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The Day of Prayer and Its Potential for Engendering Public Ecclesiology Ecumenism in Zambia

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Abstract: This article argues that while the National Day of Prayer in Zambia has its inception in political context, it has obligated the institutional churches to break out of their religiously fixed spaces, forcing them to suspend their official doctrinal positions for that specific day, and embrace each other in enacting what could be classified as “public ecclesiology ecumenism”. The article defines public ecclesiology ecumenism as the manifestation of institutionally-defined churches in public spaces to celebrate a common liturgical life in Christ through prayer, songs, preaching, and promotion of unified prophetic witness in the public. However, being a political initiative makes the Day of Prayer a potentially dangerous neo-colonial space for advancing a dominant political ideology which perpetuates corruption and exploitation of the masses. Thus, one of the core tasks of the churches is to liberate, reclaim, and reconstitute the Day of Prayer into a prophetic site of struggle against political corruption and poor governance by seeking to produce alternative public and political cultures.

Keywords: Day of Prayer; public ecclesiology ecumenism; prophetic witness; disruptive; Zambian church

1. Introduction

Brazilian ecumenist Fernando Enns (2007, p. xxiv) argues, “Ecclesiology is ... a sphere of authentication for ecumenicity; but ecumenicity is equally a sphere of authentication for ecclesiology.” Additionally, one can argue that ecumenicity and ecclesiology, mutual authenticated realms, are a crucial locus of authentication and a source of authority for the church’s prophetic voice in the public arena. To avoid giving an impression of a monolithic definition or neat systematization of both ecclesiology and ecumenism, this article is premised on understanding that these notions are fluid and dynamic with multiple delineations. This also means that while in this article, ecclesiology ecumenism is underpinned on prophetic witness, the notion itself is not reducible to a single model of social engagement. The specific focus on prophetic witness is in keeping with ecclesiology ecumenism public dimensions and African notions of ecumenism which have been largely understood in prophetic terms. For instance, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC 1963) since its inception in 1963 in Kampala, Uganda, has underlined prophetic witness as one core task of the church in Africa. The centrality of prophetic witness was also underlined at Lusaka Assembly in Zambia: “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 live better in the future” (AACC 1975, p. 38). All the subsequent themes of AACC’s General Assemblies have underscored prophetic witness as foundational for the church in Africa.¹ AACC has taken this focus in

¹ There is a detailed discussion of the vision and Assembly themes of AACC on website (AACC 2016).

recognition that there are and have been many forms of ecclesiologies and many forms of ecumenisms which each reflects the context and concerns of a particular sociopolitical context.²

For the purpose of this article, ecclesiology ecumenism refers to the church's unified prophetic contestations, negotiations, and engagements within elite dominated public spheres utilizing counter-ideology and neocolonial negating narratives from and of the margins. Public ecclesiology ecumenism legitimates the narrative from and of the margins as a divine missional instrument for negating, dismantling, and promoting resistance against elitist political vision and version of the public. It seeks to assert the honor and dignity of the margins, keeping alive their hopes and visions of just and equitable forms of socio-relational, economic, and political interactions. In this way, public ecclesiology ecumenism functions as an enabling impetus for the margins to imagine another society, and sometimes sanctions public rupturing of dissent (Carter 2011, p. 98). In its public manifestations, ecclesiology ecumenism seeks to prophetically witness to God's mission by rearticulating the public spheres from the underside of modernity and enabling various churches to engage as a unified body of Christ beyond local congregations for the sake of the public good. It challenges narrow confessional and denominationally informed prophetic witness by dismantling their commonsense or naturalization that underpin them. As explained further below, the prophetic intention of public ecclesiology ecumenism is to visibly give epistemological preference to the marginalized in matters of public discussions, public policy, and public good by critiquing and guiding political spheres and their different actors in the search for an effective political vision for a just, equitable, and prosperous society (Kaunda 2015c, 2016a, 2017a, 2018a).

