

Zambian Protestant Ecumenism and the Quest for Eco-Justice: A Case Study of the Council of Churches in Zambia

Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa
University of the Western Cape

Abstract

This paper maps the trajectory of eco-justice discourse in Zambia with specific reference to the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) as one of the most significant ecumenical structures in the country. Foregrounding the notion of eco-justice, this paper seeks to answer the question, namely, in what ways do religious resources (read: institutions) engender ecological ethos? Such a question is explored in light of the widely recognised inextricable link between environmental degradation and justice as expressed in the concept of eco-justice. Therefore, through documentary analysis, the paper delineates the theological basis of CCZ's advocacy for eco-justice and underscores the potential of ecumenical institutions as sources of religious social capital. While underlining the role of religious resources in shaping people's attitudes and behaviour towards the environment, the paper offers a critique of 'prophetic voice' by drawing attention to the need for clarity on the distinctive contribution of Christian resources in addressing ecological degradation.

Keywords: Eco-Justice; Council of Churches in Zambia; Religious Social Capital; Prophetic Voice; Ecotheology; Stewardship; Environmental Impact of Mining in Zambia

Introduction

This paper takes its cue from Sakupapa (2021) who locates three strands of eco-theological discourses within the Zambian context, namely the eco-justice actions of ecumenical bodies, the retrieval of the indigenous ecological knowledge, and the reinterpretation of pneumatology in light of ecological concerns. More specifically, the paper seeks to map the trajectory of eco-justice discourse in Zambia with specific reference to the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ) as one of the most significant ecumenical structures in the country. Following Gerrie Ter Haar's (2005:22–27) conceptualisation and categorisation of religious resources in four categories, namely religious ideas, religious practices, religious organisation and religious experiences, this paper aims to investigate the ways in which religious organisations engender ecological ethos. It specifically explores the ways in which the CCZ addresses ecological issues and enquires into what may be distinctively theological about such engagement. This will be approached in a number of steps. First, I will offer a brief institutional background on the CCZ. This will be followed by a conceptual explanation of eco-justice in the context of Christian theological discourse on ecology. The next step will entail a discussion of the findings of this research on the CCZ as a case study of the role of religious institutions in engendering ecological ethos. This will be framed in terms of the CCZ's vision to be a "Prophetic Voice with a transformative impact on the church and society". I will

conclude the article with some observations on the implications of this research for constructive ecumenical theological reflection on eco-theology.

Methodologically, the data for this study was derived through an analytic method of document analysis. According to Bowen (2009:27), document analysis is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material”. Procedurally, this entails not only the finding and selection of documentary data sources but also their appraisal and synthesis. Data on the CCZ was derived from analysis of information on their website and relevant published documents with a view to identify key themes related to the CCZ’s environmental actions.

Brief Institutional Background on the CCZ

The focus of this paper on Christianity is necessitated in part by the historic and contemporary public profile of Christianity in Zambia (see Gifford 1998:189–186)¹ on the one hand, and the statistical data on Christianity in the country on the other. Statistically, Zambia has a population of about 19.6 million people (Zamstats 2022:7). The country is religiously pluralistic, albeit predominantly Christian. Most sources on Zambia’s religious demographics indicate that over 85% of the population is Christian.² Unarguably, these statistics are not necessarily indicative of the tensions and relationships between religious belief, belonging and practice. This notwithstanding, the focus of this paper on a Christian ecumenical body takes cognisance of ongoing transformations in Zambia’s religious landscape in general and within Christianity³ in particular. The latter is partly a consequence of widespread charismatisation of historic mission churches and the proliferation of Pentecostal type churches and movements. Sakupapa (2019:123) describes the ecumenical implications of these transformations as follows:

Ecumenism in Zambia can no longer be reduced to its traditional and mainly institutional expressions characteristic of ecumenism among mainline (denominational) churches as embodied in ecumenical organisations such as the CCZ and in collaborative work amongst and between the three “church mother bodies.

The changing ecumenical landscapes in Zambia notwithstanding, the CCZ remains a significant ecumenical structure with significant potential for mobilising religious social capital through its national, regional and international networks. Following Maselko et al. (2011:760), I take religious social capital “as the social resources available to

¹ For analyses of the public role of religion in Zambia, see chapters in part II of Gewald, J.B., Hinfelaar, M. and Macola, G. eds., 2008. *One Zambia, many histories: towards a history of post-colonial Zambia*. Leiden: Brill.

² The 2010 Census of population for instance reports the following; 95.5% Christian, 0.5% Muslim, 0.2% other and 1.8% none. See CSO, “Census of population and housing,” Republic of Zambia (2012), 19. More recent sources (e.g. Zurlo 2022:316) report that by 2020, 86% of Zambia’s population was Christian. See Zurlo, G.A., 2022. *Global Christianity: A guide to the world’s largest religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe*. Michigan: Zondervan.

³ See the case study by, Cheyeka, A., Hinfelaar, M. and Udelhoven, B., 2014. The changing face of Zambia’s Christianity and its implications for the public sphere: a case study of Bauleni township, Lusaka. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(5):1031–1045.

individuals and groups through their social connections with a religious community”.⁴ Although the notion of religious social capital originally emerged in the context of debates in the United States, it is deployed in this study for its generative value.

