

Beware of gifts: Addressing the church leadership dilemma on controversial donations in Zimbabwe

**Author:**Kimion Tagwirei¹ **Affiliation:**

¹The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Kimion Tagwirei,
52912418@mynwu.ac.za

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Background: While ordinary Zimbabweans struggle to bear the brunt of political and economic crises, one of the incumbent president's stalwarts has been donating cars and cash to prominent church leaders and other people of influence in Zimbabwe – allegedly buying their support for the ruling party.

Objectives: Most of the targeted church recipients, such as a bishop of the Zion Christian Church, accepted these donations, while only one, so far, the archbishop of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa, publicly rejected the gifts. Academic research on this matter is scanty.

Method: By employing a qualitative case study of Bishop Mutendi and Archbishop Gutu through digital ethnography and a literature review, this article fills the gap by reviewing Facebook engagements between the benefactors, the beneficiaries and their followers.

Results: The study found that gifts are welcomed when they are meant to promote a selfless mission, and unwelcome if given with selfish motives. In the Zimbabwean situation, the majority of those who accepted the donations are partisan; some previously prophetic recipients turned quietist after receiving gifts, and those who rejected the gifts remained unchanged.

Conclusion: The study concludes that accepting contentious gifts compromises integrity and weakens and silences the church. In contrast, rejecting such gifts can sustain integrity and the prophetic voice.

Contribution: This study contributes to an ongoing public debate in Zimbabwe about whether church leaders should accept or reject gifts from controversial sources.

Keywords: church; leadership; politics; economics; gifts; controversy; prophetic; quietist.

Introduction

Poverty is problematic, especially in Zimbabwe, where the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. Whereas the bulk of ordinary Zimbabwean citizens are suffering because of ongoing political and economic crises in the country (Dendere 2025; Ray 2025; Siambombe & Hupile 2024), one of the closest supporters of the ruling president, and a controversial 'tenderpreneur', has been handing out expensive cars and cash to the most influential church leaders, celebrities and gospel musicians, and anyone else who goes beyond in praising the president and the ruling political party (Buwirimwe 2024; Huni 2024; Nyoka 2025). The benefactor usually writes a long message on his Facebook page, explaining what inspired him to offer each person the gift – a car, cash or both – and concluding with a request to the beneficiary to accept and collect the gift(s) at particular places in Harare or elsewhere for benefactors who are not in Harare. Of all ecclesial leaders who have been offered gifts, so far, only one, Archbishop Eunor Gutu, has rejected the gift of a 'brand-new 2025 Toyota Land Cruiser 300 Series VXR and US\$250 000 in cash' (Nehanda Radio 2025:n.p.). Wedu (2025) and Mbofana (2025a) argue that the benefactor is 'buying' influential people to ensure they support the incumbent president's bid to extend his rule beyond a two-term limit, which ends in 2028. Considering that over 80% of Zimbabweans are Christians (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency 2023), the church is possibly the most influential body for citizens; hence, benefactors may believe that gifting top church leaders will attract public support. As a result of the controversy surrounding the intimacy between the benefactor in question, Wicknell Chivayo, and Zimbabwe's president, coupled with allegations of corruption and a failure to account for the source of Chivayo's wealth, some followers and beneficiaries of

Chivayo have been posting questions in response to the offers on Facebook; mainly, the questions ask whether the church will remain prophetic if its leaders accept cars and cash from political and controversial sources. Should church leaders accept gifts from controversial sources? What are the effects of accepting the gifts?

Considering that the public views and questions cited by this article are drawn from the Facebook pages of the benefactor and beneficiaries, the article starts with an overview of digital ethnography, followed by a review of the Zimbabwean context. Then, it explores whether church leaders should accept gifts and ends with a review of the nature and effects of the gifts to church leaders and the church in Zimbabwe.

