

# The Study of Catholic Church History in Zambia's Past 50 Years

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## Abstract

This article explores the trends that have characterised the study of Zambian Church history with specific reference to the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia to commemorate the 50 years of existence of *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, a journal dedicated to themes of Church History and the history of Christianity within the African and South African context. Drawing on a qualitative case study research design that utilises document analysis, the article focuses on the scholars and major themes that have dominated the study of the history of the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia. It shows that the study of Roman Catholic Church history has been dominated by male Zambian scholars, with a few notable female scholars. The article further shows that the major themes that have preoccupied the scholarly focus on the history of the Roman Catholic Church range from its growth, Pentecostalism's influence, and Zambia's declaration as a nation, enduring Catholic church engagement with the state to the church's contribution to national development. The article argues that the scholars and the themes in Catholic Church history in Zambia point to the growth of church history as a field of study that requires sustained scholarly engagement.

**Keywords:** Church history; Catholic Church; approach; trends; Zambia

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## Introduction

The birth of the Church in Zambia is tied to the British occupation of the territory, which resulted in the establishment of missions abroad in the 1820s. The missionary pioneering work in Zambia is attributed to David Livingstone, who crossed the Zambezi in 1853 to explore what today is Zambia. The accounts of Livingstone's travels contributed to the arrival of Europeans to the region. Livingstone died in Zambia in 1873. Different missionary societies entered the territory following his death in Chitambo (in Central Zambia). For example, by 1945, eighteen missionary societies had established themselves in the area (Snelson 1974, 10). The first of these missionaries was Frederick Stanley Arnot, who belonged to the Plymouth Brethren missionary society. Arnot settled among the Lozi-speaking people in western Zambia in December 1882.

Arnot was followed by numerous other missionary societies, such as the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, Primitive Methodists, and White Fathers and Jesuits (Roman Catholic mission groups), among others (Henkel 1989; Carmody 2001). Since then, Christianity has grown in the country, as evidenced by the dominance of Christianity in the religious demographics of the country. The Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats) estimates that Christians constitute 95.5 per cent of the population (Office of the International Religious Freedom 2021). The majority of the 95.5 per cent are Protestants (75.3 per cent), while the 20.2 per cent are Catholics.

The foregoing growth and trajectory of the Church in Zambia have been of interest to different scholars. However, there has been no attempt to map out a comprehensive analysis of what has preoccupied scholarship on church history in the country. This article, therefore, explores the scholars' writing on the subject (of Catholic Church history in Zambia) and the major themes that have dominated the study of Zambian church history. This focus on Church history in Zambia serves to mark the 50-year celebration of the existence of the *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae*, which is dedicated to themes of Church History and the history of Christianity within the African and South African context. The interest in focusing on church history in Zambia is anchored on the Church's active engagement in the life of the nation, including the struggle for independence, democracy, and social justice.

Since the history of the Church in Zambia is characterised by many histories, this article focuses on the history of the Catholic Church in Zambia in the last 50 years, a period that falls in post-independence Zambia, precisely the 1970s to date. In doing so, the article seeks to not only commemorate the 60 years of the country's independence but also draw lessons on what has preoccupied the discipline in the 50 years of church history in Southern Africa. It unfolds by providing a brief description of the context and the methods before exploring the themes in the study of Catholic Church history in Zambia.

## Brief Description of the Context

Politically, Zambia became an independent nation from Britain in 1964 with a multi-party democracy up to 1972, when the system changed to a one-party participatory democracy. The 1970s were characterised by an economic downturn. By the 1980s, economic hardships were widespread in the country, such that the partial removal of government subsidies in 1986 resulted in riots sparked off by food shortages in the cities (Kelly 1991). In 1991, Kenneth Kaunda was defeated by Frederick Chiluba of the Movement for Multiparty Democracy, making the country revert to a multiparty system of democratic governance that exists to date. Besides the political developments, the 1990s were characterised by the process of economic restructuring, which negatively impacted Zambia's social life. The country pursued rapid economic liberalisation policies, which resulted in the privatisation of national and parastatal companies and led to the retrenchment of many workers from formal employment (Saluseki 2000).