The CCZ is an ecumenical umbrella organisation of largely protestant “Christian churches that seeks to promote cooperation and fellowship between Christian churches and organizations”. The institutional history of the CCZ can be traced to the formation of the General Missionary Conference in 1914, which underwent a name change to the Christian Council of Northern Rhodesia in 1944. It was later renamed as the Christian Council of Zambia in 1964 and has been known as the Council of Churches in Zambia (hereafter, CCZ) since 2003. The vision of CCZ is to “be a prophetic voice with a transformative impact on the church and society” (CCZ Website). In Zambia, the CCZ is widely known as one of the so-called Church mother bodies along with the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB)⁵, and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia. These bodies have played a prophetic role in Zambia at crucial moments, such as the period of Zambia’s transition from a one-party state to multi-party electoral democracy in the early 1990s (see Gifford 1998:186–197).

The CCZ, EFZ and ZCCB have over the years issued major joint statements on a number of national issues, thus signifying wider ecumenical cooperation.⁶ Comparatively, the Roman Catholic ZCCB has a much broader and deepened base in their engagement with issues of social justice in part due to a long tradition of the social teaching of the church and the contribution of competent Roman Catholic organisations such as Caritas Zambia and the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection.

The CCZ in particular, has a rich and documented history of engagement around issues of human rights and democracy (see Phiri 1999), gender justice⁷ (CCZ 2015), and social and economic justice. Comparatively, the work of the CCZ on environmental and ecological issues is largely under-researched and insufficiently theorised. Therefore, this study makes a modest contribution in this regard by exploring the ways in which church institutions (as a religious resource) engender ecological ethos. Accordingly, the paper deploys eco-justice as a theoretical framework. The eco-justice framework is best understood in light of ecumenical theological reflection on ecology.

⁴ For a systematic literature review on religious social capital, see Baker, C. and Miles-Watson, J. 2010. Faith and Traditional Capitals: Defining the Public Scope of Spiritual and Religious Capital – A Literature Review, *Implicit Religion* 13(1):17–69.

⁵ Originally established in 1965 and its statutes approved by the Holy See on April 2, 1984, the ZCCB was until July 15, 2016, known as the Zambia Episcopal Conference.

⁶ For a compilation of some such statements until 2001, see Komakoma, J. ed. 2003. *The social teaching of the Catholic bishops and other Christian leaders in Zambia: major pastoral letters and statements 1953–2001*. Ndola: Mission Press.

⁷ Following a Gender Audit of 15 CCZ member churches commissioned by its Gender Justice Desk in 2008, the CCZ has since developed a workplace gender policy (2010) and established a Gender programme that is responsible for the mainstreaming of gender and health issues among its member churches. Most notably, the 2008 Gender audit triggered the publication in 2009, of a joint gender document by the CCZ together with the EFZ and the ZCCB (then Zambia Episcopal Conference) titled *The Voice of the Church on Matters of Gender in Zambia: Addressing ourselves to Issues of Gender injustice and Gender Based Violence*. For the CCZ Gender Audit Report see <https://www.norad.no/globalassets/import-2162015-80434-am/www.norad.no-ny/filarkiv/ngo-evaluations/13a-council-of-churches-in-zambia-gender-audit.pdf> Accessed: 27/05/23.

Christian Theological Reflection on Ecology

The ecological crisis is widely recognised as a multidisciplinary concern. Within the broader multidisciplinary field of religion and ecology⁸, Christian theological reflection on ecology (hereafter ecotheology) can be said to have served as the vanguard of scholarly engagement with environmental issues since at least the 1960s. Typically, theological responses to the pervasive ecological crisis of our time abound and find expression in several key publications on ecotheology,⁹ ecofeminism and ecowomanism, and in major statements by church leaders¹⁰ and ecumenical bodies. The sheer diversity of forms of Christian ecotheology renders any task of doing justice to the full terrain of ecotheology globally nearly impossible.¹¹

The initial theological rejoinders on ecology tended to be responses to historian Lynn White's (1967) influential critique of Christianity as a major cause of the worldwide ecological crisis. While the generative legacy of White's critique is undeniable, I will not venture into its discussion here. Suffice it to mention that over the last decades, theological reflection on ecology has offered nuanced examinations of the environmental impact of anthropocentrism, constructively located ecological resources within Christianity and explored the ambiguous record of Christianity in so far as its attitude toward nature is concerned. Conradie (2020:2–3) succinctly notes the ecological ambiguity of Christianity by pointing out a two-fold critique and a two-fold constructive task of ecotheology, namely “an ecological critique of [western] Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction”.¹² It is this vein that calls for the “ecological reformation of Christianity”¹³ or the “earthing of the Christian Faith”¹⁴ have been made. More recently, theological reflection on the Anthropocene is indicative of the broadening of theological discourse as it engages with planetary thinking.¹⁵

Of particular relevance to the focus of this article is the contribution of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to ecotheological discourse. The WCC has articulated ideas addressing ecology since at least 1973. These include a focus on a “Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society” articulated at the Nairobi Assembly (1975), the “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” (JPIC) conciliar process after its Vancouver assembly in 1983 which subsequently led to the International Convocation on JPIC held in Seoul in

⁸ For an overview, see the various contributions to the *Routledge handbook of Religion and Ecology* edited by Willie Jenkins, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim; For surveys of developments in the field of religion and ecology see Jenkins, W, and Christopher K.C. Religion and environment, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36 (2011): 441–463; See also Jenkins, W. 2009. Religion and Ecology: A Review Essay on the Field, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77 (1):187–197.