Research methods and design

Qualitative digital ethnography

Digital ethnography is made up of two words: digital and ethnography. The word digital refers to technical and online channels – their use or engagement. Delli Paoli and D’Auria (2021) define ethnography from its Greek origin *ēthnos*, which means population, cultures and description. In this case, qualitative ethnography is used with reference to observing, researching, assessing, interpreting and drawing conclusions from what people do and say through their online engagements – in this study, on Facebook. ‘Digital ethnography can be defined as a contemporary form of ethnography which considers online social spaces of discussion’ (Delli Paoli & D’Auria 2021:245). They add that digital ethnography ‘can be considered a methodological research approach which recently has assumed a wide reach across many fields’, and that the ‘cognitive objective of a digital ethnography does not concern the characteristics of the medium or its use, but rather the cultural, relational and value experiences developed within cross-media digital spaces’ (Delli Paoli & D’Auria 2021:245). Considering what people share on digital platforms, this study agrees with Kozinets, Scaraboto and Parmentier (2018) that, through digital ethnography, we can observe people’s feelings, views, identities and meanings. According to Underberg and Zorn (2013:10), digital ethnography is a research method that has the intention of ‘representing real-life cultures through combining the characteristic features of digital media with the elements of story’. Also known as virtual ethnography, online ethnography, cyber-ethnography, or even Netnography, digital ethnography is described by Kaur-Gill and Dutta (2017) as a specialised qualitative research method through which researchers can observe and study people, situations or events virtually, for short or long periods. ‘[I]t studies the cultural and social domains of human interaction through the Internet technologies they use’ (Kaur-Gill & Dutta 2017:2).

Pink et al. (2016) explain that digital ethnography involves iterative–inductive research that engages with participants online. In this case, the researcher studied the donations of cars and cash to church leaders that are publicised on

the Facebook pages of benefactors and beneficiaries. For maximum analysis, this article is delimited to online responses of Archbishop Guti and Bishop Mutendi to the donations in question. Guti and Mutendi were studied because they represent Pentecostalism and African Indigenous Churches, respectively, which have the biggest following and, correspondingly, a great deal of influence in Zimbabwe. The researcher carefully and thoroughly read, interpreted and analysed Facebook posts about cars and cash donations by the benefactor, Chivayo, and reactions of the beneficiaries themselves, as well as that of their followers.

The researcher randomly sampled 10 Facebook posts of the benefactor, read, interpreted and analysed the reactions of beneficiaries and the first 20 comments of their followers on each donation post. A descriptive and interpretive data analysis approach was employed, mainly because it describes, interprets and assesses gathered views. The researcher categorised data openly to assess public views on whether church leaders should accept or reject the donations. Each view of every engaged post and comment was given due attention, analytically decoded and interlinked with related public and scholarly viewpoints. In the process of interpreting and coming up with meanings, unreasonably long sentences were summarised, and short ones were explained for the sake of clarity. As Pink et al. (2016) explain, digital ethnography converses with participants indirectly by examining what they post on their social media pages. Digital ethnography enhanced the researcher’s understanding of the issue under study by analysing the randomly sampled Facebook posts and comments. Because every methodology has weaknesses, the author was aware that digital ethnography has limitations, such as a vulnerability to online lies. Therefore, this study complementarily employed a literature review and contextual observation to verify and examine Facebook messages. Taking into account that Facebook is a public platform, this study does not reveal the identities of those who commented, to protect their privacy, except for public figures and information that they posted to the public.

Whither Zimbabwe? Reviewing the Zimbabwean context

Zimbabwe was once known as Southern Rhodesia, after Cecil John Rhodes, who had fronted Britain’s colonisation of the country, and Zimbabwe was born on 17 April 1980, after a prolonged war of liberation. ‘Once the breadbasket of Africa, Zimbabwe is now on the brink of man-made starvation’ (Elver 2019). During the long 37 years of rule of the late Robert Gabriel Mugabe, until today, under the military-assisted administration of the incumbent president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, Zimbabwe struggles with deepening political and socio-economic crises. Dube (2019) reports that Zimbabwe is presently facing a worse political and economic crisis than it did under Mugabe. Lawal (2025) recounts that Zimbabwe is crumbling as a result of multiple crises. The ruling party is battling an internal crisis because ‘two main factions are at loggerheads, one supporting a prolonged term for Mnangagwa, 82, and another one

supporting the ascendancy of Constantino Chiwenga, his 68-year-old vice president' (Lawal 2025). Mnangagwa came to power in 2017 with promises of democratic and economic reform (Marima 2018). However, poor governance, corruption and victimisation of dissenters continue unabated (Nyoka 2023). Mnangagwa is currently in his second elected term, which is due to end in 2028. Although he has been making public declarations that he is a constitutionalist and will not extend his rule beyond his constitutionally mandated two 5-year terms (Mavhunga 2024), his supporters are increasingly pushing for him to rule for a third term. Although this desire cannot be publicised without the president's consent, it is discernible that he is scheming to extend his rule (Moyo 2025).

