

ACTUALISING THE DECLARATION OF ZAMBIA AS A CHRISTIAN NATION, 2016 TO 2021

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Abstract

Since 1991, the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation by President Frederick Chiluba has remained a hollow religio-political proclamation because it has not translated into praxis. President Chiluba's intention was that as a Christian Nation, Zambia would be governed by the righteous principles of the Word of God and that righteousness and justice must prevail at all levels of authority so that the righteousness of God would exhort Zambia. Twenty-five years later, in 2016, the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs was created and one of its mandates was to 'actualise the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation'. Grounded in a qualitative research strategy, an intrinsic case study by design, and through a critical reading of the Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs policy, the implementation plan, and a careful interpretation of the two documents and interviews with two informants – one from the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation and the other from an abolished Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, the article concludes that the measures to actualise the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation are purely symbolic as they do not address, political expediency aside addressing President Chiluba's concerns. Consequently, the author makes an invitation to scholars who have been fascinated by the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation to a new or fresh conversation of elaboration and alternatives on the topic of how the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation may be actualised.

Keywords: Christian Nation, Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs, Zambian Humanism

Introduction

Sociologist, Paul Freston (2001: 160), described the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation (Hereafter the Declaration) as politically empty, since it did not introduce new substantive laws or establish any church. He went on to argue that it was purely symbolic, in tune with much Charismatic political theology, which talks of benefits accruing mystically from such acts. In 2016, twenty-five years after the declaration, President Edgar Lungu created a Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs (MNGRA). The urgency of actualising the Declaration could be sensed in President Lungu's speech to Parliament on 14 September 2016, in which he

lamented the lack of patriotism and national pride among citizens. He, therefore, called on the MNGRA to come up with guidelines, which could help the country to restore its image as a country guided by Christian norms not just by word but by action. ‘We should not be a Christian Nation on paper but in deeds and words’, he emphasised. On 20 June 2020, the ministry launched a policy on how it was going to carry out its mandate. The main objectives of the policy are to enhance the application of the national values, principles and ethics in individual, institutional and national affairs and to actualise the Declaration (MNGRA, 2020: 14). To that end, two departments were created in the ministry namely the Department of National Guidance in charge of enhancing the application of national values, principles and ethics in the country and the Department of Religious Affairs to actualise the Declaration. In 2021, the MNGRA was abolished and its key departments of National Guidance and Religious Affairs relocated to the Office of the Vice President.

The intention of the author of this article is to initiate a conversation on the feasibility of actualising the Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation as outlined in the policy document and the implementation plan of 2020 to 2024. This is because, the author argues: 1) For the first time, ‘Declaration’ has been defined; 2) The means of actualising the Declaration have been worked out although the question of whether or not they are in line with President Chiluba’s *raison d’être* for the Declaration has to be addressed because he envisioned a corrupt free society and one in which justice would be the norm. On the contrary, any honest and objective assessment of most of the years after the Declaration indicate that they have been venal, violent, wasteful and corrupt; 3) Jack (not his real name), an officer at the MNGRA argued that the ministry had done little in trying to unbundle the mystery behind the Declaration and to suggest practical means of realising it (E-mail communication, 24 June 2022); and 4) The MNGRA may be gone, but as a Professor of Religion and African Studies at Leeds University, Adriaan Van Klinken who continues to research on religion and public life in Zambia has perceptively put it, it is most unlikely that the Declaration will be repealed thereby continuing to provide lively and public discussions about Christianity’s role in, and relation to Zambian politics and national identity (Van Klinken, 2013: 542). Arising from the foregoing, the question that the article has tacitly grappled with is: Do the output indicators in the implementation plan translate into actualisation of the Declaration?

In attempting to judge the feasibility of actualising the Declaration, it is important to define ‘Policy’. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: International Student’s Edition*, a ‘policy’ is ‘a plan of action agreed or chosen by a political party, a business, and so on.’ (n.d.p. 1131). Logically, a plan has to have an implementation or a strategic plan. Bernardo Mueller (2018: 312) states that two characteristics of a good policy are: it being realistic and attainable. The MNGRA’s policy is a simple and short document of 25 pages, written in very simple English. It

has objectives and implementation strategies. Although William Dunn (2004) argues, and a variety of policy researchers concur (Bardach, 2009; Patton & Sawick, 1993) that the failure of many policies lies in the misdiagnosis of the problem rather than in mistakes made in finding the right solution, this article is of the view that there seems to have been no misdiagnosis of the problem that the MNGRA wanted to address but the means of achieving the specific objectives of the main objective to facilitate the actualisation of the Declaration are highly contentious.