⁹ See for example Conradie, E.M., Bergmann, S., Deane-Drummond, C. and Edwards, D (eds.) 2014. *Christian faith and the earth: Current paths and emerging horizons in ecotheology*. Oxford: Bloomsbury.

¹⁰ See for example the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* and the several WCC statements

¹¹ For a discussion on distinct Christian discourses on ecology, see Conradie, E.M., 2016. Christianity: An ecological critique of Christianity and a Christian critique of ecological destruction. In *Routledge handbook of religion and ecology*, 70–78. Routledge.

¹² See also Santimore's 1985 survey of the historically ambiguous ecological promise of Christian theology in his *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology*.

¹³ See for example the Volos Call entitled “Manifesto for an Ecological Reformation of Christianity”.

¹⁴ See Conradie, E.M. and Pan-Chiu, L. eds. 2022. *Taking a Deep Breath for the Story to Begin: An Earthed Faith*, Volume 1. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

¹⁵ See for example Deane-Drummond, C., Bergmann, S. and Vogt, M. (eds.) 2018. *Religion in the Anthropocene*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade.

1990. Through these and subsequent initiatives such as the articulation of concepts of “an economy of life”, “ecological debt”¹⁶ and “climate debt”, the WCC has fostered eco-justice ethics. Thus put, it must be noted that this paper will not engage with the more recent ecumenical calls for a related notion of eco-diakonia.¹⁷

Eco-Justice as integral relation between Ecology and Justice

The term eco-justice was coined in 1972 by the American Baptist Richard Jones to mean both ecological wholeness and social justice.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the need to make connections between *ecology* and *economics* had earlier being mooted by Norman Faramelli (1970), who argued that “choosing ecology instead of poverty, or vice versa, is to make a bad choice”. Eco-justice subsequently became popularised by William Gibson (1985:9), who argued that “Eco-justice means the well-being of all humankind on a thriving earth. It means a sustainable sufficiency for all.” Eco-justice thus expresses both *ecological* and *economic* justice.

Following Hessel (2003:12), this research deploys the hyphenated word ‘eco-justice’ to refer to “constructive human responses that concentrate on the link between ecological health and social justice”. This kind of inclusive vision implied in seeing ecological justice and social justice was initially fostered by ecumenically minded North American Christian ethics and subsequently within the ambits of the WCC at least since its Nairobi Assembly (1975). The American ethicist Dieter Hessel (2004:50) highlights four ethical norms that emerged out of this ecumenical vision on eco-justice. These can be briefly summarised as follows:

- “*Solidarity* with other people and creatures - companions, victims and allies - in earth community, reflecting deep respect for creation”;
- “*Ecological sustainability* - environmentally fitting habits of living and working that enable all life to flourish and utilize eco-socially appropriate technology”;
- “*Sufficiency* as the standard of organized sharing, which requires basic floors and definite ceilings for equitable or “fair” consumption”;
- “*Socially* just participation in decisions about how to obtain sustenance and to manage the community life for the good in common and the good of the commons.”

The norms of solidarity, ecological sustainability and socially just participation are particularly relevant for the focus of this study on the CCZ. In light of this and the

¹⁶ See World Council of Churches, “Statement on Eco-justice and Ecological Debt,” 2009, <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-eco-justice-and-ecological-debt>

¹⁷ In a recent WCC/Act Alliance study document titled “Called to Transformation – Ecumenical Diakonia”, a call has been made for the “advancement of the concept of “Ecodiakonia” - exploring the close relationship between diaconal care and the environment in the context of climate change” (WCC 2022:114). Framed this way, ecodiakonia may be said to capture something of the spirit of eco-justice given the ways in which the objective of diaconal action is formulated namely, “to assist people in need, to defend their human dignity and the rights they hold as citizens, regardless of their formal citizenship or nationality, and to support processes that promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation” (WCC 2022:68). In this connection, Dietrich Werner (2023:15) has perceptively argued for the necessity of keeping together social diakonia and eco-diakonia.

¹⁸ For a history of how the term emerged, see Hessel, D.T. 2011. Eco-justice ethics: A brief overview. In Sharma, A. (ed). *The world’s religions: A contemporary reader*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

foregoing description of eco-justice, I argue that this notion offers a useful framework for analysing the role of religious institutions in shaping ecological ethos. This is crucial not least because of the intersectionality of the realities of economic injustice, environmental degradation, corruption and bad governance, and the problematic ‘power’ of transnational corporations (see Werner 2020). It is to the analysis of the ways in which the CCZ, as a major ecumenical structure in the country, engages with environmental and ecological issues that I now turn.