In terms of the developments in the Church, the past 50 years are characterised by different missionary groups establishing their foot in the country, as seen through the formation of the Christian umbrella bodies. These include the Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC), which was established in 1963 to administer all dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia. The ZEC has since rebranded to become the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB). Other Church umbrella bodies include the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), which was established in 1945. The CCZ is the administrative body of mainline protestant churches. The Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ) is another body that was established in 1964 to superintend evangelical churches. The Independent Churches of Zambia (ICOZ) was established in 2001 and caters to charismatic churches, ministries, fellowships, and centres. The Bishops Council of Zambia is the newer Pentecostal church umbrella body. Additionally, the last 50 years have witnessed the growth of Pentecostalism with the declaration of the country as a Christian nation by former President Dr F.T.J. Chiluba on 29th December 1991, a declaration which has had numerous implications on the Church in Zambia.

## Research Design and Methods

The article draws on findings from a qualitative case study research design that relied on desk review. A case study was used because the intent was to explore a phenomenon in a real-life setting, as guided by Yin (2003). As recommended by Merriam (1998), the case study research design utilises diverse data collection methods. In this case, the study utilised document review to provide a more complete picture of scholarship on Catholic Church history in Zambia. As such, data sources included published literature on the subject in Zambia, as sourced through Google Scholar, and library resources chosen based on availability. Since the aim of the article was to map out the scholarly work done by scholars on the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia, the search for data was limited to secondary sources of data as opposed to primary sources such as minutes of the Catholic Church in Zambia.

Given that the intent of analysis of data in qualitative research and in case study designs, in particular, is to uncover emerging themes and the underlying meaning, common themes in the data were sought to generate an interpretation of the data (Barker et al. 2002, 219–244). Practically, this entailed generating and applying codes to data and identifying and reporting the themes with the overall aim of drawing lessons from the case (Mwale 2022).

## Themes in Catholic Church History in Zambia

Scholarly writing on Catholic Church history reflects a trend of scholarship being done by Catholic clergy and later non-Catholic clergy; as such, it is dominated by male scholars. These include missionaries and other scholars in the field. The themes that have been the focus range from the development of the Catholic Church in Zambia, her involvement in education, health care, politics, and the impact of Pentecostalism on the Church in the country.

## Historical Aspects of the Catholic Church

The historical development of the Catholic Church in Zambia has been captured by many scholars, with Catholic-specific studies concentrating on providing a general history of the Church. For example, Hinfelaar (2004) documented a comprehensive history of the Catholic Church in Zambia from its inception in 1895 until 1995 at the turn of 100 years. Hugo Hinfelaar came to Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, in 1958. Hinfelaar worked in Northern and Central Provinces as a Missionary of Africa (White Father) (Mwale and Chita 2021). Hinfelaar traces the 100 years of the growth of the Catholic Church from its foundation in 1895 and shows the early missionary work carried out by the White fathers in northern Zambia in the 1890s, Jesuits in southern Zambia in 1905 and the Conventional Franciscans (on the Copperbelt) and Capuchin Franciscans (in Southern and Western Zambia) in the 1930s. Hinfelaar further shows that missionary activities in Zambia continued after the Second World War and the country's independence in 1964, resulting in the increase of missionary societies and the consequent establishment of local administrative structures of the church.

O'Shea (1986) trailed the development of the Catholic Church in Zambia through his study of the church in Zambia's Copperbelt region. Other missionary scholars have focused on the history of individual Catholic congregations and orders. These include Murphy (2003), who has traced the history of the Jesuits in Zambia, and Cumming et al. (2003), who has provided a history of Francis Mazzieri, a Conventual Franciscan. O'Sullivan (2014) has documented the history of the Capuchins in Zambia, while Coyne (1970), Lane (1991), and Murphy (2003) have explored the history of the Jesuits in Zambia. Others, like Carmody (1992; 2002), have concentrated on specific aspects of the Catholic church, such as Catholic education in the country.