The focus of the article is on the last sentence ‘as well as actualise the Declaration’ of the main objective of the MNGRA, which reads in full, as earlier cited, ‘to enhance the application of the national values, principles and ethics in individual, institutional and national affairs and actualise the Declaration’ (MNGRA, 2020: 14). The understanding of this article is that the MNGRA was charged with two responsibilities. Firstly, to provide strategic direction on mainstreaming national values and principles in public and private spheres of life and secondly, to actualise the Declaration (MNGRA, 2020: v), thus, the creation of the two key departments; ‘National Guidance’ and ‘Religious Affairs’. In the policy implementation plan for the period 2020 to 2024, objective 4 on page 20 is the specific way to actualise the Declaration. At the expense of being repetitive, it reads: ‘To facilitate the actualisation of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation.’ Under the objective are four measures with responding activities, output indicators, targets, responsible institutions (due to the multisector approach whereby different ministries or departments of government have a role to play), and resource estimates or budgets. In the article, the roles of other ministries or departments and budgets have not been included in the table that was gleaned from the implementation plan nor have they been discussed because the focus and scope of the paper are the measures and activities to actualise the Declaration.

Researchers have engaged the MNGRA and publications have appeared since its creation in 2016. Religious studies scholars, Nelly Mwale et al., (2020) have argued that the creation of the MNGRA had complicated the role of the Church in politics resulting in a divided and compromised voice of the Church. Theologians, Chammah and Mutale Kaunda (2018) have claimed that because of its strong conservative Christian orientation, the ministry was in danger of falling prey to a Pentecostal demoteocratic political paradigm, which rejects certain human rights, religious pluralism, and knowledge constructions from other religions, which are perceived as inferior. Chammah Kaunda (2020) further argues that the MNGRA’s regulations relating to churches were aimed at neo-Pentecostal churches, which were non-aligned politically.

So far, however, the policy, as well as its implementation plan have not been interrogated so as to offer alternative suggestions on how the Declaration can be objectified. It is noted, in any case, that six years before the creation of the MNGRA, Simon Muwowo and Johan Buitendag of the Department of Dogmatics and Christian Ethics at the University of Pretoria in South Africa like many other analysts earlier,

doubted the achievability of Christian nationhood in Zambia. In their article, ‘A Scriptural, Theological and Historical Analysis of the Concept of the Zambian Christian Nationhood’, Muwowo and Buitendang made two conclusions. The first was that a country cannot attain its Christian nationhood by presidential decree, but only by means of cultural determination; and the second was that the Declaration must be both theologically and ethically sound (Muwowo and Buitendag, 2010). Muwowo and Buitendag (2010: 4) further volunteered suggestions of how the Declaration could be actualised. They argued that the Zambian Government has to be Christian in every sphere as having a non-Christian government run the affairs of a Christian Nation is untenable. They proposed, therefore, that all members of parliament, government ministers, judges and civil servants have to be committed in order to manage the affairs of the Christian Nation. Additionally, they argued that the laws of Zambia have to be consistent with Christian dogmas and practices, so that in the end, the Bible and Christian doctrines and dogmas, and not the Constitution would be the supreme law. These are suggestions that the article is inviting in light of the definition of ‘Christian Nation’ by the MNGRA.

To emphasise; the intention of the present article is to initiate a conversation with those scholars who are still interested in the Declaration because the departments of National Guidance and Religious Affairs have not been done away with but merged as one department and their mandates maintained. The argument, in other words, is that a plan to attain Zambia’s Christian nationhood has finally, been worked out and the concept of ‘Christian Nation’ defined. It is, therefore, time to engage with the definition and the actualisation strategy of the Declaration, which has remained merely emblematic for many years. The issues that President Chiluba characterised as inimical to Christian nationhood still loom large. Somehow, in making the Declaration, President Chiluba had knowingly or otherwise, hinted at the fact that:

Religions possess in their teachings the main principles of democracy which include, among others, justice, freedom and fairness and that religion has an important role in cultivating these moral values, which are necessary for democracy to thrive. ... (Chepkwony, 1999: 100).

It is, therefore, arguable with evidence from his words that President Chiluba’s Declaration was in its finality anchored on social justice and the development of a democratic culture. Whether he really meant what he was saying or he was merely politicking is another matter.