The CCZ as a Prophetic Voice with a transformative impact on the church and society

The *raison d’être* of the CCZ is to be a “prophetic voice with a transformative impact on the church and society”. The CCZ’s idea of ‘prophetic voice’ is arguably missiologically framed in keeping with African ecumenical notions of prophetic witness. For example, at its inaugural Assembly in Kampala, the AACC (1963:61) portrayed the church as a “watchman in the midst of the nation”, prophetically witnessing to the divine demands for truth, justice and peace. Later at its Lusaka Assembly in 1974, the AACC (1975:38) described the mission of the church as follows:

The mission of the church is prophetic, and in serving it can accomplish its prophetic mission by being engaged, involved and sensitive to the well-being of the society. The Church must be alive in the present in order to better live in the future.

This prophetic tradition names the church as prophet. In this sense, prophetic witness is best understood as a communal venture; indeed, an ecumenical imperative.

Within the CCZ, the notion of ‘prophetic voice’ has often referred to the practice of critiquing unjust social structures and norms as well as speaking truth to power in the tradition of biblical prophets. In practice, this often involves a discernment of “the signs of the time” (e.g. uncovering perceived injustice in society), a prophetic critique and a call for alternatives on the basis of biblical teaching. According to Brueggemann (2001:3), the task of prophetic ministry “is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us”. Prophetic witness can indeed take different forms, including but not limited to a mode of Christian public moral discourse. The CCZ has particularly operated within an ecumenical paradigm of prophetic witness as advocacy in which churches seek to realise Christian responsibility by directly influencing government policy and actions on a wide range of issues through media utterances by its leadership, written press statements and communiques, and very rarely through symbolic acts that may include protest actions to signal resistance to unjust norms and structures. The analysis of several CCZ documents and media commentary by its leadership revealed the CCZ’s self-understanding as a “prophetic voice”.

The current CCZ programmatic structure consists of six operational programmes. Of these, the “Emergency and Development Programme” (EDP) is devoted to the promotion of “good governance and environmental stewardship through awareness raising, CSO capacity building, gender mainstreaming and economic empowerment” (CCZ Website).

The Advocacy role of the CCZ

The CCZ's advocacy role includes an engagement with resource governance¹⁹ in the context of the extractive industry, mostly notably mining. Copper mining activities of a traditional and subsistence nature have been reported to have been occurring long before the arrival of white settlers in what would later be called Zambia.²⁰ However, the "first commercial mine was opened at Roan Antelope (now Luanshya) in 1928" (Larmer & Lungu 2007:7). Since then, "copper extraction has dictated not only the economic history of Zambia, but its political and social histories as well" (Hinfelaar & Achberger 2017:6). The mining sector in Zambia thus remains the country's economic and social backbone and accounts for nearly 70% of Zambia's total export value (World Bank 2016). Given the economic significance of mining, the CCZ has been involved in national advocacy for tax justice²¹ and calling for measures to mitigate the high risk of environmental damage caused by mining activities.

Tax Justice as a Social Justice Concern

In the late 1990s, the Zambian government privatised the nationalised mining company, Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines (ZCCM), through a series of development agreements. In a report of the Civil Society Trade Network of Zambia (CSTNZ)²² entitled *For Whom the Windfalls?*, Frazer & Lungu (2007) reveal that the mines were sold cheaply and went on to tabulate the losses in tax revenues to the government as a result of the low tax rates and tax holidays which were granted to private mining companies.²³ The CCZ alongside other civil society players in Zambia advocated for mining companies to pay their fair share of taxes. As a result of pressure mounted on the government by the churches and civil society, "president Levy Mwanawasa cancelled all tax concessions to the copper mining industry in Zambia in 2008" (Christian Aid 2009b:4; c.f. Lungu 2009:18). Commenting on the need for tax justice in the mining sector in Zambia, the former general secretary of the CCZ, Rev Susan Matala (cited in Christian Aid 2009a:13), observed that "people who come to help us mine these minerals must ensure that we, the owners of the land, also benefit in a very significant way".

Related to tax justice is the CCZ's involvement in the Multi-Stakeholder Group of the Zambia Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI). The EITI seeks to promote transparency and accountability in the extractive sector.²⁴ While the effectiveness of the EITI is a subject of debate²⁵, it does provide a platform for multi-

¹⁹ For the churches in Zambia, this also includes the concerns of corporate social responsibility. See for example the CCZ's 2009 *Baseline Study on Corporate Social Responsibility*.

²⁰ See for example, Sikamo, J., Mwanza, A. and Mweemba, C., 2016. Copper mining in Zambia-history and future, *Journal of the Southern African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy*, 116(6):491-496.

²¹ For ecumenical reflection on tax justice, see recommendations on addressing tax justice in the WCC document "An Economy of Life for All Now: An Ecumenical Action Plan for a New International Financial and Economic Architecture". See also the statement "Diakonia in the time of inequality: Final Statement from Sigtuna Consultation on Theology, Tax and Social Protection 11-13 January 2017".