## **Pentecostalism and the Catholic Church**

The historical life of the Catholic Church in Zambia is also linked to Pentecostalism. To start with, Zambia's declaration as a Christian nation is an outward manifestation of the influence of Pentecostalism in the country. This is an aspect that has also been studied from the Catholic perspective. In this regard, scholars like Phiri (2003, 407) highlight the reaction of the Catholic Bishops to the declaration by maintaining that adequate consultation before the declaration should have been done, given the democratic system of governance in the country. Mukuka (2014) also affirms that Zambia's declaration as a Christian nation by Chiluba in 1991 resulted in many conflicts among the Church umbrella bodies because of dissensions among the three organisations (Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), and Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC)).

Similar observations were made in 2016 when the government created a Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs (MNGRA). The ZCCB asked searching questions about the relevance of the MNGRA during the period when Zambia remained economically challenged. Together with CCZ, the ZCCB noted that the ministry had the potential to compromise the Church-State relationship as the state would begin to react favourably only to Christian denominations or religious groupings which are supportive of the government. They were also concerned that the creation of a dedicated religious cabinet ministry was not at all a priority for a government that was struggling with uncontrollable debt and overblown expenditure, as this was not going to help fiscal discipline (Mwale, Chita, and Cheyeka 2020). This demonstrates the consistency of the Catholic Church in setting the tone for Church-state relations in Zambia.

Other studies have shown the impact of Pentecostalism on the Catholic Church. These include Udelhoven (2010) and Cheyeka (2009), who traced the history of charismatic movements in the country. Muyuni and Cheyeka (2020) have also shown how some Catholic youths converted to Pentecostalism in their search for prophecy and prosperity gospel preached by Pentecostal preachers. These studies linking Pentecostalism and the Catholic Church demonstrate how the growth of Pentecostalism has changed the religious landscape in the country. At the same time, the studies show how the influence of Pentecostalism in the political life of Zambia has given the role related to safeguarding church-state relations to the Catholic Church.

## **The Church and Education**

The past 50 years have also traced the Catholic Church's presence in education, including the recently expanded mandate in the provision of higher education. Notable scholarship is attributed to Brendan Carmody, a Jesuit priest. Prior to taking up a research associateship position at University College and Visiting Professor at St. Mary's University in London, Carmody worked as a secondary school teacher and later a lecturer at the University of Zambia. Carmody (2000) documented the origins or development of the Catholic Church's involvement in Zambia's secular schooling

system using a secularisation lens (Cited in Mwale 2020, 2). Carmody (2011) also traced the provision of a value-laden education by the Catholic Church for over 100 years of her existence in the country. Carmody has also explored the contributions and challenges encountered by the Catholic Church in providing primary and secondary education (Carmody 2001; 2004; 2007; 2015; 2016) (Cited in Mwale 2022, 2).

Carmody's pioneering work on Catholic education has been extended by other scholars, such as Mwale (2021; 2022), who have explored the growth of Catholic higher education. Others like Mwimanenwa (2012) have explored the Catholic Church's contribution towards the promotion of literacy in Zambia. These studies on education as linked to the Catholic Church point to the roles of the Church in the educational sector. The Church's involvement in education provision has gone hand in hand with health care provision. For example, Munalula (2012) focused on the healing ministry of the Catholic church in Lusaka.

### **Catholic Church and Public Life**

Besides education, the involvement of the Catholic Church in public life in different spheres has also been studied. In the political life of the country, studies have been done to map out how the Church has shaped the political growth of the country. For example, after the 1970s, when the Zambian economy drastically weakened, the Church acted as a pressure group through the provision of checks and balances to the UNIP government using its media. To this end, Marja Hinfelaar (2008) traces the role of the Catholic Church in the political sphere from 1972 to 1992 using the example of archbishops Elias Mutale and Emmanuel Milingo. Others like Simutowe (2011) have investigated the role of the Catholic Church in the 2011 general elections and showed that the Church, among other roles, was involved in election monitoring of governance issues in the country.