The article is structured as follows: following the introduction above, the methodology is explained and then the Declaration is contextualised in the ideologies that Zambians have lived with before and after independence. Thus, colonialism is mentioned and Zambian Humanism and the Declaration dealt with as post-colonial ideologies. The notion of ‘Actualising the Declaration’ through the MNGRA is then

discussed by tracing it from 1996 when Chiluba created what some writers have erroneously called ‘Ministry of Religious Affairs’ instead of, ‘Religious Affairs Desk’ at State House. Next, the article deals with the policy and the actualisation plan of the Declaration as a work in progress. Rather than recapping the main issues in the conclusion, the article raises a number of critical questions on the matter of the actualisation of the Declaration including whether or not it is headed in the direction of Zambian Humanism, which despite all efforts to actualise it failed to achieve its overarching objective of creating heaven on earth in Zambia. By raising questions in the conclusion, the aim is to invite analysts and researchers to whom the Declaration is topical to a serious conversation on it, in terms of whether or not it remains a promissory note or merely political rhetoric beyond 2021.

Methodology

This article is mainly based on an iterative and critical reading of the MNGRA’s Policy and Implementation Plan for the period 2020 to 2024. By design, it is an intrinsic case study in the constructivism paradigm. According to Robert Stake (1995), an intrinsic case study is used by researchers who have a genuine interest in a case with the intention of better understanding the case. Consequently, a qualitative strategy was inescapable so as to generate and analyse none numerical data. The author of the article is a religious studies scholar to whom the Declaration has been a topical subject matter since 1991. The article, is thus, an in-depth analysis of particularly, the implementation plan for actualising the Declaration. Cases are bounded by time and activity, process, or one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014: 14). In light of this, this article addresses the implementation plan of actualising the Declaration between 2016 and 2021. The analytic procedure demanded making sense of the data contained in the policy document and more so, objective number 4 in the implementation plan of the MNGRA and the data from two interviews via mobile phone, e-mail and WhatsApp. The analytic framework was the text of the Declaration as read out by President Chiluba at State House on 29 December 1991. The author mainly employed document analysis as a research tool because any document containing text or words (books, journals, newspapers and public documents, etc.) is a potential source for qualitative analysis (Patton, 2015).

It has to be pointed out, however, that document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation in the study of the same phenomenon (Denzin, 1970: 291). Therefore, two informants – one from the abolished MNGRA and another from the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) with knowledge about the plan to actualise the Declaration were consulted.

The overriding ethical consideration was that those consulted remain anonymous in order to protect their rights and welfare. Overall, if the essence of ethics in all scientific reporting is that authors report methods and results of their studies fully, accurately and protect the identity of the participants, this article has adhered to that.

The Declaration in the Context of Earlier Ideologies: Colonialism and Zambian Humanism

In retracing the Declaration, it is inescapable to bring in earlier ideologies that Zambians have experienced or are aware of. This, in this paper, is the setting of the thoughts on the actualisation of the Declaration. The first ideology is colonialism – a swear word in Africa – a creed which, according to Walter Rodney (1974) impoverished Africa and developed Europe. Most offensive about this ideology was the racialism that underpinned it. When British colonial rule officially ended in Zambia, a vacuum occurred, which according to a Catholic priest and historian, Fr. Hugo Hinfelaar who had worked in Zambia from 1958 to 2014 was filled by the first President, Dr Kenneth Kaunda's philosophy of Zambian Humanism (Hinfelaar, 1994: 151). Introduced in 1967, Zambian Humanism was the country's overall guide to national development (Soremekun, 1970: 194). Men of the cloth (especially Rev. Colin Morris of the Wesleyan Methodist Church) served as theorists of this ideology (Scott, 2019; Hinfelaar, 1994; Hinfelaar, 2004; and Gordon, 2012), which Kaunda defined as 'a statement of philosophical theory on the meaning of human existence. Man, concretely man (not some idea of man), is central' (Kaunda, 1974: 1). In other words, 'the central feature of the philosophical theory was its focus on persons as unique individuals of absolute worth and dignity' (Dillon-Malone, 1989: 75). Historian, Miles Larmer (2021: 198), has argued that Zambian Humanism was promoted as a national ideology by state intellectuals such as Dr Henry Meebelo who produced a body of work on the philosophy. In stark contrast with Zambian Humanism, the Declaration is yet to be systematically developed into a political ideology to shape the behaviour of the citizens (Van Klinken, 2017: 140). The question might be: who will do that?