²² The CSTNZ was an alliance of Zambian NGOs, individuals and church bodies (such as the CCZ) interested in trade issues at local, national, regional and international level.

²³ For example, mineral royalty taxes were reduced from the then statutory 3% to 0.6%.

²⁴ See 2021 *ZEITI REPORT*, 2023, 10.

²⁵ See Villar, P.F. and Papyrakis, E., 2017. Evaluating the impact of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) on corruption in Zambia. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 4(4):795-805.

stakeholder collaboration. The CCZ is also an active participant in the Alternative Mining Indaba (AMI). The AMI is a global platform “that emphasises critical, joint and comprehensive monitoring by extractive industries, host countries, and most importantly host communities with the support of civil society organisations to safeguard preservation and care of creation for future generations.”²⁶ Nationally, the CCZ plays a crucial role in the Zambia Alternative Mining Indaba (ZAMI) whose goal is “create a platform for Communities, the Church, Government, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Mining Companies to effectively deliberate on real life experiences of the costs and benefits of extractive industries” (ZAMI). At local levels, the CCZ has created Social and Economic Justice (SEJ) committees who translate the CCZ mandate and mobilise Christians in local communities.

Churches and the Environmental Impact of Mining

With a social justice focus, the CCZ contends that the poor, in particular, should not bear a disproportionate share of the adverse environmental effects of commercial, industrial and governmental actions or policies. As such, the significant efforts of the churches through the CCZ, have been directed towards environmental issues that arise from the mining industry. A recent study summarises the environmental issues caused by mining as follows:

The main environmental issues caused by mining in the past include air pollution by SO₂ emissions and particulate matter (PM), water pollution due to ore treatment and chemical plant leaks, and flotation tailings ponds seepage. Others are tailings dam instability due to inadequate maintenance, leakage of sludge into the drainage network, large-scale pollution of soils and vegetation with dust from mining operations, dry beaches of tailings ponds, and, in particular, emissions from metallurgical plants (Křibek et al. 2023:31).

In Kitwe, a city located on the Copperbelt province, refuse from the copper smelter that was initially commissioned in 1931 resulted in a copper slug dump (officially, Nkana Slag Dump No. 48) that is (in)famously known as the Black Mountain. On 20th June 2018, the safety limitations at the Black Mountain resulted in the unnecessary deaths of 17 mine “workers”. Another concern is the adverse effect of mine waste (waste rock or tailings) on the health of people who reside near these mine waste dumpsites and on the ecosystem and biodiversity. Similarly, the significant land alteration resulting from surface mining also negatively impacts the environment and humans due to the resulting disruptions of ecological relationships. Other environmental impacts of mining relate to inadequate closure (or rehabilitation) of mining sites. These observations raise ethical questions around who bears responsibility for environmental legacy issues of the kind described here.

Given the above environmental risks of mining, the CCZ has undertaken a number of initiatives. A notable example here is its advocacy role for the development of policy

²⁶ The AMI convenes an annual conference in Cape Town every February.

on the mining of Uranium in Zambia.²⁷ In 2010, the CCZ commissioned a study on uranium mining in Zambia whose findings were published with the title *Prosperity unto Death: Is Zambia ready for Uranium mining?* (2010). The title of the report resonates with the WCC's depiction of economic practices of neo-liberalism and globalisation as "economy of death" in its AGAPE Call. The CCZ (2010) study sought to "comprehensively review the uranium policy and related statutes in Zambia with respect to health issues, environmental protection, transparency, accountability, and equitable distribution of benefits realised from the exploitation and mining of Uranium" (CCZ 2010:viii). The study findings revealed some gaps in Zambia's legislation, most notably that the country had no specific legal and policy framework on Uranium exploration and mining. The study reported that existing operations related to uranium mining were governed by a much-generalised Mining Policy of 2008, which the study found to be inadequate given the peculiarity and dangers of Uranium as the deadliest of metals (CCZ 2010:27). If not managed well, Uranium mining can have devastating consequences for both local ecosystems and biodiversity. The CCZ report noted the need for adequate policy for the safe management of Uranium mining, disposal and transportations, and thus made a recommendation to the government to develop a policy on uranium to ensure sustainable and safe uranium mining. In November 2011, the CCZ proposed and submitted to the government a draft uranium mining policy. Although there was no feedback from the government on the CCZ proposal by June 2012, the CCZ continued to campaign for investments in the extractive industry to have "a sense of moral responsibility" (Chikwanka 2012).

The significance of CCZ advocacy is highly desirable. As Křibek et al. (2023:31) recommend, the

establishing of non-governmental interest groups that would force mining companies to fulfil their environmental obligations and apply environmentally friendly technologies are highly desirable. Public awareness of environmental issues should be promoted, especially in local schools, parishes, NGOs, and communities.

The Environmental Actions of the CCZ

Further to environmental issues around mining, the churches have added their voice and actions to the climate change crisis, not least because of the devastating effects of climate change, such as severe weather events in the form of floods and droughts, accelerated land degradation, the drying of streams and rivers, increase in the deaths of wild animals, and increased food insecurity. The CCZ has not only been active in providing relief support to victims of climate-induced disasters such as floods but has also conducted training for church leaders in various districts of Zambia to respond to emergencies.

