as a concept within the Christian faith that aims to restore unity, both amongst and within different Christian denominations, focusing on the themes of unity, fellowship, and collaboration. According to Sakupapa (2018:6) there is an emphasis in the New Testament on the unity of the church which Jesus Christ taught about in the gospel of John (10:16), namely, that his goal is that “there shall be one flock, one shepherd.”

Zimbabwe has a “plethora of churches” which range from Mainline, Pentecostal and African Independent Churches (Shoko, 2016:3). In other words, different churches have separated to form different denominations. Kasper (2002:1) postulates that the situation of division among the churches is contrary to the will of Christ. It is sinful and shameful as it is a major obstacle to world mission. In his prayer, Jesus Christ said, “that they all may be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). The desire to recover the unity of all Christians is a gift of Christ and a call of the Holy Spirit. (C.C.C., 2011). Therefore, the importance of ecumenism in Zimbabwe is to show visible unity, in order to give credible witness so that the world may believe. Unity is one of the marks of a true church which is treated as a true church. Kung (1968:460) argues that the unity of the church is grounded in the saving

and redeeming work of God in Christ. McGrath (1997:485) assents to the opinion of Kung, saying that the unity of the church is the product of God's reconciliation of the world through Jesus Christ. Migliore (2004:270) opines that the unity of the church is a unity formed in Christ in whom our isolated self-dies and in whom we find new identity in mutual relationship with others.

Theologically the unity of the church is now compromised in Zimbabwe because ecumenical movements no longer speak with one voice. The unity of the body of Christ has been manipulated because some of the ecumenical movements are not representing the body of Christ. Dube (2020) notes that Nehemiah Mutendi, Bishop of the Zion Christian Church and Andrew Wutawunashe, Bishop of the Family of God act as enablers of injustice and misrepresent the religious mandate by assuming the role of regime enablers with their ecumenical movement called Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC). This ecumenical movement was formed after the coming of the second republic on 17 November 2017 after the fall of Robert Mugabe.

The unity of the church is what Christ's prayer in John 17:21 is all about, therefore creating divisions is against the will of God. According to Mahokoto (2014:212) the unity of the church must be visible so that the world may believe. Unity is a gift from God therefore ecumenical movements must unite for the cause of the gospel. It is against the will of God for churches to be divided and to support injustice among members of the society regardless of their political affiliation. Fellowship in unity is the mandate of ecumenical movements whereby churches should come together even in times of suffering. Ecumenism in Zimbabwe is trying its best to address the issue of unity in church and society though it is facing some interference by political parties and government to advance their political agenda using churches.

The unity of the church must find expression in its witness and service in the world. The lack of unity makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for the church to deal with socio-ethical challenges (Mahokoto 2014:279). Church unity is required. It is needed for various aims related to the value of life together and for the sake of the other. It must be a fruitful unity for both the church and the society.

In working together as churches, ecumenical movements are there to process, facilitate, and encourage churches to work together in propagating Christ through unity, development, and evangelism. When there is unity in the church it provides room for it to speak about justice, peace, and reconciliation within the church and society. The nonexistence of the prophetic voice of the religious institutions also contributes to the challenge of moral deterioration in humanity because the church is expected to be the moral compass for society and across the globe.

## **Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation**

The role of ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe is to facilitate peace and national healing. The struggle for justice, peace, and reconciliation is a very relevant theological foundation for ecumenical engagement. Justice is at the core or heart of the gospel (Pillay 2015:639). Zimbabwe like many other countries is plagued by political instability, dictatorship, hunger, poverty, corruption, the abuse of women and children, and oppression of the poor. Jesus Christ's main message from the book of the prophet Isaiah (42:1-4) was the gospel of liberation of the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19; Pillay 2015:639).

According to Shoko et al (2013:45), the levels of violence and political polarisation experienced in the country calls for the church to come up with useful platform for peace and national healing. Zimbabwe experienced the *Gukurahundi*<sup>1</sup> atrocities in August 2018 shooting which resulted in the "deaths of six people" at the hands of Zimbabwe security forces (Zimbabwe Human Rights Non-Governmental Organisation Forum, 2019:4, 29- 30) and other wounds that continue in the socio-political arena. In ecumenical cooperation, church institutions such as the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) and the Ecumenical Church Leaders Forum are making frantic efforts to oppose the violence by founding local Peace and Gender Committees (GKKE, 2019:3). In light of the state's abuses of power and use of violence against its own citizens, new

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<sup>1</sup> Gukurahundi, a Shona word meaning a series of massacres which were effected by the government of Robert Gabriel Mugabe against the Ndebele people in Matebeleland Provinces and Midlands Provinces in Zimbabwe.