The main cause of the failure of Zambian Humanism according to a Nigerian philosopher, Anthony Kanu (2014: 377), was that during the translation from theory to praxis, there was no place to look to because Zambia was the only country with that kind of philosophy and as an ideology, it was not strongly rooted among the Zambians. It is also argued that government officials paid lip service to it (Bwalya, 1987: 32). Whatever the case, Zambian Humanism as an ideology, ended with Kaunda's comprehensive defeat suffered at the hands of Chiluba in the 1991 multiparty elections. On 29 December 1991, at a 'Celebration of Praise' at the State House, Chiluba unilaterally and quite unashamedly declared Zambia as a Christian Nation.

President Chiluba's Text of the Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation

The exact words of the Declaration on 29 December 1991 are cited from below and it is vital to reproduce the whole speech because it mirrors statements in the MNGRA policy that have been a staple for this article. In fact, to repeat the point made earlier, President Chiluba's statements serve as the analytic framework to judge the project of actualising the Declaration. Standing between two pillars of State House, Chiluba thundered forthrightly as can be viewed on [youtube.com/watch?v=RhFX5kywvCs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhFX5kywvCs):

Dear God, as a nation, we now come to your throne of Grace and we humble ourselves and admit our guilt. We repent from all our wicked ways of idolatry, witchcraft, the occult, immorality, injustice and corruption, and all other sins that have violated your righteous laws. We turn away from all this and renounce it all in Jesus' name. We ask for your forgiveness dear Father and cleansing through the blood of Jesus. Therefore, we thank you that you will heal our land. We pray that you will send healing, restoration, revival, blessings, and prosperity to Zambia, in the name of Jesus, Amen.

On behalf of the nation, we have now entered into a covenant with the living God, and, therefore, I want to make the following declaration. I declare today that I submit myself as President to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I, likewise, submit the government and the entire nation of Zambia to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. I, further, declare that Zambia is a Christian Nation to be governed by the righteous principles of the Word of God. Righteousness and justice must prevail in all levels of authority, and then we shall see the righteousness of God exhorting Zambia.

My fellow Zambians, let this message reach all civil servants in all government departments. The time for corruption and bribery is over. For too long, these wicked practices have been destroying and tearing down the nation. Now, the hour has come for our building up. The hour has come for stability, for Proverbs 29:4 declares that one who is for bribes tears down the nation, but by justice, a King or a President gives the country stability. The book of Romans 13:11 urges us to understand the present time as the hour has come for us to wake up from our slumber because our salvation is nearly over and the day is almost here. So, let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. Fellow countrymen, fellow Zambians, a new dawn has come to Zambia. May God bless and help us all to live according to His righteous laws.

Naomi Haynes, a social anthropologist at Edinburgh University who has done research in Zambia for close to twenty years looking at the intersection of religion and political economy correctly points out that, for Zambian Christians, especially Pentecostals, the Declaration is a covenant with God made according to the principles of the prosperity gospel (Haynes, 2015: 5). The *quid pro quo* in the covenant is that for Zambia to prosper, the people or citizens are to be obedient to God by avoiding wicked practices. Chiluba's main assumption was that the Declaration was going to end corruption in the country. Thus, in 1995, he referred to the Declaration as a 'code of conduct' when he said: 'We now have a code of conduct because when we do something bad, people will say; that is not expected of a Christian Nation' (Cheyeka, 2008: 99). In his second term (1996-2001) of presidency, President Chiluba ensured that the National Assembly of Members of Parliament enshrine the Declaration in the preamble of the country's Constitution. Thus, it was enshrined as follows

WE, THE PEOPLE OF ZAMBIA by our representatives, assembled in our parliament, having solemnly resolved to maintain Zambia as a Sovereign Democratic Republic; DECLARE the Republic a Christian Nation, while upholding the right of every person to enjoy that person's freedom of conscience or religion (Preamble of the Constitution of Zambia, Act No. 18 of 1996).

The above statement in the preamble of the Constitution has been described by most Zambians as an imposition on the people of Zambia just because the MMD had a pro-Christian manifesto, which Chiluba affirmed by the Declaration (Cheyeka, 1998). In doing so, he officially committed the country to one particular religion. It is important to point out the fact that the Patrick Mvunga chaired Constitution Review Commission of 1991 that reported the wishes of the people in a multiparty state to the government of President Chiluba did not at all recommend that Zambians wanted their country to be declared a Christian Nation. In 1993, John Mwanakatwe's Constitutional Review Commission established that the majority of the petitioners 'did not favour the inclusion of a provision in the Constitution for making Zambia a Christian Nation' and consequently, the Commission recommended that Zambia should not adopt a state religion but should remain a secular state (Mwanakatwe, 2003: 470). Similarly, the Wila Mung'omba Commission of 2005 that was appointed by President Levy Mwanawasa to review the 1996 Constitution recommended the removal of the Declaration from the Constitution but to no avail, because the government maintained it (Mapulanga-Hutson, 2020: 23).

