

BOOK REVIEW

Bekithemba Dube, ed. *Religious Leaders and the Regime in the Second Republic of Zimbabwe*. London: Lexington Books, 2023. ix + 234 pp. Index. About the Contributor. \$105.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-1-66693-677-3.

The November 2017 military-assisted transition in Zimbabwe ushered in a “new” dispensation that identifies itself as the “Second Republic.” The transition reconfigured on one hand, and reinforced on the other hand, the already complex relationship between the Zimbabwean postcolonial state and the church. The twelve chapters in the edited volume “address this changing context by interrogating the nexus between (*Christian*) church(es) and politics in Zimbabwe” (46–47).

The twelve chapters in the volume map out how different religious leaders and organizations have related to the Emmerson Mnangagwa-led government in Zimbabwe. Based on the ways religious leaders and organizations relate with the government, they are categorized as “regime enablers,” “regime transformers,” and “regime resisters.” Several chapters in the book identify leaders such as Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, Apostle Andrew Wutawunashe, Madzibaba Obey Mapuranga, and Madzibaba Lawrence Katsiru as some of the religious leaders from African Indigenous Churches—whose religious organizations are part of the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches—as regime enablers. These leaders provide ideological and human resources that help to keep Emmerson Mnangagwa and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) in power by giving prophecies that construct the Second Republic leadership as divinely anointed or encouraging their followers to vote for the incumbent. Furthermore, religious regime enablers are part of an elaborate government propaganda machinery. As Sifiso Mpfu (71) and Masengwe and Dube (134) show, these leaders support the government for personal gains in the form of land, government funds, and farming implements.

The Second Republic has a troop of religious entertainers and comedians at its disposal. Prophet Passion Java, Mai TT, and Madam Boss are singled out as regime enablers who cunningly use religion, comedy, and wealth to divert attention from the government’s failure and authoritarianism. The target group for religious entertainers is young people, the majority of whom are unemployed. This category of regime enablers is responsible for creating false consciousness in young people by peddling falsehoods and downplaying the political agency of young voters.

Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) is a collective group for Evangelical denominations in Zimbabwe. This group is categorized as a regime transformer whose approach is to engage the government in secret, what Banda (30) calls

“quiet diplomacy” and “priestly approach.” In its activities, the EFZ aims to address the plight of Zimbabweans through humanitarian and developmental programs that strengthen food security, water, and sanitation provision. The middle-of-the-road approach by EFZ is complimented by the integrative theology that simultaneously underscores the plights of Zimbabweans while calling the government and duty-bearers to act. The approach by EFZ is ineffective because “quiet diplomacy” avoids commenting—in public spaces—on abuses of human rights and the lack of rule of law and worsening corruption in Zimbabwe. Evangelicals’ voice is missing.

The third category of religious actors discussed in the book are religious resisters who speak truth to power and openly criticize the government for mismanaging the economy and its authoritarian tendencies. Apostle Talent Chiwenga and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference (ZCBC) challenge the actions and policies of the Second Republic. The theology and approach of these actors provide candid and robust critiques of the government. The government, religious comedians, and the Zimbabwe Indigenous Interdenominational Council of Churches target Apostle Chiwenga and ZCBC in smear campaigns, showing how the Second Republic is dividing the body of Christ on political lines.


The book provides an overview of how different religious leaders, denominations, and organizations relate with the government post-2017. This is an important intervention and contribution. However, the first chapter of the book does little to provide theoretical and conceptual grounding to the chapters contained in the volume. It provides a synopsis of each chapter. After reading the book, I am left wondering about the aims of the book, the gap it fills, and what informed the structure and flow of the volume. I assume that the volume is inspired and based on an opinion piece written by a Zimbabwean public scholar, Alex Magaisa. All chapters refer to his blog. More framing would assist readers to appreciate the aims of the volume and how the volume is organized.

This is a book about religious leaders and their interactions with the Zimbabwean government. The criteria for including two female comedians—Mai TT and Madam Boss—as religious leaders is unclear. The two neither lead any religious organization nor are publicly identified as religious actors in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the volume is silent about minority religious groups and their leaders—for example, Muslims, Hindus, and Jews leaders. The focus on Christianity silences the voices of religious actors who also interface, interact, influence and are affected by government policies and laws.

All chapters are based on an analysis of secondary data from sermons, newspaper stories, social media, and websites. The book privileges the positions and preferences of religious leaders. We do not know how the sermons are received and interpreted by their followers. This is an area that requires scholarly attention.

Despite the caveats, the volume’s contribution is its focus on the ever-shifting nature of state-church relations and the subtle ways in which religious leaders

support and entrench the government in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the volume brings to the fore symbolic and ideological affinity between African Initiated Churches and liberation war movements in a postcolonial context.

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