Christian organisations such as the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) and individuals have emerged to question the propriety of this relationship with Zanu Pf which is the political party of the sitting government in the country (Tarusarira 2016:58). Justice must not be an issue to be added to parts of the agenda of ecumenical movements; it is the duty of the church to preach the gospel of peace and reconciliation. Jesus Christ is the model of advocating justice, peace, and reconciliation. Justice is a process whereby injustice is overcome, exploitation lifted, oppression removed, rights restored, and livelihood assured (Pillay 2015:640).

Baum and Wells (1997:7) maintain that reconciliation and peacemaking are part of the Christian calling, for Christian individuals and for churches and Christian organisations. To buttress the same view, Field & Koslowski (2016:98) state that Christians are to continue seeking God's justice through a liberating and healing ministry. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches in 1994 established the Justice Peace and Advocacy programme under their Church and Society department. It was dedicated to training and providing legal assistance to ordinary and marginalized people in their socio-economic and political rights. The programme engages officials from government<sup>2</sup> and other stakeholders in political powers. The programme's mission even today is to provide economic justice, legal aid and human rights. On women's issues, Justice Peace and Advocacy is focused on providing women with equal opportunity to become prosperous and totally emancipated as we read in the Bible (Galatians 3:26-28). The goal of the programme is to empower women. The department also carries out workshops on issues such as inheritance, project developments issues, and training about HIV/AIDS for caregivers and support groups.

On the Youth and Child Survival Desk, Justice Peace Advocacy sought to improve youths' and children's psychological, social, and economic wellbeing. In this, it has helped orphans materially and otherwise, built awareness and capacity on various activities, as well as helped youth form sports leagues and drama and music groups and programmes. Again, this desk facilitated youth and children related conventions, training programmes, workshops and seminars, and exchange and exposure visits in related areas. To do this, the desk

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<sup>2</sup> <http://relizm.org/category/news/>. Accessed on 21 August 2021.

provided training for youth coordinators, Sunday school teachers, and its target group.

The relevance of ecumenism in Zimbabwe is that some of the churches who are not members of the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-Denominational Council of Churches (ZIICC) of the second republic are speaking with one voice against injustice, abuse of human rights and poor governance. Matsvimbo (2011) avers that Churches through ecumenism worked tirelessly to rescue the desperate situation where people's rights were not respected. Pastoral letters<sup>3</sup> from churches, especially pastoral letters by Catholic Bishops' Conference, Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe were written and handed over to the government. These pastoral letters were written to criticize the government for not being accountable for their deeds. By doing this the churches played an important role, especially in 2009, to conciliate a restive citizenry in the face of the crisis caused by bad political and economic decisions in the country. The Heads of Christian Denominations, representing four main ecumenical bodies in the country - Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa - issued pastoral letters and statements encouraging peace in the country. Through ecumenism, the church in Zimbabwe was advocating for peace and tolerance in the country and, as a result, this led to the establishment of the unity government, which was a combination of the three main political parties. The unity government was facilitated by the then president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, as Southern Africa Development Community's representative on 13 February 2009 (Nhede, 2012:2).

Ecumenism allows the church to speak with one voice (GKKE, 2019). The current government seem to be relying heavily on coercive tactics that were developed during the liberation struggle to elicit civilian compliance (Shoko, 2016:6). In addition, Zimbabwe is also faced with a hyperinflationary economy, high levels of corruption, social injustice, human rights abuse, and poverty, among other issues. Contrary to this, the Zimbabwean constitution stipulates that citizens

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<sup>3</sup> <https://relizm.org/major-religious-zimbabwe/catholic/>. Accessed on 21 August 2021.

have the right to peace, equal opportunities, and good governance (Constitution of Zimbabwe, 2013:18, 19-20, 32-33). In such situations, there should be a voice for the voiceless. To deal with the crises, the churches have jointly raised their voices and are demanding a national dialogue (GKKE, 2019:11). According to GKKE (2019:11) four umbrella organisations, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), and the Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa (UDACIZA) have teamed up as the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations (ZHOCD) to host events such as a National Leadership Prayer Breakfast to back their call for a national dialogue. Thus, ecumenism is crucial in ensuring one voice in the call for a national dialogue, and in this regard, one may say that the ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe are pursuing the ecumenism vision.

