

Mining in Partnership

An Empowerment Agenda

Esther Reed examines the tensions between benefit and damage to local communities in mining operations, and goes on to explain the function of the Mining in Partnership initiative in resolving these tensions. She then looks at the relevant theological and biblical insights and the problem of political dysfunction. She concludes by looking at the challenge to the churches.

Mining in Partnership: An Empowerment Agenda is an initiative with and for seminary students, priests, church pastors and other leaders who want to think theologically about mining, and about how to prepare theologically, spiritually and practically for engagement with the industry. *Mining in Partnership* comprises resources for teaching and reflection that are intended to inform, support and encourage Christian leaders in places where mining is taking place or might be planned.

A range of experts have already contributed 'Further Reading' that comprises teaching resources, articles, prayers and liturgy, and represents a diversity of perspectives and views.

All may be viewed at <http://www.mininginpartnership.org>
Please make contact if you would like to contribute too.

Blessing or Curse?

It cannot be assumed that countries with large mineral deposits should consider themselves blessed. Mining activity within a country does not always result in local sustainable businesses, education and health infrastructure, and other forms of investment that contribute to a nation's wellbeing.

'The natural resource curse' is a familiar phrase that the Archbishop of Canterbury used during a Day of Reflection on Mining with the industry and church leaders. When years of mining produce nothing for local communities in the long term, the blessings of the earth's natural resources do not sow the seeds for future development but bring harm and misery. '[T]here has to be a change', he said 'in the endless cycle in a country where the first discovery of minerals or hydro-carbons leads to inflation, followed by deferred

hope and impatience, and then by corruption and division and, finally, by disappointment and failure.' (Ecumenical Day of Reflection on Mining, 7 October 2014 p. 7)

Natural Resource Wealth

Some countries and regions benefit greatly from their natural resource wealth. Natural resources provide critically important sources of revenue generation for many countries. Families and individuals might want the jobs, spin-off businesses, and infrastructure that mining can bring.

Every context is different. Too often communities have been afflicted by poisonous pollution from mine sites and plagued with other problems arising from mining. In too many places the environmental impact of mining has been devastating, with water supplies contaminated and local bio-systems disrupted. Too often the social and cultural effects





A fisherman pulls in his nets from the Gulf of Paria on Trinidad's west coast, polluted by intensive offshore petroleum exploitation

Picture Fritz Burgher

of large-scale mining have been damaging to local community life. In such contexts, church leaders sometimes feel compelled to stand with their people against the power of transnational mining corporations, and even against the will of governments.

Some will report more positive experiences. Not every community reports environmental devastation, disastrous relocations, livelihoods adversely affected, and poverty after mine-closure. Some report economic benefit to local communities from mining, diverse training opportunities for young people, environmental restitution, and ways of using infrastructure associated with the mine for socio-economic development.

Let the Facts Speak

The *Mining in Partnership: An Empowerment Agenda* (MiP) resources for teaching and reflection are written in commitment to letting the facts speak about the realities of mining as they impact on miners, their families and other local people, tribal and other local traditions, the land, livestock, flora and fauna, other native species, and so on, as well as to standing in solidarity with local

people who decide they must resist large-scale mining in their area.

The challenge is to think about mining and related questions of social justice and environmental protection from the promises of the Bible and good news of Jesus Christ. In particular, it is written variously with, in gratitude to, alongside and for those deeply involved in struggles to:

- address why mining in developing countries so often fails to benefit local communities in the long term
- support faith group leaders of the future in developing theologies of mining and ethics of good business necessary to support entrepreneurship and start-up businesses that will continue after the life of the mine
- eliminate bad mining practices that kill people, destroy landscapes, forests, agricultural land and wildlife habitats, pollute water supplies for future generations, and more
- campaign against corruption and human rights abuses.

These MiP resources for teaching and reflection represent merely one collaborative initiative amongst

many to resource seminaries and local church leaders in their engagement with the mining industry. I hope that there will be many more.

Mining: Definition and Scope

Mining is the removal of non-renewable minerals, metals and other resources from the earth. Precious metals and minerals, ores and clay, coal, gravel and coal, potash, rock salt, and much more, are extracted using equipment that ranges from huge bulldozers and excavators to the small-scale, rudimentary equipment of artisanal miners.