This article explores public ecclesiology ecumenism in the National Day of Prayer, Fasting, Repentance, and Reconciliation (short form, the Day of Prayer) in Zambia. It utilizes media content analysis of news articles, reviews, commentaries, and reflections from the WhatsApp blog under the group name: "One nation under Christ". This blog was created to coordinate the activities of the Day of Prayer and promote ongoing prayer for the nation (Kaunda and Kaunda 2018b). The purposeful sampling technique was deliberately used to generate data on the Day of Prayer with specific themes related to ecumenism, church unity, collaboration, cooperation or working together. In other words, the documents both published and unpublished, interviews in the media, and blog comments and reflections were all purposively sampled based on their relevance to the study and analyzed using media content analysis (Cohen et al. 2007). The media content analysis "comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analyzed" (Bryman 2004, p. 392). It emphasizes "the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts" (Bryman 2004, p. 542). It also allows key themes to materialize out of data and recognizes "the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analyzed (and the categories derived from it) appeared" (Bryman 2004, p. 542).

The article underscores that the Day of Prayer is a potential space for prophetic witness of public ecclesiology ecumenism. It creates an environment that can help the churches of all denominations to reflect together on what it means to be a prophetic church in the context of human suffering and political corruption. It can help the church as a united body of Christ re-envision alternative public cultures of peace, forgiveness, hospitality, tolerance, unity, recognition, respect for difference, and good governance that can promote the public good. In order to appreciate this form of ecumenism, or rather public ecclesiology ecumenism, we have to clarify and develop further the theory of public ecclesiology ecumenism.

² The article does not give detailed discussions on various theologies of ecclesiology. For an in-depth treatise on these theologies, especially in relation to ecumenism (see Tavad 1992; Healy 2000).

2. Theorising Public Ecclesiology Ecumenism

I use the concept of “public ecclesiology ecumenism” to refer to the prophetic witness of various churches as a unified body of Christ in the public spheres influenced and motivated by various public issues within the local or and global contexts. The notion of “public” is understood as a site of interaction, dialogue, and reflection among the churches, through worship, preaching, prayer, and social praxis. The public is not to be regarded as a fixed, neutral space, but rather as a space where the ubiquitous existential struggle is a daily reality for the marginalized. The churches engage in the public as a site of struggle against alienation and death dealing forces. The power of the public space for the churches is concealed in its ability to offer a place of equality without institutional, doctrinal or legal privileges, and where ecclesiological identity is suspended, and the focus is placed on common needs, common Savior—Jesus, and common humanity, rather than denominational doctrines and ecclesiological hierarchies (Kaunda 2017b). It is a space of ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy in which normative ecclesiological identities dissolve for a while, resulting in increased permeable ecclesiological boundaries (Kaunda 2015b, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). It offers a dynamic space where doctrinal constraints are broken, and institutional liturgical approaches are suspended or relaxed (Kaunda 2016b, 2016c). This is a context with potential to lead to new ecclesiology ecumenical imaginations.

Public ecclesiology ecumenism is a “prophetic socio-just action” seeking emancipation and liberation of the marginalized including God’s creation. It searches for new ways of being, becoming, and allowing the flow out of socio-relational healing energy, reconciliation, economic development, and life-giving politics. The public space is regarded as a dynamic site of encounter, relational overflow, contestation, and border-crossing destabilizing among worshippers from various churches, politicians, and God. This makes public ecclesiology ecumenism have a radical focus on existential realities by challenging the status quo and seeking rearrangement of the socio-political order, norms, and values of the nation for the sake of the common good. In this way, the public becomes a space of agonizing re-enactment of suffering and unresolved struggle over injustice; a space of subversion against religio-social normativity; and revolt against neocolonial political order as well as institutionalized and individualized church engagement in politics. This is “not a space of homogenized knowledge formation, rather an arena of contestation, challenges, border-crossing resistance and solidarity for the betterment of humanity and the world” (Kang 2010, p. 39). Public ecclesiology ecumenism is missional praxis of the churches’ seeking “to fulfil together their common calling to glorify the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (Kessler 1990, p. 363) by putting the action of the state and the clandestine church collaboration with the state under God’s eye (Boesak and Villa-Vicencio 1986; Iosso and Hinson-Hasty 2008). There is no separation between the act of being the church from socio-political commitment to total liberation and social transformation.