Pursuant to the above argument, GKKE (2020:1) indicates that ecumenical groups in Zimbabwe continue to be committed to building a united, peaceful, and prosperous Zimbabwe. On the 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2020, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches directed the formation of a Comprehensive National Settlement Framework proposal which is meant to ease the troubles that are destroying the society. In the same vein, on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a pastoral letter titled, "The March is not Ended," in which they gave a historic perspective, mentioning root causes of current Zimbabwean problems and clearly highlighting the role of the current government in the ordeals the citizens are experiencing (GKKE, 2020:1). Thus, the role of ecumenism in Zimbabwe cannot be undermined since ecumenical groups are tirelessly fighting to transform the nation for the betterment of the general populace. As Kessler (2004:278) notes, genuine ecumenism is transforming and not silencing or oppressing the society.

## **Evangelism and Mission**

Ecumenism embraces a common witness in the worldwide task of mission and evangelism. Even the World Council of Churches (WCC) indicates that it has an ecumenical vision of mission and evangelism (Bosch, 2011:332; Field & Koslowski, 2016:98). Pillay (2015:640) notes that the church is a community in response to *Missio Dei*, bearing witness to God's activity in the world by its



communication of the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed, proclamation and praxis. Therefore, the church through ecumenism is mandated to preach the good news of Jesus to the church and society. The church's main goal is explicitly stated by Jesus Christ in the gospel of Matthew 28:19-20: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

This is the assignment that the church is to fulfil through ecumenism. It is not an option for the church to be part of the great commission; it is a mandate which has to be fulfilled. Through ecumenism, the church must be concerned with the salvation of every creature on earth, because it is the mandate which was tasked to the church by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Migliore (2004:275) notes that the proclamation of the Word of God is the human testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ and its effectiveness depends ultimately not on the preacher but on God. Furthermore, he states that the proclamation of the Word of God is based on the witness of scriptural texts. In Christian theology the phrase, "Word of God" has three meanings: (1) the incarnate or the living Word of God, who is Jesus Christ; (2) the written Word of God, or the Scripture and (3) the proclaimed Word of God, or the preaching of the gospel, in present (Migliore 2004:276). Ecumenism can only be and remain relevant in society if the churches are preaching the Word of God with one voice so that humankind can be liberated. Evangelism and mission are the best tools to be employed in order to bring justice, peace, and reconciliation in our societies.

This is crucial in Zimbabwe where there is a great need to reach out in remote areas, care for the less privileged, and provide basic social services. According to GKKE (2019:3) ecumenical groups encourage their member churches to assume responsibility for health and education in the crisis over basic social services. In support of the same view, Shoko (2016:4) insists that the church in Zimbabwe has always been associated with healing mission as part of its broad program to evangelise through medical care and education. Even during the time of the Global Political Agreement, Churches in Manicaland, as an ecumenical initiative, have been running healing and reconciliation workshops

with members of the civil society. According to Shoko (2016:6), these workshops have sought to remind Christians about their role as peacemakers and peacekeepers in a heavily polarized society.

The ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe are relevant in the crafting of national bills. Tarusarira (2016:73) notes that the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) claimed a seat at the constitution-making process table in 2013. According to the Herald newspaper,<sup>4</sup> the Zimbabwe Council of Churches met in 2019 at their conference centre (formerly Kentucky Hotel) to discuss a bill that sought to formalize marriage partnerships. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches rejected this bill as it sought to promote adultery and thereby reducing the value of faithful marriages desired by God. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage is honourable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.” In consideration of the above works, one may say ecumenical groups or movements are actively participating in the proclamation of peace and justice in church and society.