The world has needed the products of mining since civilisations began: flint for knives and weapons in the Stone Age, ores for pots and pigments, gold and silver for coinage in the ancient world, copper and lead for axes, arrow-heads, cauldrons and bells, and more. Today, every cola or beer can, mobile phone, saucepan, length of water piping, and so much more, contains the products of mining.

People in 'developed' countries bear a huge responsibility to live more simply and consume less of the world's finite metals and mineral resources. Inequalities of income and

wealth between those who consume most of the products of mining and those involved in their production are vast, and must be addressed by Christian leaders. As Pope Francis wrote: 'Inequity affects not only individuals but entire countries; it compels us to consider an ethics of international relations. A true "ecological debt" exists, particularly between the global north and south, connected to commercial imbalances with effects on the environment, and the disproportionate use of natural resources by certain countries over long periods of time.' (*Laudato Si*, §51)

Care of God's Earth

Responsible care of God's earth demands respect for all creation. God created the world to yield harvests of grain and fruit, grasses and leaves, flora and fauna, animals, birds, and fish, and also harvests of metals and minerals. Biotic (relating to living organisms) and abiotic (physical rather than biological) creation were alike created by God. All creation praises God. When some of the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke his disciples for shouting with a

loud voice as he entered Jerusalem, he replied: "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out" (Luke 19:40). These stones would have had a mineral composition given by God, a long history on the earth, with their own stories to tell of the passing millennia.

Today, human beings face unprecedented challenges about the use of natural resources. Technological advances mean that metals and minerals can now be removed from the earth in huge quantities. The shocking reality is that, as the Society for Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration Foundation estimates, every person in a typical developed country will have provided for them during their lifetime 212 lbs of phosphate rock for fertilizers and animal feed supplements, 66 lbs of aluminium (bauxite) used in buildings, tin cans, cars and aircraft, 13 lbs copper used in buildings, electrical and electronic parts, plumbing and transportation, 11 lbs of lead used mostly for batteries in cars and other transportation, 7 lbs zinc used to

make metals rust-resistant, in paint, rubber and skin creams, 6lbs manganese used to make almost all steels for construction, machinery and transportation, 330lbs iron ore to make cars, truck, planes, and so on.¹

Industry-Scale Mining

Industry-scale mining is not likely to stop any time soon given these realities. Yet many questions must be asked. Mining disasters in the past leave a painful, poisonous legacy. 'The export of raw materials to satisfy markets in the industrialized north has caused harm locally, as for example in mercury pollution in gold mining or sulphur dioxide pollution in copper mining.' (*Laudato Si*, §51) Political realities today embroil mining, and the export and trading of metals and minerals, in some of the most intractable problems of justice in national politics and international relations.

Christian people across the world bear differing responsibilities for the care of God's earth. One purpose of our website is to help us learn better from one another about what respect for the earth means today given the



'Technological advances mean that metals and minerals can now be removed from the earth in huge quantities'

Scout Moor Quarry
Lancashire

Photo © Copyright Paul Anderson

huge demands for metals and minerals, and to do this alongside questions about sustainable economic development and poverty alleviation. A related purpose is to help equip pastors at mine sites to think and pray about their particular context, and to act in a Christ-like manner as the challenges of each new day unfold.

We concentrate on large-scale mining operations undertaken by state-owned, national or transnational companies. The MiP resources for teaching and reflection focus especially on relationships between transnational mining companies and local communities. Small-scale mining has been expanding rapidly, however. At the end of the 20th century, the International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that small-scale mining was expanding ‘often uncontrollably in many developing countries, employing large numbers of women and children in dangerous conditions and generating a workplace fatality rate up to 90 times higher than mines in industrialized countries’. Small-scale mining can be dangerous, dirty and damaging to the local environment.²

Mining in the Bible

Mining is an ancient practice, the practice and products of which are mentioned in the Bible. (Gen 2:11-12; Gen 4:22) Abraham’s servant gave jewellery of silver and of gold to Rebekah when wooing her for Isaac (Genesis 24:52). The Israelites were to take silver and gold jewellery from the Egyptians (Exodus 3:21). The Ark of the Covenant was overlaid with gold (Exodus 25:11). David and Solomon used the products of mining, gold, silver, bronze and iron, to make and adorn the Temple (I Chronicles 29:1-5). Each gave precious stones along with blue, purple and crimson fabrics, and

chains like necklaces, beautified and added lustre to the House of God (2 Chronicles 3:14-16). Jewels bedeck Solomon’s bride (Song of Solomon 1:10). Isaiah likens God’s favour to a bride adorned with jewels (Is. 61:10).