Mnangagwa's administration has failed to address political and socio-economic crises, and ordinary citizens are bearing most of the consequences (Mbofana 2025b). It is in the midst of this economic quagmire that the president's supporters are trying to buy public support through donating cars, cash and other gifts. Such vote buying is not new in Zimbabwe – Nyoka (2023) reports that vote buying has always been one of the ruling party's electoral strategies. Harris (2023) reports that some ruling politicians scheme to commit electoral fraud and use bribery to conquer and retain power. *ZimEye* (2025) writes that:

Amid mounting political tension and public unrest over Zimbabwe's constitutional order, controversial Zanu PF-linked businessman Wicknell Chivayo has reportedly resorted to lavish gifts of cash and luxury vehicles to secure loyalty from provincial party leaders. Critics argue that these actions are part of a broader effort by President Emmerson Mnangagwa's loyalists to extend his rule beyond 2028, a move they say violates the Constitution. (n.p.)

According to Buwerimwe (2024:n.p.), Chivayo has donated millions to church leaders and other influential people, thereby continuing the Zanu PF tradition of buying 'support, especially during the elections'. She explains that the ruling party 'knows that it does not have support on the ground and it will do anything to remain in power' (Buwerimwe 2024:n.p.), hence, attempts to buy support via ecclesial leaders, and, as indicated before, because more than 80% of Zimbabwe's population is Christian, churches have influence over the majority of citizens.

This study concurs with Nyangani and Buwerimwe (2024) that donations made by the president and allies of the ruling party are part of well-planned strategies to win public support. In addition, Chivayo's 'source of wealth has remained a mystery' (Nyangani & Buwerimwe 2024). According to Matendere (2024:n.p.), 'a well-known ex-convict-cum-tenderpreneur, Chivayo made millions of money out of state institutions ... and proximity to Mnangagwa'. After a long investigation by the *News Hawks*, Gagare (2024) reports that Chivayo leveraged his close relationship with Mnangagwa to secure lucrative government contracts with the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission and Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority

and consequently made a fortune. Chivayo has several tenders with the government and state institutions. According to Gagare (2024):

Insiders say Chivayo has not been arrested because of his close links with Mnangagwa and also a result of the fear that he might spill the beans if cornered – meaning to protect senior officials. (n.p.)

Matendere (2024) explains that Chivayo's case has sparked public outrage and calls for transparency and accountability in government and business dealings. Consequently, concerned and affected Zimbabweans are convinced that Chivayo is making donations to sanitise his ill-gotten wealth, and buy church leaders and the public to support the incumbent president and his party, while continuing to engage in corrupt 'tenderpreneurship', which undermines the country's economic performance and development and perpetuates mass suffering.

Should church leaders accept gifts?

Accepting gifts, especially from controversial sources, remains a thorny issue and demands a discussion about ethics. Consequently, public debates on this issue continue unabated. Generally, accepting or rejecting a gift from a donor who made money through, or behaved in objectionable ways, often raises ethics-related controversy for church leadership. For example, the controversial benefactor gives away hundreds of thousands of United States dollars in cash – and ensures that the source of his money is untraceable. This is why many people have offered theories about the sources of his wealth. Goba (2025) reports that:

[C]ontroversial Zimbabwean businessman Wicknell Chivayo has ignited a national conversation following revelations of a lavish spending spree exceeding US\$9.3 million on luxury cars and opulent gifts since January 2024 ... The gifts include a range of top-of-the-line vehicles – Mercedes Benz, Toyota Fortuners, Ford Rangers, Toyota Land Cruisers, and Lexuses – alongside sprawling mansions. (n.p.)

Wedu (2025) reports that Chivayo, often referred to as Sir Wicknell, displays untraceable wealth and deep ties with the ruling president, and has been at the centre of various high-profile corruption scandals. It is thought-provoking to note that Chivayo publicly declares that he is a Zanu PF stalwart and a close ally of the ruling president, whose administration is regarded as oppressive and elitist. When church leaders accept gifts from such a source, they compromise the church's integrity. According to Harrington and Varma's (2020) study on non-profit organisations, accepting donations from controversial donors can compromise one's mission. It is understandable that church leaders need donor support, and it is rare for a donor to be completely free of controversy. Thus, it is important to explore whether it is ethical to refuse, return or retain gifts.

