



Decoloniality in Theology Today: The Quest to Liberate United Theological College's Curriculum from Foreign God Talk

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ABSTRACT

United Theological College is one of the oldest and largest ecumenical institutions in Southern Africa. The institution brings together six Protestant churches in Zimbabwe. For years, the institution produced competent theologians. Unfortunately, these theologians drunk from some foreign theological calabashes whose contents are divorced from the Zimbabwean realities. The College had been clinging to the Western, far distant, and neighbouring African theologies and theologians for its curriculum forgetting to scratch where Zimbabweans are itching. This collection of different theologies into one combination was an attempt by the College to equip students with diversified theologies from different sociopolitical, economic, and religious environments, ignoring that the context is divorced from Zimbabwe's milieu. This paper sought to invoke the institution's continual addressing of contextual theological issues using borrowed theological epistemologies. Using a decolonial framework and qualitative research methodology, the paper challenged the institution to decolonise its curriculum by liberating it from armchair theories of foreign God talk. Structurally, the paper discussed the theoretical framework, methodology, and identity of the College and proceeded to present the curriculum of the institution and the findings from the interviews with special reference to four modules. The paper stressed that the perpetual pontification of foreign theological themes by the institution will continue to create theologians whose heads and the body are separated. The conclusion challenged the College to decolonise its curriculum and advocate for a theology that speaks with the language and idioms of the Zimbabwean milieu regardless of the challenges associated with the move. This paper contributes significantly to scholarship as it challenges United Theological College to use relevant resources to do theology.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to engage the theme of decoloniality of theology focusing on United Theological College (UTC). The paper was motivated by the impact of foreign theology from Europe, North and South America, and West, East, and Southern Africa that define the institution's Faculty of Theology curriculum. For more than half a century, UTC students have been mouthing this theology clothed in

foreign regalia, divorced from the everyday experiences of the country.¹ The country has many challenges that include controversial land redistribution, hyperinflation, contested elections, forced migration, perpetual draught, and poverty of the majority in a country where the economy is in the hands of the minority. With all these deplorable contexts, UTC remains bogged on the theology of enlightenment, and the philosophies of Western theologians, whereas when their students are confronted with different monsters that characterise the ministry after training, they find it difficult to proceed.² Students at UTC are still being trained to swallow theology that makes them appear incompetent in the context of the harsh political, economic, and multireligious environment that demands homegrown God talk.

The paper aims to invoke UTC to decolonise its theology and liberate it from both European and far-distant African theological caricatures if it has to make sense to modern God talk in Zimbabwe. In addition, the paper invokes the institution to unthink foreign God talk although this theology stood as the only option for the institution. Moreover, the paper challenges both theologians and theological institutions to decolonise their curricula and use theology to address contextual issues as they are presented in different contexts such as controversial land redistribution in Zimbabwe, hyperinflation, contested elections, forced migration, perpetual draughts, and poverty of the majority in a country where the economy is in the hands of the minority. The paper also encourages the institution to make a deliberate move to redefine its curriculum so that it will speak to the demands of Zimbabweans suffering from endless polarisation, persistent poverty and hunger, and voter apathy among other ills. The paper will conclude by challenging the institution to decolonise its curriculum by liberating it from armchair theories of foreign God talk. In addition, the paper will also present some of the hiccups being faced by the institutions to implement contextual approaches to decolonise its curriculum including a repressive political terrain, a lack of resources to develop the new curriculum, and a brain drain that has hampered the country. The paper will not only raise challenges but the conclusion will also proffer some possible headways to the challenges that are making the College remain in limbo with a colonial God talk.

Quest for Decoloniality of Theology Today

Before engaging in the need to decolonise theology at UTC, it is important to understand the theme as a global reality. Most scholars agree that the decoloniality of theology today has dominated the academic field with both the former colonisers and the colonised advocating for decoloniality. Decolonising initiatives, movements, and theoretical approaches started in the 1990s and continue to emerge and include an increasingly rich array of voices from around the world. These voices present profound epistemological challenges with wide-ranging implications across scholarly disciplines, including theology. For example, Tonelli argues that “decolonial theology is an ongoing process, requiring the readiness of all actors involved (both former colonised and colonisers).”³ The decoloniality of theology is not a one-sided thing, but the coloniser must allow theology to speak liberally without oppressing the already oppressed while for the colonisers, theology must not be a tool of subjectivity. Tonelli warned that decolonising theology has the greatest risks that come from the prevalent feeling of revenge and a too strong influence of politics and theological thinking.⁴ For this reason, a high-quality level of dialogue is a good way to avoid radicalism and extremism, but also to build a new and common perspective.⁵ Tonelli’s work sets the tone for an urgent call to decolonise theology as the discipline cannot continue enjoying the past glory which is no longer relevant to its present situation and this is true with UTC.

¹ Peter Masvotore, “The Dynamics of Decoloniality in Theological Education: A Critique of the History of the United Theological College (UTC) for Indigenous Clergy in Zimbabwe,” *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 7, no. 1 (2021): 1–20.