Catholic Church involvement in public life has further been extended towards other spheres. These include public health and social justice. For example, the Catholic Church's role in addressing the xenophobic attacks involving refugees from Rwanda (and other nations) was studied by Mwale and Chita (2017). The duo shows that the Catholic Church hosted the refugees and condemned violence using different modalities, such as pastoral letters and homilies. Mwale (2020) further examined the Catholic Based Organisations' roles in mitigating the challenges encountered by migrant youths amid forced migration in Zambia. The Catholic Based Organisations provided pastoral care and empowerment initiatives and advocated for the youth. These roles were a response to the livelihood challenges of the refugee youth population, which included limited access to education, health, child and forced marriages, and discrimination. The work of Catholic Based Organisations in the social sphere is driven by religious knowledge or familiarity with doctrines, rituals, and practices of friendliness that constituted their religious capital.

In addressing the Cholera outbreaks of 2017/18, the Catholic Church responded by offering public health education and implementing safety and prevention measures. The

Church further emphasised that Cholera was both a public health and social justice matter requiring lasting solutions (Mwale and Chita 2020). Therefore, the Catholic Church sided with the poor and suspended public worship and gatherings, including certain liturgical practices. For example, using handshakes to exchange the sign of peace and participating in funeral rituals was halted. Similarly, the advent of COVID-19 brought the Church into the limelight. Mwale and Chita (2023) show how the Church addressed the pandemic. Like in previous epidemics, the duo shows that the Archdiocese aligned Catholic worship amidst COVID-19 to the guidelines provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Ministry of Health.

Other scholars who have explored the Catholic Church and epidemics and/or pandemics include Bett, Ndunge, Mathuva, and Njiraini (2023), who show that scholarly attention on the impact of COVID-19 on studies have begun focussing on the effects that the pandemic had on religious communities, such as Catholic religious Sisters. Accordingly, they investigate the perceptions of Catholic Sisters in Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia on the impact of the pandemic on individual and communal ministries. They conclude that despite the fear and uncertainties, COVID-19 gave the Sisters some opportunities for self-evaluation for the good of the social ministries. These studies, which depict the contribution of the Church in addressing disease (and pandemic), point to the continued stride of the Catholic Church to render service. This is also in line with Catholic social teaching, which emphasises human dignity and the need to be on the side of the needy to mitigate dehumanising situations (Compendium of the social doctrine of the church 2005).

### **Gender and the Catholic Church**

Other studies have taken a gendered dimension. For example, Machila and Chuulu (2010) examined the participation of women in the Church and showed how dioceses lacked accountability for gender equality. The duo showed that although women were the majority in the Church, they were hardly in the leadership and governance structures of the dioceses. Machila and Chuulu further argued that dioceses had practices and teachings which restricted the contributions of women to reproduction and caring for the sick in the church and community. Hinfelaar (1991;1994) points to significant women's roles in the Church as he represents them as key players in the development of the church and in religio-cultural heritage. As argued by Mwale and Chita (2023), Hinfelaar's attention to capturing the place of women in Catholic Church history in Zambia shows the critical contributions of women to religio-cultural heritage.

Other studies with a gendered dimension admit that women's voices are often submerged in wider accounts of the Catholic Church in the country. For example, Mwale (2021) raises this concern in her study of the contributions of rural women towards the care of our common home using women's trajectories in sustainable agriculture. She argues that while the worldwide Christian community had accepted that women's rights are part of social justice, and ecology had particularly become a priority for the Jesuit religious order, seen through their initiative at Kasisi Agriculture Training

Centre in Zambia, the voices of women's experiences and contributions in this initiative remain unheard. In the same vein, the role of women in sustainable development (Mwale 2022) and the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Mwale 2023) were examined from this gendered perspective.