Mathews (2025:5) argues that 'gifts are a joy to give, and in most cases a joy to receive ... gifts or other payments to pastors can be a thorny issue requiring some thought'.

According to Mathews (2025), gifts to pastors are often mired in various issues, such as the motivation of the donors, and whether the gifts are meant for the pastors, the church or society. Generally, gifts are the fruits of generosity. The Bible presents generosity as praiseworthy, especially where and when financial support furthers the gospel. According to Philippians 4:18, Paul teaches that we should appreciate gifts as acceptable acts of generosity and sacrifice that are pleasing to God. What determines whether gifts should be accepted or rejected is mainly the underlying motive, accountability and transparency. As Schaefer (2001) explains, donations from questionable sources must be rejected because accepting such donations suggests that money is more valued than ethical considerations. Schaefer (2001) drew his conclusions from studies on non-profit organisations; but his view, that followers want their leaders to always honour their followers and their faith in them by acting with integrity, is also applicable to church leadership. When church leaders accept funds from tainted sources, people question the leaders' integrity and feel betrayed: '[A]ccepting money from an inappropriate source creates cognitive dissonance – the sense of uneasiness' (Schaefer 2001:6). Therefore, accepting controversial gifts can stain the beneficiary's values and mission. Thus, church leaders should always consider the character and motive of the source. In cases of controversy, Agidi (2024:n.p.) argues, 'accepting funds from individuals or institutions perceived as corrupt risks undermining the church's credibility, as it could be seen as endorsing their actions, even inadvertently'. Rukanga (2024) cites the example of Kenya's Catholic Church, which rejected a donation of about \$40 000 from President William Ruto. 'He offered the money towards the building of a priest's house and as a gift to the choir during Mass on Sunday at the Soweto Catholic Church in the capital, Nairobi' (Rukanga 2024:n.p.). Agidi (2024:n.p.) argues that the Catholic Church's rejection of President Ruto's donation 'exemplifies the courage and conviction required of Pastors today'. It is believed that the Catholic Church leadership acted out of concern for the church's moral integrity, because they understood that accepting such a gift could be interpreted as complicity in the very corruption and governance failures that the church often criticises. Such consideration aligns with Proverbs 22:1, which states that 'a good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold'. According to Agidi (2024:n.p.), the church, as the ethical word-bearer of God, must demonstrate integrity. Ephesians 5:11 encourages believers to 'have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them'. By rejecting controversial donations, the church can expose possible misuse of church platforms for selfish politics. Rejecting controversial gifts ensures that the church's prophetic role remains uncompromised. The church must stand strong and confront national leaders, as Nathan confronted David (2 Sm 12:1–13) and John the Baptist rebuked King Herod (Mt 14:3–4). In addition to preserving integrity, rejecting controversial gifts can send a significant message to the state and society – that the church values

accountability, justice and transparency. By demonstrating integrity and incorruptibility, the church can inspire public confidence in itself as an unwavering moral conscience of society.

Digital ethnographic review of Zimbabwean church leaders' donated cars and cash

As indicated above, several church leaders in Zimbabwe have been gifted cash, cars and other gifts by various benefactors. For the past year, Chivayo has been publicising giving expensive gifts in the form of cash and cars to selected clerical leaders, celebrities and other people of influence in the Zimbabwean society. As a delimitation of this research, this study purposively decided to focus on Chivayo's gifts to two leaders: Mutendi and Guti. Their cases are suitable for in-depth study because they are both founding leaders of highly influential denominations in Zimbabwe, whose conduct wields considerable influence in Zimbabwean society. They are representative of other leaders, and their conduct is expected to be exemplary.

Reviewing the case of Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi

Mutendi is the incumbent senior leader of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) in Zimbabwe. It is known that he inherited the church leadership from his father, the late Samuel Mutendi. According to Dube (2020:4), it is estimated that the ZCC has a membership in excess of 500 000, and is regarded as one of the biggest indigenous churches in Zimbabwe. Bishop Samuel Mutendi died in 1976, and, after his death, his sons Reuben and Nehemiah succeeded their father in running the church. However, after a disagreement, they went their separate ways, and each established their own churches. Reuben moved to Bikita and Nehemiah to Mbungo estate, just outside Masvingo. The latter maintained Zion City at Gokwe (Dube 2020). Nehemiah Mutendi grew his church across the country, gained popularity, and is credited for the growth of ZCC after the death of his father.