Actualisation of the Declaration Set in Motion

When discussing the actualisation of the Declaration, it is instructive to begin with the creation of the MNGRA if only briefly. First of all, if it is taken that Kaunda was the first person to recognise that Zambia was a Christian Nation as Hinfelaar (2008 and 2011) contends, it could also and correctly so, be taken that his *Zambian Humanism* was the means of actualising and unifying his Christian Nation (Van Klinken, 2018: 134). While the actualisation process of *Zambian Humanism* was set in motion as soon as the philosophy was officially launched, the actualisation of the Declaration took years before it took off. One year before the formation of the MNGRA, Bishop Paul Bupe of the Redeemed Methodist Church argued in frustration that:

The Church in Zambia has wasted twenty-three years wandering in the wilderness of indecisiveness and ignorance with regard to the actualisation of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation and the relationship between the Church and politics (Bupe, 2015: 46).

When Mr. Lungu, as President-elect mooted the idea of a Ministry of Religious Affairs (later to become MNGRA) in 2016 at St. Andrews United Church of Zambia congregation in Lusaka, the reason he gave was that there was a need to create a

ministry that would look into and coordinate religious affairs if the country's Christian Nation Declaration was to retain its true meaning as the current situation limited the Church's access to State House (Mwale et al., 2020). Although the reason sounded precisely the same as Chiluba's for creating a Religious Desk at State House in 1996, it turned out to be completely different in the end because when 'the Ministry in charge of Religious Affairs' became known as MNGRA, and one of its major responsibilities became that of actualising the Declaration. Later, as President, Edgar Lungu argued that the introduction of the ministry was imperative in order to reaffirm and strengthen the Declaration and operationalise the Christian Nation's values and practices (Kaunda and Kaunda, 2018: 5).

Contrary to some information in some publications that President Chiluba created a Ministry of Religious Affairs, he only established a *Religious Desk* at State House with a Deputy Minister in charge when he commenced his second-term (1996-2001) of presidency. His justification was that the minister in charge would be controlling and coordinating visits to State House by the clergy (Cheyeka, 2014a: 60). By and large, whether in the first (1991-1996) or second-term (1996-2001) of presidency, the Declaration remained a pretentious pronouncement, which actually set up the criteria by which Chiluba's presidency would later be judged (McClendon and Riedl, 2019; Phiri, 2003; and Freston 2001). In any case, while Chiluba's successor, Mr Levy Mwanawasa (2002-2008) abolished the Religious Affairs Desk at State House, he did not, as it has been pointed out already, revoke the Declaration despite a recommendation by Wila Mung'omba Constitutional Review Commission to have it done away with. Mr Rupiah Banda (2008-2011) did not temper with the status quo either and so did the least enthusiastic about it, populist Patriotic Front (PF)'s party leader and founder, Mr Michael Sata (2011-2014) announced that he himself was going to rule by the Ten Commandments (Cheyeka, et al., 2014b: 1031).

The MNGRA was ratified by parliament in October 2016, drawing its mandate from the Preamble and Part II of Article 8 of the Constitution of Zambia Amendment Act No. 2 of 2016. According to the Government Gazette and the Constitution, the specific portfolio functions of MNGRA were Christian Affairs, interdenominational dialogue, national guidance, national values, principles and ethics, public religious celebrations, preservation of Christian and religious sites, and religious affairs. In short, therefore, the creation of the MNGRA reveals how President Lungu synthesised Kaunda's Zambian Humanism, Frederick Chiluba's Christian Nation, Sata's populism and his own style of leadership (Mwale, et al., 2020: 33).

Policy and Implementation Plan of the Declaration

From 2016 to 2020, the MNGRA worked out its structures, policy, charter, and implementation plan *etcetera*. On the occasion of the validation of the draft of the policy in 2019, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry, Rev. Dr Howard Sikwela,

according to an online news platform, Lusaka Times of 13 November 2019, said that it was important for the ministry to come up with a policy to guide the implementation of its mandate as most people did not have an understanding of what it was about. Eventually, the policy was launched on 20 June 2020 at the Government Complex in Lusaka.¹ The Minister, Rev. Godfridah Sumaili, announced that the government was working hard to inculcate positive cultural values in its citizens. She repeated the point that the government was working hard in ensuring that people uphold good national values and positive cultural values such as respect, hard work, honesty, good neighbourliness, teamwork and patriotism, as a way of developing the country. She cautioned Zambians not to copy from other cultures things that were contrary to Zambia's traditions and religious heritage. She further urged all well-meaning Zambians to condemn the culture of insults and disrespect.