Although ecumenism has been relevant in pursuing the vision of mission and evangelism in the country, these efforts are sometimes derailed by the actions of some member churches and individuals. According to Tarusarira (2016:59), churches in post-independence Zimbabwe have failed to provide the essential cognitive, emotional, and moral guidance to the government in dealing with past and present political challenges. When the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Zimbabwe Council of Churches, and Evangelical Fellowship Zimbabwe attempted to facilitate talks between the main political parties, African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in the mid-2000s, they failed to rise above political patronage after the head of the team Bishop Nemapere started to support the government after having a banquet with President Mugabe (Tarusarira, 2016:60).

Ecumenism in Zimbabwe, on the other hand, is not relevant because the church itself has failed to unite. The Reformed Church in Zimbabwe’s Church

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.herald.co.zw> . Accessed 21 August 2021.

Constitution (Article 132) lists six churches that it cannot fellowship with (RCZ<sup>5</sup> *Bhuku yoMurairo* or Church Order Book, 2017: 44 – 45). In fact, it is difficult for these ecumenical groups to preach unity when their member churches are marred with serious divisions and corruption. *The Herald* (Munyoro 2015, Nemukuyu 2018, and Madzianike 2020) published squabbles between Bishop Kunonga and the Zanu PF political that rocked the Anglican Church. Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM) wrangles between Madziyire faction and Chiyangwa faction, African Apostolic Church wrangles between Bishop Mwazha`s two sons, and Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church quarrels between the main party led by Aron Munodawafa and Washington Mugodhi (the late Bishop Mugodhi`s son), just to mention a few (Taruvinga, 2020). These squabbles tend to indicate that the church is in the world and for the world because she has accepted the world`s values and standards (Field & Koslowski, 2016:99). But the church should not of the world (John 15:19) and should not conform to it (Romans 12:2). Therefore, meaningful ecumenism can only be realised when churches practice what they preach and live as agents of unity, restoration, and justice, and as members of a reconciling body (Field & Koslowski, 2016:99).

The current injustices and corruption in the country suggest that ecumenical groups have failed to seriously challenge repression and oppression (Tarusarira, 2016:60). According to Tarusarira (2016:60), some ecumenical bodies, mainline church bodies in particular, are courted by political elites with gifts, and so they end up siding the oppressors. Tarusarira (2016:73) reports that in 2007 the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance had a meeting violently disrupted by security forces, resulting in arrests and many getting injured.

In consideration of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches mission statement, one may suggest that the ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe seem to have forgotten the reason for the establishment of these organisations. The Zimbabwe Council of Churches` mission statement is to “enable the member churches to proclaim the good news of Christ, to strive for a visible Christian unity in Zimbabwe, speak with one voice on issues of national concern, with a focus on the preaching and teaching of the gospel in accordance with holy scriptures, on ecumenical worship and spirituality, on community service and

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<sup>5</sup> RCZ is an acronym for Reformed Church in Zimbabwe.

renewal, on justice and peace in church and society, and on sound theological reflection/education” (World Council of Churches, 2020:1). Tarusarira (2016:56) argues that ecumenical groups have digressed into politics leaving behind the spiritual issues and teaching of the gospel, and therefore he prefers to call them “religio-political organizations.” However, Bosch 2011:342, argues that although evangelism may never be equated with labouring for justice, it may also never be divorced from it. According to Bosch (2011:342) social justice was at the heart of the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament since most of Israel’s kings were challenged by prophets when they had perpetrated or tolerated injustice in their kingdoms.

Ecumenical groups in Zimbabwe have been very critical of the regime’s oppressive tendencies as evidenced by the critical and strong pastoral letters they have published. The church’s fight for justice has been seen by the participation of Zimbabwe Christian Alliance in the 2013 constitution making process. The rejection of the marriage partnerships bill by Zimbabwe Council of Churches in 2019 was a milestone in the church’s pursuit of preaching and teaching of the gospel in accordance with holy scriptures and of sound theological reflection and education. In an effort to fulfil the ecumenical vision of mission and evangelism, the church has also provided health, educational, and social support to vulnerable members of the society. However, the current injustices, abductions, human rights abuses, and corruption may suggest that ecumenism has failed to be relevant in Zimbabwe. Some ecumenical leaders have also been accused of being bribed to side with the oppressors. Rather than the church uniting for the world to see and believe, the church is tainted by divisions as they fail to follow their own constitutions. Churches in Zimbabwe have also failed to unite as one ecumenical body, as different ecumenical movements continue to erupt in relation to the existing religious differences. It is then not unreasonable for one to argue that ecumenism in Zimbabwe does not have much fruits to show or celebrate, and that they are not a living example and also seem to have forgotten the spiritual aspect of their vision and mission.