²⁷ Zambia has over the years developed regulatory and institutional mechanisms that are indicative of an environmental ethos. Nevertheless, questions continue to arise around the adequacy of such legislation and the institutional capacity of the regulator to enforce such legislation. Iva Peša (2020:7) argues that despite the protective legislation and regulatory bodies, "Mining companies continued to approach environmental issues in a primarily economic and technocratic manner, by trying to combine pollution control with profit generation, or by advocating the newest engineering solutions."

Leveraging its nationwide constituency, the CCZ has further initiated activities in support of nature conservation. This includes promoting environmental stewardship. In November 2022, the CCZ implemented a project in Fibalala Camp-Musaba Ward of Samfya District through the distribution of Musangu trees and “Chaka” hoes to local farmers as one way of promoting conservation agriculture practices. Such projects are also aimed at strengthening the existing capacities of community responses to the risks of climate change. Earlier in 2014, the CCZ implemented another project entitled “Empowering local communities to adapt in Zambezi District” in which they empowered about 150 peasant farmers in sustainable agriculture land use and gardening.

From the foregoing, it is evident that the churches represented by the CCZ have particularly stressed a social justice perspective on environmental issues in ways that represent environmental issues and social justice as inseparable. Their advocacy role has drawn attention to the disproportionate exposures to environmental problems. Theologically however, one notes a rather ‘shaky’ theological grounding of the CCZ environmental advocacy. For instance, while it is interesting to note that the CCZ study report on Uranium mining is prefaced with reflections and an emphasis on stewardship as a biblical and ethical injunction (CCZ 2010:vi–vii), the explanation of this principle smacks of the dominion theology which reinscribes questionable anthropocentricity. The report for instance observes that the “book of Genesis calls upon all of us to look after the earth and to have dominion over the earth in a responsible stewardship manner” (CCZ 2010:11). This critique of the CCZ’s framing of stewardship does not suggest that the concept be dropped all together. Rather, it argues that such usage needs to be cognisant of critiques of the notion of stewardship as androcentric, Eurocentric, and anthropocentric.²⁸ The CCZ engagement could benefit from ecumenical perspectives on eco-justice. As Gibson (2004:34) argues,

Eco-justice recognizes in other creatures and natural systems the claim to be respected and valued and taken into account in societal arrangements... The concern for ecological soundness and sustainability includes but transcends the concern of humans for themselves.

The eco-justice model places emphasis on the interrelatedness of all creatures including humans in ways that necessarily call for the deconstruction of the anthropocentric model of domination.

Additionally, the CCZ’s work faces the same critique of whether or not the views expressed in its official statements reflect the thinking and theologies of member churches. The need to address these concerns may be implied from the remarks of the CCZ General Secretary, Fr. Chikoya, during a homily that he delivered at a joint ecumenical prayer service on the creation that was held at the Chawama Catholic church in Lusaka under the theme “walking together in caring for God’s creation.” Fr. Chikoya (2018) observed that “the clergy should take environmental issues seriously and not

²⁸ For an overview of such critiques of the notion of stewardship, see Conradie’s (2006:128–132) reflection in *Christianity and ecological theology: Resources for further research*. African Sun Media: Stellenbosch. On discourse on responsible stewardship, see Conradie’s (2011:81–92) discussion in his *Christianity and earthkeeping: In search of an inspiring vision*. African Sun Media: Stellenbosch.

respond only during calamities”.²⁹ Fr. Chikoya (2018) further added that

we need to see sermons and bible studies in churches targeting the environment so that we change the mind set of our people depending on government... Christians have role to play in protecting the environment by ensuring that they avoid engaging in activities that can negatively affect the natural habitats.

From the foregoing, three aspects of the CCZ’s engagement on ecological issues can be identified. First, the CCZ ecological advocacy work is grounded on the Christian notion of stewardship as a core motivating value for environmental action and care for the earth and a prophetic understanding of the public role of the church. Second, the study reveals that the role of the CCZ may also be understood in terms of raising awareness. Third, this research illustrates the potential of churches to build social capital.

Stewardship and Prophetic Witnessing as Distinctive features of CCZ eco-justice work

Theologically, the CCZ’s ecological advocacy work is grounded on two notions. The first is the Christian notion of stewardship as a core motivating value for environmental action and care for the earth. A prophetic understanding of the public role of the church is the second characteristic of the theological grounding of the CCZ’s environmental and ecological advocacy. The oft-reference to being a “prophetic voice” in several of its official and pastoral statements lends credence to my argument that “prophetic voice” is definitive of the CCZ’s *raison d’être* as an ecumenical body. While the CCZ has demonstrated capacity in its social analysis, this study reveals a need for more deepened theological reflection on its ecological engagements. As the South African theologian John De Gruchy (2016:2) has argued, “critical theological and biblical reflection informed by social analysis and ecclesial praxis” are key aspects of prophetic witness.