Since Mugabe was in power, up to the present and Mnangagwa's administration, Nehemiah Mutendi has played the role of regime enabler by mobilising his followers to support the incumbent president unreservedly (Dube 2020). In April 2025, Chivhayo (2025a) posted on his Facebook page that he would gift Mutendi and his wife cars and cash, as follows:

'In recognition of your EXTRAORDINARY work, His Grace, Bishop Mutendi and the pivotal role *Amai* [Mrs] Mutendi plays in supporting the spiritual leader of such a HUGE congregation, yesterday I had the greatest pleasure of PERSONALLY going to see VICTOR [*car dealer in Harare*] in order to choose a gift that is most befitting, as my small token of my APPRECIATION to them. I was highly honoured to buy this top of the range 2025 Range Rover Autobiography

SV valued at US\$400 000 for the Bishop, and for Amai [Mrs] Mutendi a 2025 Toyota Land Cruiser 300 Series valued at US\$190 000 both brand new to help in their church's PHILANTHROPIC and evangelical initiatives.' (n.p.)

Bishop Mutendi accepted the gifts. Then, the donated vehicle was involved in an accident and was damaged beyond repair before it was even delivered. Khanye (2025) wrote:

As if to prove that he has a bottomless well of riches, controversial tenderpreneur Wicknell Chivayo has given a brand new US\$550 000 Mercedes Benz Maybach to Zion Christian Church (ZCC) leader Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi, after the previous vehicle he had gifted him, a 2025 Range Rover Autobiography SV worth US\$400 000 was damaged before delivery to the clergyman. (n.p.)

The benefactor Chivayo (2025b) confirmed this on his Facebook timeline:

'I was deeply SADDENED to learn on social media that the driver sent to collect the Range Rover vehicle was unfortunately involved in an accident at Featherstone, causing reasonably bad damage to the whole front and left side of the vehicle ... I'm thrilled to once again extend and REPLACE the Range Rover with this brand new 2025 MERCEDES-BENZ MAYBACH GL600 FACELIFT, valued at US\$550 000 ... I am currently away on vacation but on my return and at your earliest convenience please be kind enough to spare some time out of your busy schedule to allow me to come and officially handover yet another 1 million dollars to you.' (n.p.)

The public responded to the gifts with mixed feelings. One person commented on Chivayo's (2025b) Facebook post as follows:

'While I appreciate the generosity behind such gifts, I cannot accept expensive luxuries like cars when our hospitals lack essential medicines and many are struggling. True service means prioritizing the well-being of the community over personal comfort.' (n.p)

Other commenters on Chivayo's (2025b) Facebook post posted:

'*Jehovha vakavamba* [God founded] ZCC, God bless u' (n.p.)

'most of the people saying congratulations here are just people hoping to be seen and told to also go and see Victor [*the car dealer*], they are not saying congratulations from their hearts' (n.p.)

'congratulations *chiiko iyo iri mari yedu iri kubiwa nembwa idzi irikufanira kubatsira muzvipatara hama dzedu dzapera kufa nekushaya medication muchingopembedza zvisina basa zvimbwa*' ['what congratulations? All this cash is stolen public money that should have been catering for public medication while you commend useless things'] (n.p.)

'our country has been turned into a banana republic and many of our people like these *mbingas* [people who boast about being wealthy] and hate Geza [*former army general who once called for public protests against elitist and self-serving governance*] but he is trying to get things right for us, it's unbelievable really' (n.p.)

'who is going to save us from this stupidity?' (n.p.)

'there is no compassion, it's looted money.' (n.p.)

In view of the public comments opposing the gifts, Moyo (2025) reports that Mnangagwa defended Chivayo by describing him as a philanthropist who is spending his own money. Mbofana (2025c:n.p.) described Chivayo's much-publicised spree of gift-giving as 'carefully curated social media campaigns, ensuring that his generosity is consumed by a national audience'. Mbofana (2025c) argues that true philanthropy helps the needy and is not consistently publicised, unlike the gift-giving of Chivayo, which involves self-glorification and political campaigning on Facebook; his donations represent politicking.