² Masvotore, “The Dynamics of Decoloniality in Theological Education: A Critique of the History of the United Theological College (UTC) for Indigenous Clergy in Zimbabwe.”

³ Debora Tonelli, “Decolonial Theology,” 2020, https://www.academia.edu/46882857/Decolonial_Theology.

⁴ Tonelli, “Decolonial Theology.”

⁵ Tonelli, “Decolonial Theology.”

Writing from a South African perspective, Ward raised two questions 1) how decolonised is South African theology? 2) if so, how should this theology be decolonised?⁶ Ward proposed a three-stage method for decolonising theology in South Africa namely, ‘provincialising the Western context as a background for doing theology in the Global South, translation of concepts into the differing contexts where theology is produced, and acknowledging culture as being reflective of the diversity of people groups.’⁷

Drexler-Dreis also added a voice from a North Atlantic world. Drexler-Dreis offered an overview of some decolonial perspectives with which theologians can engage and argue for a general perspective for a decoloniality of theology as a possible response to modern/colonial structures and relations of power, particularly in the United States.⁸ Decolonial theology critiques how the confinement of knowledge to European traditions has closed possibilities for understanding historical encounters with dignity. Decolonial theology reflects critically on a historical situation in light of faith in divine reality, the understanding of which is liberated from the monopoly of modern/colonial ways of knowing, and catalyse social transformation.⁹ This article justifies the universal call of decolonisation where the colonisers also feel the same call, unfortunately, the call from the colonial desk is speaking to itself and cannot convince UTC to decolonise its curriculum.

Medina et al also wrote from a North American point of view.¹⁰ For them, liberation theologies and decolonial insights merged. They draw from their concrete experiences in the Americas to show the intricate possibilities of using liberation and decolonial thinking in practical theology. Such a call from the former coloniser demonstrates the need because UTC has to decolonise its theology. Savides anchored his decoloniality theology on the Reformed Church in South Africa, by arguing that decoloniality can be applied as a hermeneutic to render white Christians ethically and morally vulnerable to the unifying power of the cross.¹¹ Sakupapa also enters the decolonial discourse advocating for a new paradigm for contemporary African theology in all its variance.¹²

In Zimbabwe Canaan Banana wrote an article titled, *The Rewriting of the Bible*.¹³ For him the central problem in the world is oppression and the solution is liberation. There is a need to liberate God from the captivity of culture and liberate Christ from the Bible.¹⁴ Banana’s extremism of decoloniality is seen when he argued that, “religiously speaking, there is no difference between Abraham and *Mbuya* Nehanda (the Spirit Medium of Zimbabwe).¹⁵ Even though Banana did not use the term decoloniality, it is evident that he was calling for the decolonisation of theology by compartmentalising God’s talk within the context of a given people. Despite Banana’s writings receiving a lot of criticism, Gunda does not see the ideas as some inferences of Arianism but as a challenge for African scholars to engage deeper with biblical hermeneutics to decolonise the Bible.¹⁶ From the writing of scholars from the different parts of the world presented above, it is evident that the decoloniality of theology has to be engaged as a matter of urgency and this is expected to start with the theological institutions.

⁶ Graham Ward, “Decolonizing Theology,” *STJ | Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (December 31, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.17570/stj.2017.v3n2.a26>.

⁷ Ward, “Decolonizing Theology.”

⁸ Joseph Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Theology in the North Atlantic World* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019).

⁹ Drexler-Dreis, *Decolonial Theology in the North Atlantic World*.

¹⁰ Néstor Medina, Becca Whitla, and Ary Fernández-Albán, “Liberation Theologies, Decolonial Thinking, and Practical Theologies: Odd Combinations?,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 25, no. 1 (2021): 110–31.

¹¹ Steven Theo Savides, “Unsettling the Settler Colonial Imagination: Decoloniality as a Theological Hermeneutic in South Africa?” (2022).

¹² Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa, “The Decolonising Content of African Theology and the Decolonisation of African Theology Reflections on a Decolonial Future for African Theology,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 46, no. 3 (2018): 406–24.

¹³ Canaan Sodindo Banana, “The Case for a New Bible,” in *“Rewriting” The Bible: The Real Issues*, ed. Isabel Mukonyora (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1993), 17–32.

¹⁴ Banana, “The Case for a New Bible.”

¹⁵ Banana, “The Case for a New Bible.”

¹⁶ Masiwa Ragies Gunda, “The Ingredients to (True) Christianity and Theology: Canaan Sodindo Banana and Biblical and Theological Studies in Africa,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 38, no. 1 (2012): 131–46.