However, the public is never neutral; like all social techniques, it is an elusive space that often requires negotiating overt intentions and covert agendas, often left unstated by various actors including the churches. Thus, the public ecclesiology ecumenism does not give certainty concerning social transformation but “opens the door to a world of contingency where events and meanings—indeed “reality” itself—can be molded and carried in different directions” (Thomassen 2014, p. 7). Hence, for the public space to be authentic contexts of ecclesiology ecumenical expressions, it needs to be protected in its own right against the hegemonic claims of political elites, institutional doctrines, as well as fundamentalist tendencies (Raiser 2013, p. 60). Konrad Raiser (2013, p. 60) observes that “This is where the issues of legitimacy and objectives of political authority and exercise of power need to be dealt with in a critical discourse; this is where pluralistic religious traditions may articulate their public role.” This means public ecclesiology ecumenism should situate itself as the custodian of public spaces. Being a custodian, means public ecclesiology ecumenism participates in God’s public mission through resisting the temptation to legitimize the state and draw strength from rejecting any attempt to be reduced into a state apparatus to promote any political, ethnic or nationalist interests and agendas (Kang 2010; Carter 2011; Raiser 2013; Kaunda and Kaunda 2018a). Thus, it demands the

various participating churches to form a radical bond of solidarity that can give new meaning to their interactions with one another, government, and the world in the public arena. In this regard, the public ecclesiology ecumenism as analytical framework is a tool that can help to bring a paradigm shift in re-conceptualizing the public as the locus from which the churches can authentically fulfil together the common calling by authentically participating in the public mission of God. This means, churches in their public ecclesiology ecumenical imaginations should position themselves as a unified institution with a divine public mission distinction to the state which draws its mandate from the voters. In this way the church can retain a more properly and effective prophetic voice.

While the public ecclesiology ecumenism as manifestation of institutionally defined churches in the public to perform religious rituals and response to specific social issues has not received adequate qualitative studies, there are many examples around the world. Before analyzing a case study of public ecclesiology in the Day of Prayer in Zambia, it is important to situate the argument within the changing global landscape of world Christianity.

3. The New Global Landscape of World Christianity

Public ecclesiology ecumenism does not happen in a vacuum. Its prophetic witness is being reshaped by a rapidly changing, highly interconnected, and complex global landscape. The burgeoning breakthrough in technologies, exceptional demographic shifts, economic upheavals, and social transformations are redesigning the expressions and manifestations of ecumenisms, ecclesiologies, and the practice of Christian faith in various contexts of the world. The increasingly globalized world has brought about observable and describable qualitative and quantitative changes in the fundamental character of Christianity around the world (Jenkins 2008; Irvin 2008; Kang 2010; Farhadian 2012; Kim and Kim 2016; Hunt 2016; Cabrera et al. 2017). Scholars are unanimous that the locus of Christian activity and dynamism has shifted from its dominance in Europe and North America into Latin America, Africa, and Asia (hereafter, the majority world) (Walls 1987; Bediako 1995; Sanneh 2003; Jenkins 2002, 2006, 2008; Bevans 2009). This has resulted in one of the major disruptions never before witnessed. A radically different brand of ecumenism and Christianity—or rather, ecumenisms and Christianities—are emerging in various contexts of world Christianity. Kwame Bediako (1995, p. 157), for instance, noted that the “southward shift of the church’s axis” has given Christianity “new centres of universality” and new forms of expression. As a result, new practices of ecumenisms and ecclesiologies are being forged which often collide, as they rapidly become lived realities for millions of believers around the world.

Lamin Sanneh (1995, p. 715) stresses, “Christianity has become a genuinely multicultural world religion, thriving profusely in the idioms of [many] languages and cultures, marked by a lively cross-cultural and interreligious sensibility.” Christianity in the majority world has become a powerful global force and a dominant religio-cultural phenomenon whose ecumenicity is no longer dependent on ecumenical imaginations in Western societies (Walls 1987; Bediako 1995; Sanneh 2003; Jenkins 2002, 2006; Irvin 2008; Bevans 2009; Farhadian 2012; Kim and Kim 2016; Hunt 2016; Cabrera et al. 2017). Scholars argue that majority world Christian ecumenisms and ecclesiologies are living realities more than confessional or doctrinal-theological reflections (Kung 2003). These new forms of ecumenisms and ecclesiologies seek to overcome religious relations of power and hierarchy that defined historical Christianity (Kaunda 2015a). There is a gradual recognition and appreciation that the power of diversity in Christianity is a new way of knowledge construction, especially as it relates to effective prophetic witness in the public spheres. The majority world Christians’ notion of ecumenicity or rather, ecumenicities are not only plural but also distinctive in their epistemologies and manifestations (Kaunda and Kaunda 2018a). They are not also a revision of indigenous or European forms of ecumenism, rather, new in relation to these religious systems and their ways of interpreting and interacting with the government and the world. Thus, “public ecclesiology ecumenism” is a multi-Christian site of dialogue and meaning-making grounded in dialectical social praxis directed

toward emancipation of humanity and all creation. Let me now explore public ecclesiology ecumenism in the context of the Day of Prayer in Zambia.