Chivayo has openly aligned himself with President Mnangagwa and often presents gifts that dovetail with ZANU PF's propaganda needs. By rewarding praise singers and church leaders who endorse the ruling party, he enhances patronage instead of independent civic engagement and development. 'His donations, far from being neutral or universal in benefit, are often targeted at those who already hold influence or visibility' (Mbofana 2025c:n.p.). By accepting gifts from such a controversial source, church leaders associate themselves with corruption, sanitise controversy and weaken their prophetic role, because they are prevented from speaking out against the evil done by those who gift them. Therefore, the church leaders compromise their integrity and send a disturbing message to suffering Zimbabweans, namely that church leaders do not care that a few benefit from ill-gotten wealth while the majority suffer in tragic poverty. Instead of speaking for the voiceless who are in need of a just society in which everyone has access to national wealth, church leaders accept gifts from elitist and controversial donors, which can compromise ecclesial leadership. As Dube (2020:4) argues, church leaders such as Nehemiah Mutendi could be seen as enablers 'whose political and religious constituency has been hijacked, resulting in him losing his religious mandate'. I agree with Chingarande (2019) that religious leaders such as Mutendi have been captured and are court prophets who serve the interests of the ruling party. As observed by Dube (2020:4), 'Pentecostal elites use the politics of befriending those in power as the means to access privileges, social status and national resources'. In doing so, they have succumbed to a politics of status that effectively silences the prophetic voice (Kaunda 2017). Therefore, the likes of Mutendi exemplify a captured prophetic voice that deprives Zimbabwe of diakonia, which is crucial for the church to maintain its relevance beyond the mere proclamation of the gospel.

Reviewing the case of Archbishop Eunor Guti

In addition to gifts to Nehemia Mutendi, Chivayo also offered lavish gifts to the archbishop of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA) Forward in Faith Ministries, Eunor Guti. Forward in Faith Ministries (n.d.) describes Guti as 'the mother of ZAOGA Forward in Faith Ministries International and is an influential woman gifted in healing, deliverance, prophetic revelation, business, leadership, and in nurturing people spiritually'. She is the widow of the late Apostle Dr Ezekiel Handinawangu Guti, who had founded the church in 1960 and who died in 2023,

at the age of 100 years (Dube 2023). The year 2025 saw ZAOGA celebrate 65 years as a church; in this time, it has rooted in various countries. The church is one of the biggest and most influential churches in and beyond Zimbabwe. Apostle Joseph Guti, a grandson of the late Archbishop Ezekiel Guti, was appointed and ordained as the presiding bishop of ZAOGA in 2024 (Chivhima 2024). Mawire (2025) explains that, while Apostle Guti, as the presiding bishop, oversees day-to-day church operations, Eunor Guti, as archbishop, remains the overall vision of the church; hence, she is very influential. Mid-year 2025, when the church celebrated the 100-year legacy of Ezekiel Guti and ZAOGA's 65 years of existence, Chivhaya (2025c) offered Archbishop Guti luxurious gifts via a Facebook post:

'In honor of 100 years of UNMATCHED SERVICE to the body of Christ and in recognition of the SELFLESS COMMITMENT to the Gospel, to charity, to education, to health and to building a better nation, I am PROFOUNDLY HUMBLED to express my deepest gratitude to my beloved mother, DR. EUNOR GUTI. Ordinarily I would say Please go and see Farai but Farai from Faramatsi Motors, Club Chambers Showroom along 4th Street will come to you and deliver your 2025 brand new Toyota Land Cruiser 300 Series VXR which is fully paid for and ready for delivery, subject to the church's Governing Board's consent. Furthermore, please accept USD250 000 in CASH for fuel and your personal use.' (n.p.)

The followers of Chivhaya (2025c) responded to the post with mixed feelings:

'You don't know the history of ZAOGA very well. ZAOGA is not built on handouts from *mbinga* [people who present themselves as wealthy in public] like you' (n.p.)

'people are tired of this nonsense of donating Zanu PF money whilst the hospitals are empty everyday *iwedhufu* [you fat man]' (n.p.)

'*Ukaonauchiti* Congratulations *pa post yekupihwa kwevanhu mota, bata hana yako uti, "Ndakazungaira musoro" Nyika haina kana zvipatara nemushonga* but busy congratu-lating *kuti munhu apihwa mota*, is that car going to benefit you? *Zvimwe zvacho fungaiwo musati mangoti* Congratulations *madofu imimi'* [If you find yourself saying congratulations for Chivayo's Facebook posts about his car donations, tell yourself that you are mad. The country has no medication for the sick yet you are busy congratulating car donations. How will the cars benefit you? Some of these things need us to think before congratulating anybody, you fools!'] (n.p.)