Identity of United Theological College

United Theological College is situated 11 km East of Harare. The institution is a product of ecumenism and is one of the biggest ecumenical institutions in Southern Africa.¹⁷ The institution was established by the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1954 as a theological training school called Epworth Theological College. The institution was located at Nengubo Training Institute (now) Waddilove Institute.¹⁸ With the establishment of the University of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (now the University of Zimbabwe), Wesleyan Methodist decided to move the theological College to Epworth Farm in Harare so that the ministerial students would enroll at the University.¹⁹ In 1959 the Methodist Episcopal, (United Methodist Church) who had their theological training school at Old Mutare decided to work together with the Wesleyan Methodist Church. In 1961, the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe who had been training their pastors at Mt Selinda in Chipinge joined the Wesleyan Methodist and Methodist Episcopal. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe became a participating member of the fast-growing ecumenical institution in 1965 while the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa became a member in 1969, followed by the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa which was the last one to join.²⁰

In 1976, the six denominations agreed to change the name Epworth Theological College to United Theological College. This resolution was a way of affirming the ecumenical nature of the training institution.²¹ According to Gondongwe, one of the reasons for the change of the name was to capture the ecumenical thrust and the centrality of the interconnection of the different Christian organisations and practices by replacing Epworth with 'United'.²²

United Theological College's Curriculum

Since its establishment, UTC has been offering Certificates in Theology. In 1964, the College introduced two streams. The first was the 'A' stream which prepared students for the Central African Diploma in Theology. Students who enrolled for this diploma were holders of a qualification equivalent to the General Certificate of Education now Form Four or Ordinary level in Zimbabwe. The second was, the 'B' stream entailing continued studying toward the Certificate in Theology.²³ The institution reviewed its curriculum for the first time in 1970 to introduce other courses.²⁴ In 1983, the College registered for a Diploma in Religious studies as an Associate College of the University of Zimbabwe. The curriculum was crafted in such a way that indigenous learners would be obliged to meet the economic, political, and cultural demands of their mission societies as well as the government of the day.²⁵ The reason for aligning the theological training to the powers of the day was a means to deal with the purportedly rogue ministers. Masvotore quotes Revd Fred Rea, one of the Principals at Epworth Theological College during the colonial era as saying, "If we leave the natives beyond our border ignorant barbarians, they will remain a race of troublesome marauders. We should try to make them a part of ourselves, with a common faith and common interests, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue."²⁶ Rea's statement explains why UTC remained stuck in the

¹⁷ Robert Matikiti, "United Theological College: A Centre for Ecumenical Education in Zimbabwe?," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 35 (2009): 1–15.

¹⁸ Kennedy Gondongwe, "African Ministers and the Emergence of Resistance to Colonial Domination: The Development of Indigenous Clergy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe from 1891 to 1980" (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2011).

¹⁹ Gondongwe, "African Ministers and the Emergence of Resistance to Colonial Domination: The Development of Indigenous Clergy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe from 1891 to 1980."

²⁰ United Theological College, *Handbook* (Harare: United Theological College, 2020).

²¹ United Theological College, *Handbook*.

²² Gondongwe, "African Ministers and the Emergence of Resistance to Colonial Domination: The Development of Indigenous Clergy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe from 1891 to 1980."

²³ Gondongwe, "African Ministers and the Emergence of Resistance to Colonial Domination: The Development of Indigenous Clergy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe from 1891 to 1980."

²⁴ Gondongwe, "African Ministers and the Emergence of Resistance to Colonial Domination: The Development of Indigenous Clergy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Zimbabwe from 1891 to 1980."

²⁵ Masvotore, "The Dynamics of Decoloniality in Theological Education: A Critique of the History of the United Theological College (UTC) for Indigenous Clergy in Zimbabwe."

²⁶ Masvotore, "The Dynamics of Decoloniality in Theological Education: A Critique of the History of the United Theological College (UTC) for Indigenous Clergy in Zimbabwe."

colonial syllabus that was defined by the missionaries because the institution was defined by that theology from the onset.

UTC, modules are divided into “pastoral” and “academic”. On the one hand, the pastoral modules constitute the Diploma in Theology which is done over a period of four years and the certificate is offered by the College after the writing of a dissertation and an internship report that is assessed in the fourth year. On the other hand, academic modules make the Diploma in Religious Studies (DRS) which is a two-year course and the certificate is awarded by the University of Zimbabwe. The Diploma in Religious Studies starts in the second semester of the first year and ends in the first semester of the third year. For the two years, students will be doing modules for the two diplomas concurrently.

In the First Year –students are introduced to the following pastoral modules: Academic Writing and Commination Skills, Pastoral Care, Introduction to Classical Hebrew/ Hellenistic Greek (these are elective modules) Religion & Marginalisation, Introduction to Computers, Ecumenism, Missiology, Christian Worship, Christian Education and Polity. In the Second Semester, they drop other modules and remain with Missiology, Christian Worship, Christian Education, Polity, and Homiletics and they also add Gender and Religion and at the same time begin the Diploma in DRS course. Out of the 7 modules for DRS, students will write six and the examination is set for the first semester of the second year. The modules are Old Testament 1, New Testament 1, Introduction to Christian Theology, Phenomenology of Religion, Philosophy, Christian History and Thought, and Psychology of Religion.