4. “Let Us Prayer”: Engaging Zambia’s Day of Prayer

The Day of Prayer is a national holiday in Zambia. It is observed by various church denominations including the mainline Protestant churches, the Roman Catholic Charismatics, and the Pentecostal churches. It has been argued that the Day of Prayer “has become a day that people from all walks of life gather to pray to God” (Lusakatimes.com 2017). The Prayer Day was declared and enacted into the law as a public holiday in 2015 by Zambian President Edgar Chagwa Lungu. It is held on 18th October every year—a day which is also a gazette public holiday, beginning in 2016. President Lungu felt necessary that the nation needed to pause in all activities, have a Sabbath rest to call on the name of the Lord in thanksgiving for God’s faithfulness, and make supplication for various needs of the nation. President Lungu believes he “was just used by God,” “to declare 18 October as a day for seeking the face of God” (Chipanta 2017). “The purpose is to dedicate the day to prayer, fasting, repentance and reconciliation” (Sumaili 2017, p. 2). The Day of Prayer is regarded as one of the practical ways for actualization of Zambia as a Christian nation. Zambia has constitutionally adopted Christianity as a framework to promote good governance. The nation “publicly acknowledge[s] the supremacy of [the Christian] God [A]lmighty over its affairs” (Sumaili 2017, p. 2). Thus, the Day of Prayer, “reminds us”, underscores President Lungu, “that we should recognize God’s supremacy in the affairs of our nation and our special gratitude should be given to him through prayer” (Rose and Moonga 2017). Zambia was officially declared a Christian nation in 1991 by the Second Republican President Frederick JT. Chiluba. It was enshrined in the preamble of the national constitution in 1996. Thus, the Day of Prayer is intended to function as a foundation for promoting “righteousness and justice, peace and prosperity, and co-existence in love” (National House of Prayer 2016, p. 3).

President Lungu ensured that the Day of Prayer is owned equally by all church denominations to demonstrate their equality and unity in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Day of Prayer’s success lies in the unity of the churches as they spearhead the arrangements which are supported by the government through the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance (MNGRA). The very act of participating together in the Day of Prayer is regarded as participation in God’s mission in Zambia (Mutungu 2018; Sihubwa 2018b; Temfwwe 2018; Kaunda and Kaunda 2018b). The Church Mother Bodies, namely: the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), and the Independent Churches Organization of Zambia (ICOZ) are part and parcel of the process. Each Mother Body seconds a member to sit on the organizing committee every year. The committee draws from various denominational participations. They bring the thoughts of their constituency to the table (Mutungu 2018). The government departments and all wings of the defense force fully participate. In various provinces, the planning committees draws up prayer points and assigns them to participants from various church leaders, government officials, and defense wings. Various church choirs play a critical role in leading worship. However, as already highlighted, the Zambian constitution’s explicit affirmation of Zambia as a “Christian nation” means that other religious groups are not part of this organizing committee. But are encouraged to organize their own prayers in keeping with their religious traditions (Sihubwa 2018a). The argument has been that “inviting Hindus and Muslims to the National Day of Prayer and Repentance can cause confusion in Zambia” (The Zambian Observer 2018). This confirms my argument elsewhere that while the constitution “upholds individual right to freedom of conscience, belief or religion” and prohibits religious-based discrimination, the act of enshrining Christianity in its preamble, discriminately reduced adherents of other religious groups into second class citizens. Hence, many Christians do not regard other religious traditions as viable partners in promoting the common good (Kaunda 2018a).