## **Ecumenical Movements in Zimbabwe**

As in many other countries ecumenism in Zimbabwe is operating in a plural society. Ecumenical movements see things or issues differently. Pillay

(2015:644) notes that ecumenism in Africa is surrounded by crisis and opportunities. The church is there to uphold its identity regardless of the challenges which are arising in the society. In Zimbabwe at present ecumenical movements are increasing in numbers though they are being formed to achieve different purposes. Zimbabwe has several ecumenical movements with different histories and aims, but their core business should be to bring stability and order in the nation. They represent different denominations as is explained below. Ecumenism in Zimbabwe has been developing rapidly, but there are a few reports or documented writings on the activities of the churches so far, focusing and reflecting on ecumenism. These ecumenical movements include:

### ***Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)***

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches is a fellowship of Christian churches and organizations that confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. It was formed in 1964. The purpose of its formation was to bring all Christian denominations and organizations together, so that they may work together to improve political and socio-economic challenges in the country. Zimbabwe Council of Churches<sup>6</sup> engages government to work together with church leadership in dialogue pertaining to problems within the country. Zimbabwe Council of Churches has 26 affiliates, mainly from the mainline churches and Christian organizations. It is open to any denomination. As an ecumenical board, Zimbabwe Council of Churches takes part in international relations, thus it reports to the World Council of Churches (WCC). Like any organization, Zimbabwe Council of Churches has a governing structure composed of council, officers' committee and an executive committee. The council meets biannually to decide on council policies. The council elects the officers' committee which meets in between executive meetings to assist the secretariat, which is run by the elected General Secretary. The last governing structure is the executive committee. This committee of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches is delegation of church denominations which works in between the council's biannual meetings. It acts as the Board of Directors for the council and delegates to the secretariat the day to day running of the council. The Zimbabwe Council of

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<sup>6</sup> <http://relzim.org/major-religions-zimbabwe/#EFZ>. Accessed 5 August 2021.

Churches<sup>7</sup> is one of the ecumenical bodies which speaks against injustice in the country.

### ***Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference (ZCBC)***

The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) is the official assembly of the Catholic Bishops of Zimbabwe. The Conference was established in 1962 and it has a secretariat, which is its coordinating arm. Under the secretariat, there are commissions, each with a specific mandate given by the conference. The Health Commission was established in 2009 to ensure provision of quality health care in Zimbabwe through improving access to primary health care, maternal and child health care, and sexual reproductive health rights and HIV and AIDS<sup>8</sup>.

The Catholic Church act as observers in ecumenical boards. Hence, they validate the idea and participate, but using their union which report to the Pope in Vatican. John Paul II (1995) has argued that the Roman Catholic's view of ecumenism is confined in Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio* (UR, 1964) rather than in statements issued before the council, but it sometimes presents a model with the implicit and partly explicit expectation that other Christian churches should reintegrate into the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic ecumenical movement in Zimbabwe is the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. This movement participates in bringing together the political and socioeconomic and spiritual affairs in the country. It is a formation of representatives of the Catholic faith across the country who are bishops in different dioceses.

### ***Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ)***

This movement mainly comprises the Pentecostal denominations and it reports to the World Evangelical Alliance. Similar to the already noted ecumenical movements, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe also aims to

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<sup>7</sup> Echoing, "The march has not ended" <https://kubatana.net/2020/08/16/echoing-the-march-is-not-ended/>. Accessed 5 August 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference. [https://zimhealthsos.ngo/files/cso-docs/zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference-zcbc/3-](https://zimhealthsos.ngo/files/cso-docs/zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference-zcbc/3-Governance_and_management_structure--zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference-zcbc.pdf)

[Governance\\_and\\_management\\_structure--zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference-zcbc.pdf](https://zimhealthsos.ngo/files/cso-docs/zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference-zcbc/3-Governance_and_management_structure--zimbabwe-catholic-bishops-conference-zcbc.pdf). Accessed 4 August 2021.