In the first Semester of the second year, students will continue with the academic modules that started in the first year. On the pastoral courses, they continue with Homiletics and Polity as they also add African Theology and Religion, Peace Building, and Conflict Transformation on the pastoral modules. In the third year, the first semester, they add Theology and Development to Homiletics and Polity. Students also further the academic modules now doing Old Testament 11, New Testament 11, Further Christian Theology, and African Traditional Religion. Further Christian History and Thought, Religion and Ethics and Christianity in Africa. These modules end in the first semester of the third year. Race Relations is added to Homiletics and Polity in the second semester of the third year, they go back to pastoral studies. On top of Homiletics and Polity, they add Pastoral Counselling, Liberation Theology, Religion, Democracy and Governance, Church Administration, New Testament 111, Old Testament 111, Chaplaincy, and Dissertation Writing. The program ends in the fourth year with the submission of a dissertation and internship results. This paper will focus on Systematic Theology, African Theology, and Liberation Theology. The modules were selected because they are the centre of theological discourse and the niche of UTC.

Presentation of the Selected Modules

Systematic Theology 1- Christian Theology

The Introduction to Christian Theology module navigates students to analytical and critical tools in Christian Theology. The module deals with the definition of theology, the nature and task of theology, the sources of theology, and the relationship between theology and philosophy. In addition, the modules engage with the doctrines of God, Christology, Pneumatology, Trinity, Creation, sin, theodicy, soteriology, ecclesiology, sacraments, and eschatology. According to the description of the module, students are expected to be able to articulate and defend the essential theological doctrines of the historic Christian faith, grasp the interrelationships between various doctrines, and integrate theological doctrines with contemporary issues thus learning how to do theology in the context of poverty, suffering and oppression, appreciate how the church was stumbled by the doctrinal issues of her time and how she managed to contain them and use theological doctrines in ministry.

Systematic Theology 2- Further Studies in Christian Theology

The module starts by locating the study of the Enlightenment period and how its philosophies of deism and rationalism challenge the church. The module proceeds by engaging the theologies and philosophies of Western theologians such as Daniel Fredrick Schleiermacher, Karl Barth, Jürgen

Moltmann, Karl Rahner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King Jr, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Malcolm X. The module aims to analyse and critique Western theology to deepen the theological understanding of issues from the Western point of view. The module also aims to show students how modern theologians used concepts, wrote theology, and applied it to their daily situations.

African Theology

The module focuses on the debates around theology in Africa. It concentrates on the understanding of God by Africans as transplanted/ transported and transfused by the missionaries. The module also discusses the approaches taken by African theologians to inculturate theology in African philosophy, concepts, language, and ideologies. Focus is also given to the definition of African Theology/ Theology in Africa, origins and developments of African theology, factors that led to the developments of African theology, failure by European theology to address Africans' theological issues, rediscovery of the values of traditional African culture, the rise of African Independent Churches and approaches in African theology namely Africanisation, localisation, indigenisation, adaptation, inculturation, enculturation, acculturation, and contextualisation. The modules also discuss the sources and tasks of African theology, the Doctrine of God in Africa, and Christology in Africa. In addition, it analyses the new trends of African theology as presented by Zimbabwean apostles such as Emmanuel Makandiwa, Walter Magaya, and Talent Chiwenga.

Liberation Theology

This module focuses on the Liberation Theology of Latin America, Black Theology, Asian Liberation Theology, Feminist/African Womanist Theology, and Eco Theology. The module aims to use external information to address the socioeconomic issues in Zimbabwe. More focus is put on how these theologies address the issues of poverty, marginalisation, oppression, and praxis and how the Bible as a source of theology was used to address these ills and to preach the message of hope to the hopeless and oppressed people who are products of their environment.

DECOLONIALITY THEORY

The call to decolonialise different facets of life has dominated modern-day scholarship resulting in decoloniality theory being used as one of the modern-day theoretical frameworks in research. Coloniality is a leitmotif of global imperial designs that have been in place for centuries. Decolonisation is thus reversing the gains of the colonial era.²⁷ Mignolo calls decolonisation “a delinking process. This delinking is from state forms of governance and westernisation and confronting re-westernisation using strong states.”²⁸ This delinking process was further developed by Ndlovu-Gatsheni presented what he called the “10 Ds” of decoloniality, which enabled a decolonial envisioning of the post-COVID-19 world order namely deimperialisation, de-westernisation, depatriarchisation, deracialisation, debourgeoisement, decorporatisation, democratisation, deborderisation, decanonisation, and desecularization.²⁹ The 10 words represent the need to look back on past life with suspicion and face the realities of a new future as a decolonised people learning from the colonial era.

Decolonial theory informs the ongoing struggles against the inhumanity of coloniality as a power structure. It is a method that aspires to restore, elevate, renew, rediscover, acknowledge, and validate the multiplicity of lives, life experiences, culture, and knowledge of Indigenous people.³⁰ In theology, decoloniality means moving from the hostage of Western notions of emancipation that did not seriously question the ontological and epistemic essence of colonial modernity from the snares of

²⁷ Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa* (African Books Collective, 2013).