On the prayer day, many Zambian Christians with the exception of the Jehovah’s Witnesses (JWs) gather in public spaces such as stadiums as well as specific cathedrals to reflect and pray for the nation, for peace and reconciliation, harmony, and good governance. Each year the Day of Prayer is

organized around a specific theme. The initial theme in 2015 was “laying the foundation for smart Zambia, finding forgiveness, repentance, compassion and love in God”; in 2016 it was “promoting reconciliation, healing, celebrating unity in diversity”; in 2017 it was “repentance, promoting peace and reconciliation, consolidating national unity and diversity” and in 2018 it was “facing the future as a reconciled, united and prosperous nation under God’s guidance.” These themes are created to help various Christian denominations united as one voice in prayer to God so that the nation can experience God’s blessings and prosperity (Kaunda and Kaunda 2018b; Kaunda 2018b). In a way, the Day of Prayer ensures the focus is kept away from the polarizing political situations at times, so it remains focused on unity, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Attendance includes different political parties, Christian groups, Diplomatic service, individuals, and media among others (Sihubwa 2018a). In keeping with public ecclesiology ecumenism, the Day of Prayer helps the institutional churches to break out of their religiously fixed spaces to encounter each other through specific religious rituals such as prayer, singing, and preaching as they seek to respond to social issues. In this way, the Day of Prayer functions as a locus for public ecclesiology ecumenism as it encourages church denominations to relax and take their focus from doctrines and strengthen their expressions of unity through worship and faith in the One God through solidarity prayer and service to their nation.

Each day of prayer has an order of service with mainly three components, including worship and repentance; homily; and intercessory prayers. About 10 and 15 people, both lay and clergy from various church denominations, are given responsibility to pray for different supplications. The various activities in the order of service are assigned in a representative manner. For example, singing groups and choirs represent different ecumenical bodies and church denominations. Each year, in each province, a preacher is chosen from one of the ecumenical bodies to give a homily. Additionally, different churches second their ushers, counselors, and protocol personnel to manage the day (Sihubwa 2018a).

Since its inception in 2015, the themes of repentance and reconciliation have been underscored as outlined above. This is no surprise as tribal politics, violence, and the resultant tribalism continue to threaten an already fragile democracy and fluid national unity. In actual fact, the government has called the churches in Zambia to lead political dialogue and the reconciliation process. In a joint account, three ecumenical bodies acknowledged that “the nation is going through a difficult period economically, socially, and politically, and that some of the root causes of the social economic problems emanate from disunity, continued state of political tension, and the blatant lack of political will by our leaders to address the root causes of” these human challenges (Zambian Watchdog 2018). They argued that repentance and reconciliation “means a change of heart, attitude and behaviour” and seek to “live in peace, unity and harmony by promoting a culture of true dialogue, good governance, the rule of law and human rights” (Zambian Watchdog 2018).

However, the Day of Prayer’s notions of repentance and reconciliation are not underpinned on the principle of justice (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Rom 8:5). Hence, some civil society organizations have opposed the Day of Prayer arguing that the government has failed to address corruption and repression (Cheuka 2018). Peter Cheuka (2018) notes that most ordinary Zambian Christians appear to be despondent, losing interest and trust, and are questioning the value of the Day of Prayer for religious, cultural, social, political, and economic transformation. They argue that the churches have failed to take advantage of the platform because they lack a prophetic vision, political resistance, moral imagination, and socially conscious leadership. They have called for church leaders to create a political vision to help reclaim the Day of Prayer from politicians. This is the only way the churches can utilize the Day of Prayer as a critical space for addressing the challenges in the nation and promote alternative political culture and an ethic of accountability in use of political offices and public resources (Cheuka 2018; Kaunda 2018a). Hence, there have been a lot of negative sentiments on various social media platforms which aim at accusing some church leaders as traitors of public confidence and betrayers of God (Cheuka 2018; Kaunda 2018a). Indeed, repentance and reconciliation are not achievable without intentional engagement with issues of justice, equality and socio-political transformation. In other words, authentic repentance and reconciliation are not possible without a genuine repentance of

political evils and social injustices against the masses. This suggests that reconciliation is illusive in the context of pervasive corruption, social injustice, and poor governance which constantly undermine justice and the rule of law. The Day of Prayer is yet to critique, subvert, and promote resistance against state-sponsored systemic injustices and pervasive political corruption (Kaunda and Kaunda 2018b). This does not mean that prayers against corruption are not done. There have been prayers for justice and peace, as well as against corruption and political abuse. However, the Day of Prayer has not helped church leaders and their members from various denominations to collectively rearticulate their prophetic agenda for national transformation to challenge the corrupt political culture. There are some church leaders who perceive the Day of Prayer as an opportunity to realign the national political vision in the light of the word of God for the wellbeing of the people. They have argued that this is only possible if the churches unite as the body of Christ called to fulfil the common call of God in Zambia. Rev. Canon Robert Sihubwa (2018b) of the Anglican Church, one of the key organizers of the Day of Prayer, shared his reflective prayer for 2018 on a blog:

“ . . . The focus of the National Day of Prayer for 2018 shall work in the hands of God as John the Baptist who prepared the way. It will cast a light of reconciliation, unity and prosperity over the nation. This will be in all areas of life beyond politics. The nation will get on a path to reconcile with herself, her vision, her purpose. She will begin to reconcile her rich deposits in the earth and in her people with the current economic status, poverty and inequality. She will enter her phase to reconcile her position as a Christian Nation against evil practices of corruption, hatred, injustice and anything against Christ’s character. She will begin to pluck out any system, individuals or practices that stand in the path that shall be proclaimed. She will be awakened to start to fight for herself that none will soil or spoil her purpose. If we don’t do our part God will raise “Stones” to fulfil what He marked this nation for. Remember that God is capable to raising even an evil leader to make them His instrument if the righteous will not hear. He did it with Nebuchadnezzar whom He called “my servant” and rule us with the sting of a scorpion. May the Lord not bring us to that point (Jeremiah 27:6–11).”

Sihubwa (2018b) further argues:

“The prayers will cast upon the nation an urgency to begin pulling together against anything that is not in her interest, a sense of one voice and mobilization shall galvanize the atmosphere. Our prayer is that this one voice and mobilization will be for good with understanding, because it is coming (whether we like it or not) for good or bad the unifying of energies and voices will be opened by these prayers. The prayers will also facilitate an open path for the earth to begin to TESTIFY on behalf of Zambia concerning what the earth has been keeping in store for the nation until an opportune time. On a physical level I can say, it does not make sense that we share borders with Angola, they have oil and we do not? With Congo they have gold and we do not? With Botswana they have diamonds and we do not? This wealth is kept locked to enter in the right hands lest it be abused. All leadership must consecrate themselves both in intent and action, wash our hands that the Lord may allow the earth to testify for us in due season. The earth of Zambia should not refuse to give us the fullness of her strength. She once did so against Cain when he stained his hands with innocent blood and caused him to be a nomad. It began with warning that sin is at your door master, he neglected to master the sin until it overtook him (Gen 4:7). May Zambia master the knocking sin in all departments from family, community to government in Jesus’ name (Genesis 4:12).”

Sihubwa (2018b) believes, “the theme of this year’s prophecies that when the above indicated reconciliation enters the space, united voices and purpose are center stage with right priorities, then prosperity shall be unhindered. So, prosperity which we seek will be a result of reconciliation and unity. This must take place in families, the church, industry, media, politics, arts and entertainment,

government, and education.” He (Sihubwa 2018b) concludes by petitioning God “to look with mercy upon Zambia in this her time of need. Give her the two wings of a great Eagle that she may fly from the venom of the Dragon until she gives birth to child. Lord allow the earth to open her mouth to testify for Zambia as we join as one at your Altar for Your purposes to be fulfilled in the land in Jesus name (Rev 12:13–17).”

I have cited Sihubwa’s reflective prayer at length because it depicts the core psychology at work within most churches participating in the Day of Prayer. The reflective prayer is an example of how the Day of Prayer space could become a space where collective prophetic consciousness on social issues and how to engage with them could not only emerge but also take place. In this way, the Day of Prayer as a public space has potential to bring about a unique form of ecclesiology ecumenism embedded within the common struggle for the liberation of the nation from neo-colonization and political corruption, metaphorically depicted as “the venom of the Dragon”. The Day of Prayer space could become a symbolic space where churches as the body of Christ can “gives birth to child”—that is liberation and emancipation of the nation from the venom of neo-colonization, corruption and bad governance which have become political normative. In his reflection on the Day of Prayer Rev Lawrence Temfwe (2018, p. 1) lamented:

In our nation, we have too many leaders who attend these prayer meetings [Day of Prayer] with naive optimism that since they have prayed everything is now under control. Meanwhile, the vulnerable families have still not received their cash transfer, the sick has no medicines, the unemployed have no jobs and children of poor families are still not in school. Nehemiah had a solemn assembly on his own and as he cried and wept to God, a plan begun to take form in his mind about his own role in rebuilding the broken city walls and broken lives. The walls were built in record time under difficult opposition, and the people repented and promised to change their lives by obeying God’s word. As a people we have confidence in the goodness of God. For us to call a prayer assembly it is assumed we have seen evil and we have heard God asking us to engage it. Are we going to be doers of His commands or are we going to just feel good that we are a praying nation?