'The aim of the policy', the minister announced, 'was to transform people's mind-sets, attitudes and behaviours in order to enhance socio-economic development and reverse the social ills affecting the country.' Before ending her speech, she added that the policy would further guide the nation in the inculcation and application of the country's shared values drawn from the Constitution, Vision 2030² and the Seventh National Development Plan, under the strategic area 'creating a conducive government environment for a diversified and inclusive economy'. The focus of this article is not what the minister insisted on – the inculcation of national values, principles and ethics in individuals, institutional and national affairs in her speech, but on what she merely hinted to, namely; to actualise the Declaration.

Before turning to the implementation of actualising the Declaration, 'Christian Nation' is defined as follows in the policy:

A nation that acknowledges the Divine Lordship of Jesus Christ over all its affairs. A nation in which the Holy Bible guides the beliefs and values that its people espouse in family life and apply appropriately in government and all sectors of society for enhanced welfare, peace and unity. A nation in which God's principles of Righteousness and Justice are the foundation for the rule of law and governance for sustained social order and morality (MNGRA, 2020: viii).

This definition was arrived at after consultative meetings in all ten provinces in the country. Those consulted were church leaders, non-Christian leaders such as Muslims, traditional leaders (chiefs, elders, head men and head women), civil servants, academics and chief security officers (Jack, personal communication via mobile phone, 14 April 2022). Quite clearly, the definition of Christian Nation derived from Chiluba's words:

¹ The author was part of the audience.

² According to the document Vision 2030 launched in 2006, by 2030, Zambians should be living in a strong and dynamic middle-income industrial nation that will provide opportunities for improving the well-being of all, embodying values of socio-economic justice, underpinned by the principles of: i) gender responsive sustainable development; ii) democracy; iii) respect for human rights; iv) good traditional and family values; v) positive attitude toward work; vi) peaceful co-existence and; viii) private-public partnerships.

... I further declare that Zambia is a Christian Nation to be governed by the righteous principles of the Word of God. Righteousness and justice must prevail in all levels of authority, and then we shall see the righteousness of God exalting Zambia.

The policy makes a claim that, because ‘Christian Nation’ was not defined, the influence of Christianity in public policy as well as in the conduct of public and private business had been limited (MNGRA Policy, 2020: 8). In September 2021, after the general elections of 12 August 2021, in which President Lungu was defeated, changes were made to statutory functions, portfolios and composition of government.³ New ministries were created and some older ones merged or as in the case of MNGRA, abolished. In the new government of the United Party for National Development (UPND), the departments of National Guidance and Religious Affairs of the MNGRA were merged to form one (National Guidance and Religious Affairs) under one Director and relocated to the Office of the Vice President. The specific portfolio functions of the department according to the Government Gazette Notice No. 1123 of 2021, Vol. LVII. No. 90, the Organisational Structure Report for the Office of the Vice President by the Management Development Division (MDD) of 2021, and the Constitution Amendment Act No. 2 of 2016, include: (a) national guidance; (b) national values, principles, and ethics; (c) Christian affairs; (d) interfaith dialogue; (e) public religious celebrations; (f) preservation of christian and religious sites; and (g) religious affairs. Therefore, under this new arrangement, the actualisation of the Declaration came under National Guidance and Religious Affairs as one department, which seems to make a lot more sense because there should not be a dividing line between the inculcation of the national principles and values, and actualisation of the Declaration and hopefully, this is what is going to be a strategy for actualising the Declaration going forward.

Actualisation of the Declaration as Work in Progress

When asked about the achievability of the actualisation of the Declaration and whether what was in the plan translated into ‘actualisation’, Jack, the officer at the abolished MNGRA wrote that:

The actualisation of the Declaration was still a work in progress though it is not a straightforward work because it is not clear how it should be done since constitutionally, Zambia is a multi-religious country, which respects the freedom of conscience among others. The concept remains unclear. I don’t think it is properly defined (e-mail, 24 June 2022).

³ See the Republic of Zambia Government Gazette Notice Number 1123 of 2021, which revoked the Gazette Notice Number 836 of 2016.