²⁸ Walter Mignolo, “What Does It Mean to Decolonise?,” in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analysis, Praxis*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 105–34.

²⁹ Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Geopolitics of Power and Knowledge in the COVID-19 Pandemic: Decolonial Reflections on a Global Crisis,” *Journal of Developing Societies* 36, no. 4 (2020): 366–89.

³⁰ Mellisa Steyn, *Decolonising the Human: Reflections from Africa on Difference and Oppression* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021).

which it tried to free Africans.³¹ In using this theoretical framework, the paper seeks to challenge United Theological College, to liberate its theology curriculum from the life setting of the coloniser whose dictates do not benefit the Zimbabwean minister.

METHODOLOGY

The paper used qualitative research methodology. The goal of the researcher in a qualitative study is to gain an in-depth and holistic perspective of groups of people, environments, programs, events, or any phenomenon one wishes to study by interacting closely with the people one is studying.³² Adler and Adler argue that qualitative researchers delve more deeply into those individuals, settings, subcultures, and scenes, hoping to generate a subjective understanding of how and why people perceive, reflect, role-take, interpret, and interact.³³ Qualitative research methods make use of interviews, diaries, journals, classroom observations, and open-ended questions.³⁴ In its endeavour, qualitative research aims to produce rounded understandings based on rich, contextual, and detailed data gathered from the informants. In this paper, both primary and secondary sources were used.

Whereas the secondary sources included literature on the decoloniality of theology and the history of the College that were analysed, primary sources comprised open-ended questions to purposively select members of the administration and members of the Faculty of Theology at UTC. Questionnaires were also sent to 20 randomly selected alumni from different churches that constitute UTC who studied at the College from 2005-2022. The alumni included church and ecumenical leaders and ordinary ministers of religion in different denominations affiliated with UTC. In addition, five Third-Year students on the residential training were also given open-ended questions to give their feedback on the selected modules and how the content addresses the issues of decoloniality of theology at UTC. The participants were also responding to the kind of theology best for Zimbabwe, and the challenges and/or joys of UTC students in applying the knowledge obtained from the curriculum.

The responses from the participants were received through the WhatsApp platform. The platform was selected considering the distance between the researcher in Ghana and the participants. Boughton argues that,

[O]ver the past years most qualitative researchers have resorted to using WhatsApp because it is widely used around the world, and the platform sends and receives over 42 billion messages and 250 million videos a day. Second, WhatsApp is one of the most popular social media platforms. Third, WhatsApp allows the research participants to share their responses instantly. Fourth, it creates and manages groups of participants lastly, it connects with millennials who spend most of their time on the internet.³⁵

The ethical considerations of voluntary participation, no reward for contributing to the research, and anonymity of the participants during data presentation, were all shared with the participants. Moreover, the researcher was given consent to research by the gatekeepers of the institution as proposing the decoloniality of the curriculum of an institution dealing with its intellectual property.³⁶ Thematic data analysis was used to analyse data. This type of analysis looks for themes that are the dominant features of the phenomenon under study.³⁷ The technique involves regenerating themes that evolve from the study of decolonising theology at UTC.

³¹ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Coloniality of Power in Postcolonial Africa*.

³² Nancy K Farber, "Conducting Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for School Counselors," *Professional School Counseling*, 2006, 367–75.

³³ Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, "The Epistemology of Numbers," in *How Many Qualitative Interviews Are Enough? Expert Voices And Early Career Reflection On Sampling And Cases In Qualitative Research*, ed. Sarah Elsie Baker and Rosalind Edwards (National Centre Research Methods Review Paper, 2012), 7–10.

³⁴ Mohammad Zohrabi, "Mixed Method Research: Instruments, Validity, Reliability and Reporting Findings," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 3, no. 2 (February 1, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>.

³⁵ Lisa Boughton, "5 Reasons You Should Use WhatsApp," accessed January 14, 2024, <http://www.angelfieldwork.com>.

³⁶ Shenuka Singh and Douglas R Wassenaar, "Contextualising the Role of the Gatekeeper in Social Science Research," *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law* 9, no. 1 (2016): 42–46.

³⁷ Charles Teddie and Abbas Tashakkori, *Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches in the Social and Behavioural Sciences* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009).

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This section concentrates on the submissions of respondents who were both purposively and randomly selected. The findings will be presented according to the themes that were derived from their responses.

Relevance of the selected modules

Most of the respondents agree that Systematic Theology 1 and 2, African, and Liberation Theology are relevant to a certain degree of making student ministers academics and not prophetic theologians. One interviewee mentioned that “to a larger extent, Liberation & African theologies are no longer relevant as they do not directly address the Zimbabwean context like Black Theology did in South Africa. The modules are more theoretical than pragmatic in the Zimbabwean situation.” The other respondent buttressed that,

[O]n relevance of the modules, depends on how one reads them. The background and development in theological studies, and the modules show that they are relevant, but in terms of practical application, they are not. The modules lack homegrown theologies that address the unique needs of Zimbabwe. The country has been facing socio-economic and political challenges for over two decades indicating the need for theologians to come up with homegrown theologies and the modules have nothing for the socioeconomic and politically suffering Zimbabwean populace.