Temfwe regards the Day of Prayer as a concrete missional space that could enable churches and church leaders to go beyond naïve and spiritualized approach to prayer. For him the Day of Prayer demonstrates that prayer is intimately connected and implicated in concrete experiences of the marginalized and their search for social transformation (Temfwe 2018). This understanding can make ecumenical cooperation of the Day of Prayer distinctive to the previous interdenominational engagements. As Mutungu (2018) argues, the churches during the Day of Prayer embrace the common missional calling to concretely engage with social challenges in obedience to God through Jesus Christ. He stresses that with interdenominational services, when the Roman Catholic Church call for national prayer generally only fragment of Christians participate. Equally, the burgeoning of Pentecostalism and practically every other church tradition (Mutungu 2018). Even though substantial cross pollination have occurred ultimately only devotees participate in these respective engagements. The Day of Prayer has challenged that and has been welcomed by a cross section of church leaders and lay Christians in most mainline churches and Pentecostalism (Mutungu 2018).

The Day of Prayer orders of services usually include traditional leaders, government officials, defense wing and church leaders from most mainline churches including the Seventh Day Advents, African Initiated Churches (AICs) and Pentecostals. These have fully engaged in the process of the Day of Prayer. Indeed, many churches have found this space favorable and encourage their members to participate in large numbers (Kaunda 2017a; Kaunda and Kaunda 2018b). The question is how should the churches seeking to reposition themselves unifiedly as a public ecclesiology ecumenism relate to each, the world and the state?

5. Just before We Say 'Amen!': Disrupting the Day of Prayer

It can be deduced from the forgoing, the church in Zambia appears to be struggling to reorganize itself as a disruptive force for the Day of Prayer space. As [Sihubwa \(2018a\)](#) reflective prayer above seems to suggest, the church has not adequately sought for concrete ways to refashion the Day of Prayer into a new prophetic platform for the promotion of socially and politically engaged public ecclesiology ecumenism. As argued above as long as the church does not strategically and deliberately disrupt and take control of the politically engineered space of the Day of Prayer, she will not be able to redesign or reconfigure it as an alternative space for the articulating of a prophetic vision from subaltern voices. She will not be able to challenge the dominant structures of neo-colonialism with its neoliberal exploitation. As things stand, the church in Zambia has not adequately utilized the Day of Prayer as a prophetic space for resistance against political and social corruption and poor governance. This requires missiological commitment to regard the Day of Prayer as a prophetic space for serving human need and promoting justice and peace in word and deed. It appears that the churches have not yet prioritized missional responsibility to liberate, reclaim and reimagine the Day of Prayer as a site of struggle for political emancipation, economic liberation, gender equality, and sustainable social transformation. The focus has been on spiritually oriented call for a prayer that has no political implications for prophetic witness and struggle for liberation and social justice.

This form of prayer has been described by Harvey [Sindima \(1998, p. 180\)](#) as 'empty talk'. [Sindima \(1998, p. 180\)](#) explains that;

... a prayer that does not initiate one into some kind of action, a transformation, a conversion, is empty talk. At best such prayer is therapy, an emotional catharsis that makes one feel good because deep inner feelings have been verbalized. That cannot be talking to and listening to God, but a need to hear oneself.

The 'empty talk' prayer does not integrate prayer and political commitment to concrete social transformation through acts of resistance against political injustice and corruption. The church should make a shift in theology of prayer from merely spiritual epistemology to epistemology of the margins seeking to decolonize and liberate the Day of Prayer from neo-colonialism and political manipulation. This means that the church should give attention to everyday experiences of the margins within the oppressive and exploitive political context as foundational in the process of liberating, reclaiming, redesigning, and reconstituting the Day of Prayer. The Day of Prayer remains under the shackles of neo-colonial politics controlled by both religious fundamentalists and political elites who continue to covertly undermine the prophetic voice of the church. The church cannot afford to take a naïve approach to the Day of Prayer, rather it must seek to reflect on God's mission of justice, liberation, and emancipation in its prophetic witness during the Day of Prayer ([Kaunda and Kaunda 2018b](#)). It must seek to resist relations of power and critique dominant political ideologies, which covertly seek to utilize the Day of Prayer as a state apparatus for political domination of Zambians. Thus, if the Zambian church is to become a public ecclesiology ecumenism, it must situate itself as a social analytical tool for unmasking and rejecting neo-colonial ideology that "perpetuate values, practices, and interests that serve the state in ways which become so taken for granted that they form the citizens' very subjective systems of values and presupposition, and hence inform their thoughts and behaviour in subtle and penetrating ways" ([Hackley 2007, p. 147](#)). This also means that for the church to commit itself fully to God's life-giving mission, she ought to listen to the groaning and anguish of the margins and read the signs of the time so as to interpret rightly the mission of God in the Day of Prayer ([Kaunda 2017b](#)).