The Book of Job compares the quest for wisdom with human searching in the depths of the earth for the things of highest value:

*There is a mine for silver
and a place where gold is refined.
Iron is taken from the earth,
and copper is smelted from ore.
Mortals put an end to the darkness;
they search out the farthest recesses
for ore in the blackest darkness.
Far from human dwellings they cut a shaft,
in places untouched by human feet;
far from other people they dangle and sway.
The earth, from which food comes,
is transformed below as by fire;
lapis lazuli comes from its rocks,
and its dust contains nuggets of gold.
(Job 28:1-6, NIV)*

Miners seem to have much to teach the religious about searching for the beautiful, recognising what matters, separating objects of little value from the priceless, and being prepared to sacrifice physical comfort, and more, for things of worth. Extremes of human endeavour in the depths of the earth, and the joy of discovery, are described with extraordinary clarity. Nothing earthly compares to the wisdom of God but the experiences of mining and refining convey something of its meaning.

In the New Testament, John resorts to the imagery of precious stones when extolling the beauty of the New Jerusalem:

The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, clear as glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase,

the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, transparent as glass. (Rev. 21:18-21, ESV).

The most beautiful treasures of the earth are received from God in grateful thanks, offered back in worship, and used as similes to speak of the very presence of the divine.

The Bible says little if anything about how these metals and gems were actually mined — though archaeological evidence suggests that gold, iron ore, copper and precious gems were typically mined by slaves or prisoners of war under dreadful conditions.³ This seeming failure to yearn for the liberation of all slaves and not only the Israelites in Egypt is hard to accept. What is clear, however, is that undue love of the products of mining is associated with idolatry and ungodliness. Jewellery

taken from Egypt was fashioned by Aaron into the idolatrous golden calf (Exodus 32:1-6). The prophet Ezekiel describes Israel’s faithlessness as whoring with jewels (Ezekiel 16:15). In the New Testament, Peter warns against braiding the hair with jewels for fear of detracting from inward beauty (1 Peter 3:3).

Like many issues that we could put to the Bible, its pages give few straightforward and unambiguous answers. Instead the Bible yields directions of teaching. Three directions can be discerned from the above.

1. *Dedicated to God:* the primary context in which to think about the products of mining is worship. The products of mining find their fullest destiny when adorning the temple and helping to direct the eyes of the people heavenward. Worship is the activity in which the relationship between God, his people, and the world more generally, is experienced with special intensity and meaning. Only when offered first-and-foremost

to God in worship, for his glory, are the products of mining rightly understood. The challenge for Christian people today is to relearn how to derive guidance from this directing of all things to God in worship.

2. *Justice in the workplace:* the demands of divine justice apply to all workplaces, institutions and business practices. Despite the apparent neglect of the realities for the workers of mining in the bible, it is clear enough that the direction of biblical teaching toward justice, the universal demands of divine justice upon all nations and peoples, full human dignity in mutuality, compassion, and so much more, are inclusive of all workers. Words from the prophet Amos thunder down the ages (Amos 8:4-6).

3. *Idolatry:* the products of mining are associated not only with worship of the true God but idolatry too. Like the love of money being at the root of evil (1 Timothy 6:10), due love of the products of mining can lead to sin. When greed becomes a quasi-religion that displaces love of God and neighbour, all kinds of evil result (Matthew 6:24).

Mining Today

It's a truism that what is not grown must be mined. Yet human societies have needed the products of mining since ancient times. Today, few of the essential items that many people use everyday would be available without mining. Tarmacadam roads, buildings of concrete and steel, phones, computers, batteries and toothpaste, the cans that contain some of our foods, spectacles, fertilisers, electricity, sports and medical equipment, all contain the products of mining.

Many Christian people around the world could live more simply. Few could live entirely without the products of industry-scale mining. Mining is not about to stop any time soon.

Recycling alone and processing efficiencies are not likely to meet global demands for the products of mining, however. Mining is set to continue — including in more and more remote places, and perhaps in unstable social and political contexts. It is getting harder to find and develop major new mineral resources. Mining is increasingly being undertaken in places that are socially, politically and environmentally challenging.