Another respondent who commented on Systematic Theology 1 mentioned that:

[T]he module occupies a unique and useful position in the academic field. It avails the concepts and doctrines of Christianity as a religion in a clearer way and allows theology to relate with other disciplines without losing its character. The module assists students in differentiating between orthodoxy and heresy which has rocked the twenty-first theological space.

On Further Studies in Christian Theology, one respondent confirmed that theology helps students to understand that being a minister demands a lot of sacrifice to fulfill the calling of Jesus as it was done by Martin Luther King Jr and Malcolm X in North America and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany. The examples of the three theologians demonstrate that theology compels students to understand Christianity’s point of the less privileged and martyrdom just like what happened during the patristic period where persecution was a mark of true Christian identity. The modules describe how suffering till death for the sake of the oppressed brings equality in society. Further Studies in Christian Theology also help students to understand the challenges that theology faces against changes every time for example during the Enlightenment period. Although the module is so good, unfortunately, it is brewed in a European flavour as all the theologians came from the West. Another participant highlighted that Systematic Theology is Western-oriented and does not ask the real questions that address the problems being faced by the Zimbabwean people. Issues such as the arguments about the existence of God, theodicy, etc. are not the real issues that the African person is grappling with because in Africa the existence of God is not a question to be asked because belief in God is basic and unquestioned. That being as it may, Systematic theology fails to address the African context although it makes excellent academics.

Commenting on the relevance of African theology one respondent alludes that, African theology is rooted in the encounter between Christianity and African traditional religions during the colonial period. It emerged as a response to the challenges posed by the imposition of Western theological perspectives on African societies and sought to reconcile Christian teachings with African cultural values, beliefs, and practices this is very fundamental for ministers of religion to know but does not address the oppressive structures of the society.

The other challenge of Systematic theology is its denigration of the African context and its approach does not resonate with the theologies of the Africans, and yet it occupies a bigger space on the UTC curriculum. When students attempt to apply Systematic Theology in Zimbabwe, it offers a reliable framework to communicate faith to their congregations, bolstering the credibility of their message, however, the challenge that comes with this pontification of the module is the cultural

dissonance that results from its Western origins, which might be alien to Zimbabwe, decried one former student. The respondent went further to mention that, the contextualisation of African Theology relates the module to African cultures and addresses the specific needs and concerns of African people, and yet the current problems of Zimbabwe are not culture but oppression and corruption. As such decoloniality of African Theology is not a choice.

While inculturation in African Theology promotes the integration of African cultural elements into Christian worship, liturgy, and theological expression, Zimbabwean Christians remained colonised worshippers dancing on the global culture. African theology is doing everything in the cultural perspective, traditions, use of symbols, rituals, and languages in enriching faith experience, thus making worship meaningful however, these are not the wounds of Zimbabweans that need treatment but deep-seated tribal grudges. The respondent went further to argue that, “African Theology is not a monolithic or homogeneous entity, but rather a diverse and evolving field with different expressions across different regions and communities in Africa. It encompasses a wide range of theological perspectives and approaches that reflect the rich and complex tapestry of African religious and cultural traditions.”

Some respondents bemoaned the universal irrelevance of African theology globally and Zimbabwe in particular. One of them argued that African theology concentrates on African culture and does not pay attention to issues of social justice, human rights, and the liberation of the marginalised and oppressed groups in African societies. This point was buttressed by Mujinga, who argues that African Theology is misfooted as its proponents are all Western products, and most of the things that they write are influenced by Western education resulting in the discipline becoming an academic discourse.³⁸ The theology, grapples with the place of God in African culture forgetting to address issues of poverty, inequality, colonialism, racism, and political oppression from a theological perspective. More importantly, the values of African culture have been diluted by globalisation and migration leaving African theology vulnerable.

One of the former students bemoaned the little time that is given to African and Liberation theologies. She complained that students do not give enough attention to pastoral studies as much as they do to academic studies. Systematic Theology is given two years as an academic study compared to Liberation and African Theology which are done per semester each. A former student expressed his lack of appreciation for such fundamentals of decoloniality. He expressed that, the relevance of Liberation Theology also presents it as a theoretical discipline. Its content includes theological ideologies that can be applied to the core concerns of the marginalised communities of the West and have nothing to do with the impoverished Zimbabweans. In addition, the curriculum produces academics who are not able to tackle the social ills that confront them such as the controversial land issue, the disputed election process, and tribal issues among other challenges. Liberation theology curriculum is ostensibly foreign to UTC student minister’s socioeconomic and political realities thereby rendering a module a tool for academic qualification and not for standing on the gap as what Jesus expected from those whom he chose to follow him. Moreover, the module lacks the African public prophetic pastoral features that characterize the Zimbabwean theological landscape.