Unarguably, any notion of prophetic voice implies an ‘audience’. I argue that there is nevertheless the need for the churches’ self-critical consciousness grounded in the affirmation of the integral relation between what the church is and what it does. In this way, prophetic witness cannot simply be equated with prophetic ‘voice’. We can take a cue from the AACC’s (1963:61) Kampala Assembly portrayal of the church as a prophetic “witness by her own life and example”. In the context of the CCZ’s environmental advocacy in stewardship, this raises the question of how local CCZ member churches embody stewardship in church life ranging from Christian rituals to the more practical aspects of church spaces/buildings. Here, Stanley Hauerwas’ notion of the church as a “social ethic” may be helpful.

Environmental Stewardship through Awareness Raising

This study has found that the CCZ prophetic witness may also be understood as contributing towards environmental conscientising or raising awareness around ecology and issues of climate change mitigation and adaptation. This may be inferred from the

²⁹ See <https://www.pressreader.com/zambia/daily-nation-newspaper/20181126/282308206157451> (Accessed: 10 February 2023).

various projects undertaken by CCZ, which include tree planting, nature conservation, agricultural training of clergy and laity (Farming God's way),³⁰ sustainable farming, and building existing community capacities for mitigating climate change. Nevertheless, this begs further theological reflection. As Sakupapa (2021:209) argues, a limitation of the ecumenical paradigm of the Zambian churches is the seemingly insufficient engagement with the theologies and unique practices of the church.

The CCZ and Religious Social Capital Formation

Finally, this research reveals the potential of religious institutions in religious social capital formation. This finds expression through the CCZ's transnational advocacy in collaboration with wider ecumenical networks such as the WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches. This is further evidenced from the CCZ's participation in a wider network of Christian non-governmental organisations involved in diaconal work,³¹ both nationally and globally. Arguably, the collaborative nature of CCZ's engagement with environmental issues reflects the role of religion in social capital formation. This is evinced through its various projects on environmental awareness and advocacy in partnership with member churches in local contexts. Further, through its network of member churches nationwide, the CCZ may be said to have institutional presence at local scales that the government may not have in certain areas. In this vein, the CCZ derives an advantage to forge linkages between and amongst its member churches especially at local levels. This study specifically illustrates how religious organisational resources can be mobilised in environmental action. It also exemplifies how ecumenical bodies such as the CCZ leverage their expansive and different demographic constituencies and network of global and regional ecumenical bodies and institutions. This illumines the CCZ as a case study of distinctive organisational resources linked to the Christian faith. It is illustrative of Christian religious motivation for involvement in environmental action albeit one that needs further theological clarity.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of the CCZ as an organisational religious resource in engendering ecological ethos. It established the theological basis of the CCZ's advocacy for eco-justice namely, the Christian notion of stewardship and a prophetic understanding of the public role of the church. The study further illumined the potential of the CCZ as a case study of the potential of religious organisations as sources of religious social capital. The ecumenical nature of such engagements illustrates that the ideals of justice are an integral part to the quest for unity among churches. The research also underlined the significance of CCZ eco-justice work for awareness raising as desirable, particularly in the context of legacy environmental issues associated with mining. I conclude this contribution with three questions that can be addressed in further research. First, how does CCZ environmental advocacy at the national level connect and interact with theologies or practices operative amongst its member churches at local

³⁰ The United Church of Zambia, one of the largest member churches of the CCZ, has a number of such initiatives particularly through its Chipembi College of Agriculture.

³¹ The CCZ is also a member of ACT Alliance, a global coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organisations with the goal to "promote a locally-led and coordinated approach to advocacy, humanitarian and developmental issues". <https://actalliance.org/who-we-are/> Accessed: 27/05/23

levels, if any? This is crucial given the ambivalence of religion, as some theologies, such as escapist eschatologies and earth-denying theologies, may well be a hindrance to the cultivation of an ecological ethos. Second, how do such Christian theologies or practices relate to indigenous Zambian knowledge systems? These questions can be explored in further research in order to better understand the churches' ecological engagement at congregational levels. And finally, what, if any, could be the distinctive role of constructive theological reflection in this regard? Here the role of theological education becomes crucial. As Chitando (2022:12) observes in his comments on African perspectives on religion and climate change, it "is important for African experiences and realities to be prioritized in African theology and religious studies."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AACC 1963. *Drumbeats from Kampala: Report of the First Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches, Kampala 20-30 April 1963*. London: Lutterworth
- AACC 1975. *The struggle continues: Official report, Third Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches, Lusaka, Zambia 12-24 May 1974*. Nairobi: AACC
- Bowen, G.A. 2009. Document analysis as a qualitative research method, *Qualitative Research Journal* 9(2):27–40.
- Brueggemann, W. 2001. *The prophetic imagination*, Second Edition. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Chikoya, E. 2018. Take Environmental issues Seriously, clergy prodded. <https://www.pressreader.com/zambia/daily-nation-newspaper/20181126/282308206157451> (Accessed: 08 May 2023).
- CCZ Website. <https://ccz.org.zm/index.php/emergency-development-programme/> (Accessed: 08 May 2023).
- CCZ 2015. *Women of the collar: Gender inequalities among the clergy*. Pa-Ulendo Books.
- CCZ 2010. *Prosperity unto death: Is Zambia ready for uranium mining?* Ndola: Mission Press.
- Chikwanka, N 2012. "Council of Churches in Zambia calls for policy on uranium mining." *The Post*, June 29, 2012.
- Chitando, E. 2022. Introduction: African perspectives on religion and climate change. In Chitando, E. Conradie, E.M. and Kilonzo, S.M. (eds.), *African perspectives on religion and climate change*. Taylor & Francis.
- Christian Aid 2009a. *The Gospel and the rich: Theological views of tax*. London: Christian.
- Christian Aid 2009b. The missing millions – The cost of tax dodging to developing countries supported by the Scottish government. A Christian Aid report September 2009. <https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-08/missing-millions-september-2009.pdf> (Accessed: 19 March 2023).
- Conradie, E.M. 2020. The four tasks of Christian ecotheology: Revisiting the current debate, *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* 119(1):1–13.