This article is of the view that spirituality and even the absence of it in a country have a bearing on the soul of a nation and the entire socio-political and socio-economic ethos. So, it was meaningless for Zambia to have been declared a Christian Nation without any practical benchmark(s) let alone without an implementation plan. The MNGRA attempted to present the Declaration in the policy, as a rallying point giving credence to national development plans and encouraging moral sensitivity in governance. Presently, the reality is that actualisation of the Declaration is indeed a work in progress and it is not as straightforward as the policy and implementation plan seem to suggest. There is more clarity required because ‘actualisation’ cannot be taken as absolute (Jack, e-mail, 24 June 2022). Mueller (2020: 317), counsels that all types of policies fail, but they do not do so for the same reasons. The question would be what factors would hinder the actualisation of the Declaration? Could it be a lack of political will or the multi-faith nature of the country?

It has to be pointed out that Zambia is the only self-declared Christian country in Africa and in 2020, a plan to actualise the Declaration emerged. The author of this article took an opportunity to carry out an intrinsic case study so as to contribute to the knowledge base of religion and politics in the country and to open up a debate. Having sketched the background to the actualisation of Zambia’s Christian nationhood above, in the remaining section, the objective is to interrogate the measures of the main objective, and measures, and activities under each specific objective of the actualisation process for clarity of what clearly seems to be a most ambitious undertaking. Table 1 below is taken from the implementation plan of the abolished MNGRA and it illustrates how the objective of actualising of the Declaration has been worked out. The discussion of the table takes a format of analysing the measure (action or activity) of each specific objective of the main objective one by one to make sense of it in terms of actualising the Declaration. The interest of the article is in the practicality of the measures and whether or not they can be considered as transformative – bringing about a Christian Nation, as defined in the policy and as outlined in President Chiluba’s speech. Budgets and the ministry or department responsible for implementing the measures as pointed out already have been left out of the table. Although the targets have not been removed, they are not discussed because the article did not aim at finding out how much of the actualisation of the Declaration had been achieved since 2020. Additionally, this article raises questions on the activities that are envisaged to actualise the Declaration regardless of targets having been met or otherwise.

Table 1 (Source: MNGRA Implementation Plan 2020-2024, p. 40)

Measures	Activities	Output Indicator	Targets					
			Base year (2019)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Objective 4. To facilitate the actualisation of the declaration as a Christian Nation								
Measure 4.1. Facilitate the mainstreaming of Christian values in government business, private sector as well as in education, entertainment and arts	1. Establish chaplaincy services in 252 public and private learning institutions as well as Chiefdoms	Number of public and private learning institutions as well as in chiefdoms	0	12	60	60	60	60
	2. Facilitate the establishment of 100 fellowships at workplaces and learning institutions	Number of fellowships at workplaces and learning institutions established	0	20	20	20	20	20
	3. Operationalise the National House of prayer	The National House of Prayer operationalised	0	-	-	1	1	1
	4. Develop, produce and disseminate 26 Christian information, education and communication materials	Information education and communication materials developed and disseminated	.	2	6	6	6	6
	5. Facilitate the provision of support to 12 churches and religious organisations involved in social development programmes and projects	Number of churches and religious organisations involved in social development programmes and projects supported	0	-	3	3	3	3
	6. Preserve Christian historical knowledge of 13 sites	Number of sites with documented history	0	1	3	3	3	3

Measure 4.2. Facilitate the creation of a supportive environment for activities of the Church and practice of Christianity including the area of evangelism and discipleship	1.Lobby the National Assembly on the use of the Bible as a Source Document in National Assembly	Bible adopted as a source document in the National Assembly	0	-	1	1	-	-
	2.Enact legislation to make the Bible as part of the instruments of power for the Office of Republican President	Bible adopted as part of the instruments of power for the Office the Republican President	0	-	1	1	-	-
	3.Provide for the importation of Media Equipment for Christian broadcast and Christian publications at concessional rates	Mechanism for effecting concessional rates for imported media equipment for Christian broadcast and Christian publications in place	0	-	-	1	1	-
	4.Translate Christian education materials including the Bible into major local languages	Number of materials translated	0	-	5	5	5	5
	5.Broadcast of Christian messages in local languages	% of the media houses running Christian programmes in local languages	0	-	5%	10%	15%	20%
Measure 4.3. Support public Christian and religious events	1.Facilitate the observance of the National Day of Prayer annually	National Day of Prayer observed	1	1	1	1	1	1
	2.Facilitate commemoration of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation annually	The declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation commemorated	1	1	1	1	1	1
	3.Provide support to 40 public religious events in which the State has an interest including State funerals	Number of public religious events in which the State has an interest including State funerals supported	0	-	10	10	10	10

Before examining the specific objectives towards realising Zambia's Christian nationhood, the definition of Christian Nation will be repeated so as to see if there is coherence between the objectives and the end product, Christian Nation. As earlier cited, the definition reads:

A nation that acknowledges the Divine Lordship of Jesus Christ over all its affairs. A nation in which the Holy Bible guides the beliefs and values that its people espouse in family life and apply appropriately in government and all sectors of society for enhanced welfare, peace and unity. A nation in which God's principles of Righteousness and Justice are the foundation for the rule of law and governance for sustained social order and morality (MNGRA, 2020: viii).