Responsible companies typically want their operation in a region to benefit local communities. Not all companies are the same in this respect. The desire for a good reputation internationally and nationally, however, combined with the reality that poor relations with local communities is poor business, means that responsible mining houses are increasingly keen to ensure that mining is done *with* local communities not *to* them, in ways that benefit all.

Volatility in markets that buy and sell the products of mining bring opportunities for some and devastation for others. The need for expert scrutiny of the key issues in the international and transnational regulation of the mining industry is pressing. Prophetic voices are needed amongst politicians and policy-makers concerned with international conventions to prohibit and, where appropriate, govern and regulate the mining of minerals in deep-sea ocean beds and the Antarctic, to update and enforce international environmental and human rights standards, financial regulations, and more.



*Dedicated to God
mining products used in worship*

Archbishop Hubert Walter 's 12th Century chalice and paten

Canterbury Cathedral

Political Dysfunction

At the national level, political dysfunction in a country where natural resources are discovered can fuel corruption, boost the power of undemocratic governments, and increase inequality. Weak and corrupt governments that impose upon companies only weak licences to mine, and fail to reinvest the tax income from resource wealth into education, health care, development and other infrastructure, result in the 'resource curse' of deepening poverty and environmental degradation resulting from mining. In some countries the disputes over the exploitation of resources such as oil, gas and minerals has led to violent conflicts.

Conversely, high standards of political governance can help ensure that natural resources are well used in the development of national economies. The management of land and natural resources is one of the critical challenges facing developing countries today.⁴ Natural resources whether renewable resources such as cropland, forests and water, and nonrenewable resources such as diamonds, minerals and oil, are sources of revenue generation for the nation and income generation for many households. Questions must be asked locally, nationally and internationally about the role of regulation, the adequacy of voluntary compliance, the need for transparency in dealings with governments, shareholder pressure, and such like.

The 'resource curse' is not inevitable. Governments and companies can collaborate to drive economic growth and reduce poverty regionally and nationally. Much depends upon the calibre of government in nation states, what's required of companies by governments in the licence to mine, and how companies are held to account before international standards.

Prophetic Witness

The prophetic witness of the church can take its starting-point from the passage in Job previously quoted.

The church's calling to prophetic witness is a call to wisdom, as distinct from knowledge. It encourages us to shalom-wholeness, which goes far beyond scientia-knowledge. In politics at all levels, this sort of wisdom is needed urgently in mining today. Much remains to be done internationally, nationally and regionally to help ensure a fairer distribution of the costs and benefits of mining.

Here are three areas for the committed action of mining corporations, the communities they locate in and recruit from, and the national governments to whose revenues they contribute.

1. The presence of the mine can serve as a catalyst for positive change in the region, working with local agencies and government in specific, targeted social, educational or medical action.

2. Preventing conflict and strife amongst the surrounding community. As mining becomes increasingly mechanised and the skill levels of its workers are constantly increasing in sophistication, can mining corporations and the mining trade unions aspire to be pioneers of new industrial relationships, with a focus on building new community?

3. Planning for mine closure and environmental restoration. When a mine's resources are exhausted or mothballed, what role do mining corporations and governments undertake in removing the mine's detritus and retraining those workers left unemployed? What happens to the surrounding community whose livelihoods are threatened when the major employer no longer produces the demand for housing, schools, goods and services? Should mining corporations and governments learn from the nuclear industry about end-of-life decommissioning processes, and commit to the costs involved?

Some church leaders have a voice at national and international levels. They must remain responsive to local church and community leaders in the places where the mines operate, bringing their needs and concerns to national and international fora. Our prayer is that church leaders, at every level, will have the strength, courage, integrity and perseverance to keep monitoring, challenging, and, yes, partnering, with mining corporations for kingdom values and the common good.  

1. Minerals Education Coalition, <http://www.mineralseducationcoalition.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2015percapita.jpg> (accessed 5 February, 2016).
2. ILO, 'Small-scale mining on the increase in developing countries' (17 May, 1999) http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/media-centre/press-releases/WCMS_007929/lang-en/index.htm (accessed 5 February, 2016).
3. André Dollinger, 'Ancient Egyptian Mining', <http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/timelines/topics/mining.htm> (accessed 6 February, 2016).
4. See The United Nations Interagency Framework Team for Preventive Action, 'Land and Conflict: Toolkit and Guidance for Preventing and Managing Land and Natural Resources Conflict' http://www.un.org/en/events/environmentconflictday/pdf/GN_Land_Consultation.pdf



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