## Making Meaning of the Focus of Scholarship on Catholic Church History in the Past 50 Years

The foregoing themes on scholarship on Catholic Church history reveal that the study of Catholic Church history in the past 50 years is largely dominated by mapping out the history of the development of the Church. This historical account is largely provided by the male Catholic Missionary personnel (or clergy). This can be understood in relation to the quest for the Catholic priests or clergy to document the work of the Church in areas where they have served. It is also attributed to the desire to document the individual histories of congregations in the country. Given that the growth and development have been covered in scholarship, it requires sustained inquiry and documentation to document the contemporary history of the Catholic Church. This history can be captured by more Zambian scholars, given that the missionary era of the Church is long gone.

Additionally, the contribution of the Catholic Church to education also dominates scholarship. Although mainly captured by Catholic clergy (Carmody 1991; 2000; Carmody 2001; 2004; 2007; 2015; 2016; 2011), other Zambian scholars have emerged to continue the examination of the Catholic Church provision of education (Mwimanenwa 2012; Mwale, 2020; 2021). The preoccupation with Catholic education is partly attributed to the experiences and track record of the Church in the sector. Catholic education has since come to be appreciated and valued, so a lot of people will openly state that they want their child to attend a Catholic school. To this effect, the involvement of the Catholic Church at the lower and higher levels of education, including tertiary education, has been studied. What requires a thorough analysis is the sustainability of Catholic education in the context of limited funding and the quest to uphold Catholic identity in the provision of education in a fast-changing society.

The focus on the Catholic Church and public life also attests to how the Church has been part of Zambian public life since its beginning. The Church has sided with the poor by seeking to address social ills. The socio-economic and political developments have all required the critical voice of the Church. This is aligned with Catholic Social teachings, which give the Church the responsibility to foster social justice.

Studied themes also show the writers' preferences on topics covered in Catholic Church history in the country. For example, Hinfelaar's inclusion of women in the development of the Catholic Church depicts his option for minorities in the context of a patriarchal history. Similarly, the interests of Machila and Chulu (2010) and Mwale (2021; 2023) cannot be detached from the quest to raise the voices and contributions of women in the



Catholic Church from a feminist perspective. These studies with a gender dimension in the Catholic Church closely align with the concerns of African feminism, which call for the acknowledgement of women in building the African continent (Salo 2001). As such, it affirms the active roles played by women in different African contexts, including in the Catholic Church. The interest in Catholic education also shows the educational background or occupation of scholars writing on the subject as educators (as in the case with Carmody) and products of Catholic education.

Most importantly, the studies on Catholic Church history, while being published on numerous platforms, have also been published in *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae* (Mwale 2020). This signifies the important role played by the journal in the past 50 years, especially by keeping the heritage of the Church's history in Southern Africa.

## Conclusion

This article explored the themes that have preoccupied scholarship on Catholic Church history over the past 50 years. Since the study of Catholic Church history is mainly dominated by Catholic clergy or priests and later the lay people, the article concludes that the past 50 years reveal a shift in the scholars who have studied Catholic Church history in Zambia. It shows that besides the study of Catholic church history being dominated by male Zambian scholars, it has also attracted notable female scholars. The study of Catholic Church history in Zambia is further a product of the changing trends in the life history of the church over time.

Based on the fact that the major themes that have dominated the study of the Catholic Church's history in Zambia include the growth of the church, Pentecostalism's growth and its effect on the Catholic Church, Zambia's declaration as a Christian nation and enduring engagement with the government and church's contribution to national development, the article concludes that these themes reflect the trajectory of the Catholic Church over time. At the same time, these themes reveal the writers' preferences and personalities over time. The article further concludes that the main approaches used in the study of Catholic Church history are historical, theological, sociological, and feminist approaches, given the nature of the themes that were studied.

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