bring sanity by bringing together Christian ethos into the political and socio-economic areas. It engages the corporate world for the welfare of people. It also comprises a secretariat and council. Pentecostalism is a form of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer. In nature Pentecostalism is charismatic. It was established by Charles Fox Parham in 1900 AD (Hollenweger, 2005). This group was reacting against both the Catholic and Protestant traditions on the notion of the activity of the Holy Spirit during church services. In Zimbabwe, Pentecostal churches include Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (Forward in Faith) which was established by Ezekiel Guti; Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM); Faith in God, founded by Assah Gurupira; Harvest House, founded by Collins Nyati; Word of Life, founded by Dr Shana; Jabula International, established by Bishop Tudor Bismark; Celebration, founded by Tom and Bonnie Deuschle; and several others across the country (Hollenweger, 2005). As an ecumenical movement, they regard themselves as God's mouthpiece for the nation for justice and peace to prevail in the church and society.

### ***Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe, Africa (UDACIZA)***<sup>9</sup>

This is another ecumenical movement which partakes in bringing together the political, economic, and social life of people. Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe and Africa<sup>10</sup> represents mostly the indigenous churches, which include all Zion churches, white garment churches, formally known as *Vapostori*, which some scholars describe as apostolic sects. These churches appear more African when compared to the mainline, Catholic, and Pentecostal churches. Some of these churches participated in the emancipation of the Zimbabwean natives from British bondage. They prophesized positively till the regaining of independence in 1980. The African

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<sup>9</sup> Union for the Development Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa.

<https://cite.org.zw/tag/union-for-the-development-of-apostolic-churches-and-zionists-in-africa-udaciza/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Not much about this ecumenical movement is written down in detail. Its Constitution and the dates of its founding are not available. The author has noticed this gap which needs to be investigated in future.

Independent/Initiated Churches (AIC) sprang from Mission founded churches due to the daily activities in the European churches that influenced many African's beliefs. They wanted to Africanize their way of worship. The missionaries labelled everything African evil. In protest, the Africans (Zimbabweans) like Shonhiwa Masedza founded a movement which accommodated Africans only, and is popularly known as Johane Masowe. Muchabaya Momberume established Johani Marange. Samuel Mutendi founded Zion Christian Churches (ZCC), and Paul Mwazha established the African Apostolic Church, popularly known as Mwazha. Other Independent Churches include Bethsaida, Zion, Apostolic Faith Church popularly known as Mugodhi, Mai Chaza founded *Guta rajehova* and many others. Union for the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa and Fambidzano (Ecumenical Movement for the Development of Zimbabwean Independent Churches) has the same mission and vision with UDACIZA. There is much division among these churches, therefore not much church unity can be emulated from these churches. It is one of the ecumenical movements which is a member of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations.

### ***Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA)***

Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA) was formed in 2005<sup>11</sup> as an advocacy Christian organisation focused on addressing social, political, economic, and humanitarian issues affecting poor and vulnerable communities, mainly in rural areas. This ecumenical movement was formed as a political wing for of the Zanu Pf ruling party. Zimbabwe Christian Alliance was founded by Bishop Obadiah Musindo, aiming to align people to the status quo of the former president, Robert Mugabe. The voice of the church must be heard; hence, the other mentioned ecumenical movements sometimes could not agree with the political will. In this case, Zimbabwe Christian Alliance represents the voice of the church. However, the changing of the Mugabe regime to the new dispensation gave birth to a new movement called Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches, speaking the voice of the church in support of the President Mnangagwa.

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<sup>11</sup> Zimbabwe Christian Alliance. <https://www.zimbabwechristianalliance.org.zw/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.



### ***Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches***

The movement of Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches (ZIICC)<sup>12</sup> is led by two prominent figures, Apostle Andrew Wutawunashwe of Family of God and Mutendi of Zimbabwe's Zion Christian Church (ZCC). ZIICC was founded by Bishop Mutendi as a patron to build unity among the indigenous churches of Zimbabwe with the purpose to serve, build, and strengthen the nation and her leaders through prayer and homegrown solutions. They corrected other ecumenical movements at political gatherings seeking to clarify the political will of the current status quo. This can be witnessed when ZCBC on 14 August 2020 called on the government to secure human rights (Pastoral letter of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference). The Zimbabwe Council of Churches, the Evangelical Fellowship Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Christian Alliance supported this letter, but the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches supported the government and demonized other ecumenical movements. This is the only ecumenical movement which the government of President Emmerson Mnangagwa has invited to lead prayers on Independence Day, Heroes Day, at the funerals of government officials,<sup>13</sup> unlike in the previous years during the reign of Robert Gabriel Mugabe when ecumenical movements alternated leading the proceeding and services of those departed. Sometime back president Emmerson Mnangagwa<sup>14</sup> promised to offer vast land to the Zimbabwe Indigenous Inter-denominational Council of Churches at their purported Prayer Day for the Nation. Member churches of this ecumenical body were promised to be given land for free because whenever they hold a press conference they will use it as a platform to attack and silence other ecumenical bodies and to peddle falsehoods against the opposition political parties. Instead of using these press conferences to call for unity, peace,