Another former student stressed that Liberation Theology from Latin America lacks African cosmology, which is a challenge in the African setup. This is worse with Asian Liberation theology which deals with Christianity as a minority religion in Asia. Although this is good to learn, however, the content is not relevant for Zimbabwe to bring about a theology that addresses the real issues but it appears as a book theology good for certification only. In addition, Black Theology which is part of the Liberation Theology module has lost its relevance in South Africa, and concentrating on theology that has lost relevance is making theological students historians and not theologians commented one respondent. The voices of Desmond Tutu, Steve Biko, and Allan Boesak among others were vocal on

³⁸ Martin Mujinga, “Liberating African Theology from Misfooted Theologization . . .,” in *Decolonising Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics in an Age of Technocolonialism: Recentring African Indigenous Knowledge and Belief Systems*, ed. Artwell Nhemachena, Nokuthula Hlabangane, and Joseph Z Matowanyika (Barneda: Langaa Research & Publishing Common Initiative Group, 2020), 237–56.

Black Theology and how God was siding with the poor muted the moment South Africa began independent. In addition, some activists died, while others were drawn into the mainstream politics. This situation rendered Black theology redundant as there was no one to fight with and even South Africans themselves have abandoned Black Theology. Moreover, the main political party that joined South Africans as victims during the apartheid era- the African National Congress is disintegrating at an alarming rate because of power dynamics thereby calling for a theology that reconciles the once-suffering blacks to another theology that stops neocolonialism and corruption in the country and UTC is still holding on to that outdated theology.

[M]oreover, African Theology is the interpretation of the Christian faith through the prism of African culture and experiences, it presents a potent vehicle for the ministers in Zimbabwe to contextualise Christianity in a culturally relevant manner, fostering a deeper connection with their congregations. However, amalgamating tribal religions and Christianity could potentially dilute the essence of this theology leading to theological ambiguity.

Types of Theology Needed for Zimbabwe

From the presentations of different respondents, the relevance of the selected modules is very compromising as they produce academics and not prophetic voices as such another type of theology is necessary. This point was also buttressed by Chitando, Taringa, and Mapuranga.³⁹ Another respondent mentioned that there is a need for UTC to devise a new theology purely in the context of Zimbabwe. There is a need for a homegrown theology with a bias towards providing solutions to the current challenges facing the country and through this, theology will be liberated from academic glorification. Some of the relevant theology proposed includes Political Theology given that Zimbabwean theological space is defined by the polarised political landscape. This decoloniality of theology can go deeper into the roots of the Zimbabwean challenges. UTC must know the real coloniser and how best they can help people to liberate themselves through theological education.

Another respondent proposed Combat Theology. This theology was proposed by Canaan Banana a Methodist clergy and politician. For Banana, Combat theology is, “a **theology** of actionable protest, whose fundamental credo is no retreat, no surrender.”⁴⁰ Rolinson added that “intrinsic to the concept of Combat Theology is being aware of one’s place in the universe that we are in the warzone.”⁴¹ This theology resonates well with the Zimbabwean situation which is in a silent warzone. Zimbabweans have suffered neocolonialism for a long time which has resulted in most of them migrating as aliens to different parts of the world.

The third theology is Practical Theology, this theology addresses practical issues and does not belong to armchair theoretical jargon Practical theology also addresses the situation of Zimbabwe which has faced many challenges since independence, including economic struggles, political unrest, and social inequality. Practical theology focuses on community building and it can help Zimbabweans cope with these challenges, addressing issues like poverty and social injustice. In addition, Practical theology also addresses the decoloniality of theological space and focus will also be given to forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation in a divided society.

The fourth theology relevant to Zimbabwe is Contextual Theology. Such a theology will help in addressing the socio-economic situation as well as the political challenges. During colonial times, Zimbabwe suffered not only oppression but also disintegration. Zimbabweans also lost their identity in the struggle for tribal supremacy. Most of the challenges faced by the nation in corruption, violence as well as other political challenges are a result of division and violence planted during colonial times. Lastly, a reorientation theology can also be introduced where Zimbabwe will identify its challenges

³⁹ Ezra Chitando, Nisbert T Taringa, and Tapiwa P Mapuranga, “Zimbabwean Theology and Religious Studies during the Crisis Years (2000-2008): A Preliminary Study,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae* 40, no. 1 (2014): 173–89.

⁴⁰ Canaan S. Banana, *The Church and the Struggle for Zimbabwe: From the Programme to Combat Racism to Combat Theology* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996).

⁴¹ Curwen Ares. Rolinson, “A Brief Introduction To The Concept Of Combat Theology,” December 27, 2020, <https://aryaakasha.com/2020/12/27/a-brief-introduction-to-the-concept-of-combat-theology/>.

and find the scriptures that speak to its situation. This theology will assist in redefining a post-colonial theology that respects all humanity as equal creations before God.