'as a dedicated *Zaogian* [member of ZAOGA church]. It will be a disgrace if *mama* accepts that offer ... I don't think *mama* Guti lacks anything.' (n.p.)

More than 5000 comments were posted in reaction to the offer, of which the majority criticised the donation. Archbishop Guti declined the gifts. In a video circulated on Facebook (Advocacy for Human Rights and Democracy n.d.), Archbishop Guti explains to her church that she was actually offered US\$2 million dollars, but she declined the gift, because 'there was no will of God in the donations'. In the video, she reported that, one night, a certain man was sent to plead with her to accept the gift. When she rejected it, emissaries tried to pressure her to accept the gifts, but she

stood firm and rejected them. She explained that she did not want anything to do with the personal gift or any other gift for church activities or programmes. Nehanda Radio (2025:n.p.) reports Archbishop Guti saying: 'I'm not going to take that money. They better use it somewhere else, but not even on our projects'. Archbishop Guti explained that she had advised the church board in advance that her decision was final and based on integrity (Nehanda Radio 2025). Bulawayo24 (2025:n.p.) reports that Archbishop Guti also disclosed that 'many church members had voiced discomfort with the donation, arguing that Chivayo's wealth was tainted'.

While the donation stirred debate within ZAOGA's church, Archbishop Guti's decision was lauded as one of integrity and spiritual discernment. Her stance contradicts that of other ecclesial leaders and public figures who had accepted similar gifts from Chivayo. 'She becomes the second prominent Zimbabwean to refuse such overtures, following iconic musician Thomas "Mukanya" Mapfumo, who also rejected a car and a house from Chivayo earlier this year' (Bulawayo24 2025:n.p.). Bulawayo24 (2025), furthermore, wrote that the consideration of Archbishop Guti exposed the majority of church leaders in Zimbabwe, such as Prophet Ian Ndlovu, Prophet Eubert Angels, Apostle Chipoyera, and Pastor Sylvia Charamba, who had accepted Chivayo's gifts, and prompted public criticism of beneficiaries of allegedly questionable wealth at a time when Zimbabwe's public services, particularly hospitals, are in dire condition.

According to Bulawayo24 (2025), critics argue that Chivayo's high-profile gifting campaign is a smokescreen for corruption and an attempt to buy public favour, especially amid growing discontent over deteriorating social services and in the absence of state accountability. So, by turning down the gift, Archbishop Guti did not just reaffirm her integrity, but also sent a strong message that the church must not be bought. New Zimbabwe (2025) reported that many leaders and members of ZAOGA, as well as representatives of other churches and the public, had implored Archbishop Guti to turn down the gifts, because the gifts were alleged to be dirty. 'Guti has received praise online for refusing what many view as "dirty money" acquired through corruption' (New Zimbabwe 2025:n.p.).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that church leaders' acceptance or rejection of gifts requires discernment, especially when benefactors are associated with political and socio-economic controversy. The case study of Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi is an exemplary portrayal of the majority of church leaders who accept gifts, who eventually lose their prophetic neutrality and become court prophets. As Magezi and Tagwirei (2022) observe, Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU PF party is well known for either buying or forcing church leaders as political puppets to sustain the party's selfish interests and abusing those who become partisan. The case of Archbishop Guti is a rare and essential demonstration of ecclesiastic leadership integrity, sensitivity and costly accountability. The benefactor,

Chivayo, and his associates, ZANU PF political leaders, can victimise those who choose to withstand their machinations. It is assumed that some of those who accepted the gifts might have mistaken the offers as free gain and God's answer to a lifetime of prayers. However, it is critical for church leaders to be reminded that they carry the selfless, integral mission of God to attend to, with considered integrity, always, and to save people, even when they appear to be losing out on what may enrich their personal lives. Church leaders should adopt Paul's example of selflessness, for the sake of Christlikeness (Phlp 3:8–10). In this case, declining controversial gifts demonstrates selflessness and sensitivity to ordinary Zimbabweans' cries for the church to disregard unaccounted wealth, and to foster accountable political and socio-economic development.

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CRedit authorship contribution

Kimion Tagwirei: Writing – original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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The author declares that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

Disclaimer

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