- De Gruchy, J 2016. Kairos moments and prophetic witness: Towards a prophetic ecclesiology, *HTS: Theological Studies* 72(4):1–7.
- Faramelli, N. 1970. Ecological responsibility and economic justice, *Andover Newton Quarterly* 11 (11):83–93.
- Fraser, A. & Lungu, J. 2007. *For whom the windfalls? Winners and losers in the privatisation of Zambia's copper mines*. Lusaka: Catholic Commission for Justice Development and Peace & Civil Society Trade Network of Zambia.
- Gibson, W.E. (ed) 2004. *Eco-Justice – The unfinished journey: The unfinished journey*. State University of New York Press: Albany.
- Gibson, W.E. 1985. Eco-justice: New perspective for a time of turning. In Hessel, D.T (ed.), *For creation's sake: preaching, ecology, and justice*. Geneva Press: Philadelphia.
- Gifford, P. 1998. *African Christianity: Its public role*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.
- Hessel, D. 2004. Integrated earth charter ethics, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 8(1):47–61.
- Hessel, D.T. (ed.) 2003. *Theology for earth community: A field guide*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Hinfelaar, M. & Achberger, J. 2017. The politics of natural resource extraction in Zambia, *ESID Working Papers* 80, 1–41.
- Křibek, B., Nyambe, I., Sracek, O., Mihaljevič, M. and Knésl, I., 2023. Impact of mining and ore processing on soil, drainage and vegetation in the Zambian Copperbelt mining districts: A review, *Minerals* 13(3):1–40.
- Lungu, J. 2009. The politics of reforming Zambia's mining tax regime, *Resource Insight* (8):1–28.
- Maselko, J., Hughes, C. and Cheney, R., 2011. Religious social capital: Its measurement and utility in the study of the social determinants of health, *Social Science & Medicine* 73(5):759-767.
- Peša, I. 2020. Between waste and profit: Environmental values on the Central African Copperbelt, *The Extractive Industries and Society* 8(4):100793.
- Phiri, I. 1999. Why African churches preach politics: The case of Zambia, *Journal of Church & State* 41 (2):323–347.
- Sakupapa, T.C. 2021. The decolonial imperative in African ecotheology: A Zambian perspective. In Conradie, E.M. and Pan-Chiu, L. (eds), *Taking a deep breath for the story to begin: An earthed faith, Volume 1*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Sakupapa, T.C. 2019. Ethno-regionalism, politics and the role of religion in Zambia: Changing ecumenical landscapes in a Christian nation, 2015–2018, *Exchange* 48(2):105–126.
- Ter Haar, G. 2005. Religion: Source of conflict or resource for peace? In Ter Haar, G. and Busuttill, J.J. (eds), *Bridge or barrier: Religion, violence, and visions for peace* 3–34. Leiden: Brill.
- WCC 2022. *Called to Transformation–Ecumenical Diakonia: Called to Transformation–Ecumenical Diakonia*. Geneva: WCC Publications.
<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/ecumenical-diakonia>
(Accessed: 27 May 2023).

- Werner, D. 2023. The international discourse on ecumenical diaconia as a chance to strengthen the specific profile and potential of churches as actors of eco-social transformation—A German perspective, *Religions* 14(4):517.
- Werner, D 2020. The challenge of environment and climate justice1: Imperatives of an eco-theological reformation of Christianity in African contexts. In Öhlmann, P., Gräb, W. and Frost, M.L (eds.). *African initiated Christianity and the decolonisation of development*. London: Routledge
- World Bank, 2016. *How can Zambia benefit from mining?* World Bank: Washington, DC.
- Zambia Alternative Mining Indaba 2017. Communique: Recommendations from the 6th Zambia alternative mining Indaba 20–22 June, 2017
<https://www.caritazambia.org/press/press-releases/communique-recommendations-from-the-6th-zambia-alternative-mining-indaba-20-22-june-2017> (Accessed: 09 May 2023).
- ZamStats 2022. *2022 Census of population and housing preliminary report*. Lusaka: Zambia Statistics Agency. Available at: <https://www.zamstats.gov.zm/2022-census/reports/> (Accessed: 18 March 2023).