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<sup>12</sup> Emulate Unity of the Churches: President Emerson Mnangagwa authored by Byron Adonis Mutingwende <https://spiked.co.zw/emulate-unity-of-the-churches-president-mnangagwa/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Mnangagwa offers 'Indigenous' Churches free State land. <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/mnangagwa-offers-indigenous-churches-free-state-land/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Mnangagwa offers 'Indigenous' Churches free State land. <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/mnangagwa-offers-indigenous-churches-free-state-land/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.

justice, and reconciliation, they fuel divisions within the ecumenical movements and the nation at large.

### ***Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations***<sup>15</sup>

Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations is an umbrella body of four church bodies, namely the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, and the Union for the Development of the Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe Africa. The Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations speak out against the ills of the government because their mandate is to fight for peace, justice, and unity to prevail in the country. They are non-partisan in the way they execute their mandate.<sup>16</sup> On 17 May 2021 they castigated the government for the abduction, torture, and inhuman treatment of three women from the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance led by Nelson Chamisa. One of these ladies, Joana Mamombe, is a Member of Parliament in Harare.

## **Recommendations**

The drive of this article is to investigate the relevance of ecumenical movements in Zimbabwe. Based on the discussions and findings, the writer recommends the following:

- All ecumenical movements should be members of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination, unlike today when only four ecumenical movements are members while others are not members.
- The church must speak with one voice. The theological identity of the church must fit Jesus Christ's prayer, "that they may be one" (John 17:10). In John 17:10 Jesus prayed for the unity of the Church. The unity of the church will help the political parties to respect the church

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<sup>15</sup> Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations. <https://kubatana.net/source/zhocd/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.

<sup>16</sup> "Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations call for an end to the abduction and torture ill treatment sexual abuse to women and other innocent people in the country." <https://kubatana.net/2020/05/17/calls-for-an-end-to-abductions-and-torture/>. Accessed 4 August 2021.

more than they do today. The unity of the church will promote togetherness among ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe.

- Ecumenical bodies must be on the forefront in advocating for justice, peace, and reconciliation among political parties, instead of watching people kill one another because of different ideologies. The church via the umbrella body of the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denomination must be united among one another.
- Churches should hold workshops to sensitise their members about political tolerance and unity among church members in the fight against political polarization in the country.
- Churches should foster the bringing together of all ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe like what the World Council of Churches is in the world. The World Council of Churches represents all churches across the globe. If the church in Zimbabwe speak with one voice it represents the true church which Christ advocated for. The church must be the light of the world. Therefore, if the ecumenical bodies in Zimbabwe want to remain relevant they must speak with one voice.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the church in Zimbabwe needs to continue and confidently exercise its prophetic voice and try by all means to maintain the unity of the church and be there with those who are on the borders of society. It does not help for the church to preach unity, peace and justice, reconciliation and the social righteousness of God if it stands in opposition to those who undergo injustices in society. The church through ecumenism in Zimbabwe should maintain its relevance, nature, and calling to unity, through service and witness in the society. The church in Zimbabwe believes that individuals and communities can be transformed through the witness of a united church as the body of Jesus Christ and the end result of this is the realization of the relevance of ecumenism. Ecumenism's mandate is a fellowship of humankind through unity, peace, justice, reconciliation, mission, and evangelism. The move of some ecumenical movements noted aims to bring sanity and order amongst all the citizens of Zimbabwe. The relevance and theological identity of ecumenism in Zimbabwe is the goal of the Church, however, it is experiencing not only dynamic breakthroughs but also limitations and

opposition because of some of the ecumenical bodies are partisan in their identity and not theological in their identity.

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