This also means public ecclesiology ecumenism as prophetic witness in the Day of Prayer should be situated as a critical space for reconstructing traditionally and denominationally-oriented ecclesiologies into habitus for critical conscious and socially informed ecumenical formation. It should invite various churches to participate in countering their own histories of mutual exclusion as a font of good feeling about their denominational identity. It should seek to inspire the churches to struggle

together around the common existential challenges and organize themselves around concrete hopes and faith in Christ for the future of the nation. In a way, their ecclesiological experiences that appeared fixed, monolithic, settled, and designed whole should always become disrupted, unsettled, formative, forming, dynamic, and fluid. Thereby, a unique form of ecumenism, a model for the formation of socially engaged public ecclesiology ecumenism begins to take shape in the vagaries of the believers' prayers for justice and social transformation.

This has potential to make the Day of Prayer a quiver of hope for bringing a shift from dystopic aspects of interdenominational prayer cooperation which has defined various churches in Zambia to a form "convivial ecumenism" which seeks to discern together the prophetic mandate of the church as the Body of Christ in Zambia (Temfwe 2018). Thus, the Day of Prayer presents a stage on which various churches could think together about new modes of missional and prophetic togetherness. This is not necessary about conciliar ecumenism or formation of a single unified church, rather an expression of lived multi-ecclesiologies made one in hostile public spaces for the sake of effective prophetic witnessing to the public good. I must stress that there is still a need for qualitative investigation on how the Day of Prayer creates an atmosphere, a mood, a sensitivity, and/or a deep desire and longing to work together and recognize the authenticity of each other as expressions of the Body of Christ in their own right in between the Days of Prayers. Nonetheless, it is still safe to argue that if a deliberate and genuine convivial imagination would be or was created in each Day of Prayer, the possibility of sustained ecumenical resilience embedded in a sense of togetherness and collective security in confronting the common sociopolitical enemy is likely to emerge in the process. In this way, the Day of Prayer could become an ecclesiological apparatus for unmasking and disrupting the flow of socio-political structural evil in the nation.

This implies that the Day of Prayer should take the question of politics and religious abuse at the center of concerns. Public ecclesiology ecumenism cannot disrupt structural evil without first disrupting the commonly held view of the Day of Prayer as an instrument that can neutrally shape socio-political attitudes, miraculously prosper the nation, and supernaturally reorient the nation and the state towards the promotion of the common good (Temfwe 2018). Public ecclesiology ecumenism will help the Day of Prayer to challenge the status quo that manifests in the logic of subjugation, manipulation, corruption, exploitation, and abuse of religion. It would also help to critic religious conservatism with its cooperation with political elites to foster their common interest in maintaining the neo-colonial status quo.

6. Conclusions

This article analyzed how various churches in Zambia could utilize the Day of Prayer as prophetic space for political engagement with concrete issues of public concern. It argues that churches need to reposition themselves as bearers of the divine mandate in distinction to the government which draws its mandate from the voters so as to retain their effective prophetic voice in the nation. It stresses that the Day of Prayer space has potential to become a site of struggle against political corruption and authentic expression of visible unity of the churches through worship and public witness. Already, Zambian churches manifest in the Day of Prayer as public ecclesiology ecumenism which is not institutionally defined, yet performs specific religious rituals such as prayer, singing, preaching, and collectively searching for ways of engaging in politics. The article concludes that the Day of Prayer should be liberated, reclaimed, and reconstituted as a space for public missiological struggle for emancipation, restructuring of political order, and social transformation. In other words, the church through the Day of Prayer should seek to become more unified, dynamic, and socially and politically engaged for the sake of the public good.

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