Limitations of Decolonising UTC Curriculum

The findings from different responses demonstrated that the UTC curriculum is just an academic exercise and not practical. It is necessary to have another curriculum, but there are a few challenges that the institution has to be warned of. First, the victimisation of church leaders is a reality in Zimbabwe. Chitando, Taringa, and Mapuranga gave an example of this scenario. They argue that

Pius Ncube, who was the Archbishop of Bulawayo challenged Mugabe's government. Mugabe responded by urging people to disregard church leaders who were calling for his forced ouster, accusing Ncube and other church leaders of peddling falsehoods about Zimbabwe's governance. Mugabe even questioned the moral authority of the clergy by accusing them of "sleeping around." The Church has branded a settler church with origins in the colonial era that backed Mugabe's opponents and Western governments campaigning against Mugabe ... exposing Ncube's alleged womanising tendencies. Ncube was silenced when he had to resign from his position as archbishop. Once again, it had become clear that the prophetic mission in Zimbabwe (as elsewhere) was a costly one.⁴²

The second, challenge is that the church is politicised. Political leaders have divided the church between colonial and indigenous churches. The mainline churches that form UTC are labelled as sellouts, as such advocating for a theology of resistance is even more dangerous for the institution. Third most Zimbabwean scholars lack resources as such coming up with a comprehensive theology for theological education is a daunting task. Fourth, UTC's curriculum is decided by the University of Zimbabwe whose chancellor is the State President. Any attempt to introduce a theology that is contra-government will result in the institution not being allowed to offer a degree program. Fifth, theology in Zimbabwe is also offered by secular universities, and certificates are accredited whereas the theological college's certificate is not recognised by the same universities. This is probably why it is very hectic to study for a Diploma in Theology at UTC that is done in four years, with a dissertation, and yet it is not recognised by institutions of higher learning locally and abroad. Sixth, apart from scholarly resources, UTC has a challenge of manpower that can develop a decolonised theology. For example, when one walks into the UTC library, one will not find much literature written by Zimbabwean scholars either because they lack the skill to write, they are not motivated or they fear victimisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having observed the challenges of the foreign God talk at UTC, it is evident that the decoloniality of theology is not a task that has to be pushed by a few individuals, but a serious symposium and pollination of ideas from theological gurus to be wider than what one institution can offer. Given that most theological institutions in Zimbabwe offer colonial theology, institutions, and theologians need to redefine their challenges and draw theologies that decolonise their current curricula. In addition, Systematic Theology which has largely remained a study of historical and Western theologies that does not have much relevance to the Zimbabwean context needs to be overhauled and attention should be given to Zimbabwean theologians like Cannan Banana among others. Whereas the oppressive post-colonial regimes in the country have made liberation theology a non-relevant theology in the Zimbabwean context theologians need to know that God always speaks from the side of the oppressed. To this end, Systematic Theology must be contextualised, African Theology should be tailor-made to define the problems of Africa and stop culturising theology while Liberation Theology must be revamped.

⁴² Chitando, Taringa, and Mapuranga, "Zimbabwean Theology and Religious Studies during the Crisis Years (2000-2008): A Preliminary Study."

Decoloniality of theology at UTC is possible where unrealistic theological issues have been denied. It is further recommended that UTC decide to remain as a glorified tertiary institution that teaches students for four years only to obtain a Diploma in Theology after writing a dissertation and yet the certificate is not acknowledged anywhere because the four-year curriculum is overshadowed by a two-year Diploma in Religious studies offered by the University of Zimbabwe which is a secular institution. The institution is challenged to draw lessons from other African institutions such as Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in South Africa which has its curriculum recognised by institutions of higher learning. The Seminary offers a Bachelor of Theology without a dissertation after three years of study and students join South African universities for a one-year honours degree. The other example is Trinity Theological Seminary in Ghana which offers post-graduate certificates up to PhD that are recognised in academic cycles. Lastly, the institution has to with immediate effect transform its Diploma in Theology into a Bachelor of Theology because the course content is worth this qualification.

CONCLUSION

Research has found that United Theological College is one of the oldest and largest ecumenical institutions in Southern Africa with six Protestant churches in Zimbabwe. For years, the institution has produced competent theologians using foreign theological curricula that have nothing to do with Zimbabwe's sociopolitical, economic, and religious environments. The paper noted that the continual addressing of contextual theological issues using borrowed theological epistemologies by UTC is dangerous for the Zimbabwe theological landscape. The paper used a decolonial framework and qualitative research methodology to challenge the institution to decolonise its curriculum by liberating it from armchair theories of foreign God talk. The paper concluded by challenging the College to decolonise its curriculum and advocate for a theology that speaks with the language and idioms of the Zimbabwean milieu regardless of the challenges associated with the move. This paper invokes the institution to unthink foreign God talk although this theology stood as the only option for the institution. UTC must go back to the drawing board to list things that affect Zimbabwe such as controversial land redistribution, hyperinflation, contested elections, forced migration, perpetual draughts, and poverty of the majority in a country where the economy is in the hands of the minority and draw a relevant curriculum from these challenges, only then can the theology of the institution be relevant.

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