The main objective (4) is patently clear – the MNGRA was meant to be the facilitator in the actualisation process of the Declaration because all the ministries of government were meant to play a role in the process. The specific objectives (indicated as measures in the plan) 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 and the output indicators and targets for each measure between 2020 and 2024 are set. How much was achieved between 2020 and 2021, in real terms, is not a concern of this article. The article is not an assessment of the achievements of the MNGRA towards actualising the Declaration. To begin with, activity number 1 under Measure 4.1 includes creating chaplaincy services in private and public learning institutions and chiefdoms. It was established that the Department of Religious Affairs or unit had lined up certain activities, which were envisaged to facilitate the actualisation of the Declaration, namely; identifying, appointing and orienting chaplains in all government institutions (Jack, e-mail, 24 June 2022). It was established that 'prayer fellowships' were emerging in government departments (Jack, e-mail, 24 June 2022). The author of this paper has also observed that it is not uncommon that in most learning institutions, prayer during staff meetings, school or college assemblies and Senate meetings are now elaborate and often performed in Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic fashion. In other words, in government or public and private institutions, agendas of meetings may include Christian prayer without the consideration of other people with different worldviews.

Extending chaplaincy to chiefdoms is understandable; it may have been a response to over 70 chiefs who claim to be born-again Christians and one of them, Ngabwe of the Lamba, Lenje, and Lima-speaking people in Central Province went as far as declaring his chiefdom as a Christian chiefdom (Kaunda, 2016: 20-21). Although Chief Chipepo of the Tonga-speaking people of Southern Province has not declared his chiefdom as a Christian chiefdom, he has made it known publicly that he is a born-again Christian and a devotee of the Declaration. It was learned that some chiefs such as Chief Mumena of the Kaonde people in Kalumbila District, Chieftainess Mwenda of the Tonga people in Chikankata District and Chief Chamuka of the Lenje in Chisamba District have chaplains who are serving on a voluntary basis (Jack, Personal communication via mobile phone, 10 August 2022).

Activity 2 of establishing fellowships at workplaces and learning institutions is not, in the view of this article, difficult to achieve. The officer at MNGRA repeated the point that prayer groups in government departments are commonplace and some government institutions conduct morning devotion or lunch-hour fellowships (Jack, e-mail, 24 June 2022). In Zambia, as might be the case world over, it only takes one prayerful or devout Christian with some skill to persuade others, and or some leadership qualities to attract fellow workers, students or community members to begin a prayer group or a fellowship. Research has established that many neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic churches in Zambia have been founded in this manner (Cheyeka, 2008: 39-40). Activity number 3 of operationalising the National House of Prayer could take many years. From conception, it raised debate in the country, but some Pentecostal big men defended it. To date, however, there are only pillars and the slab of the National House of Prayer. It seems that for many years to come, national prayers of different kinds will be held in open grounds or in the Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Cross, which Mwale (2021: 8) describes as a national worship space that has played an important role in hosting functions of varied nature ranging from civic, national, state, regional, international and spiritual functions of interdenominational character.

Developing Christian information and communication and disseminating educational materials is activity number 4 under measure 4.1. It was learnt from the officer at the MNGRA that, ‘the idea behind this activity is to develop literature that would promote Christian values and the Department of Religious Affairs was responsible for this’ (Jack, e-mail communication, 15 August 2022). Activity 5 has to do with government support to churches and organisations engaged in social development programmes and projects. According to Jack (e-mail communication, 15 August 2022), the intention of the MNGRA was to have a budget line under Religious Affairs to support religious organisations involved in charitable works such as caring for orphans; to collaborate with such churches and link them to potential partners or sponsors. The idea behind this, according to Jack, was to encourage churches to get involved in social programmes. In the wake of COVID-19 in 2020, the ministry secured funds, which were given to churches and Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) of different religions to alleviate the effects of the pandemic in communities. The MNGRA’s role, according to objective number 5, is to facilitate the disbursement of funds to FBOs, churches, mosques, temples, *et cetera* (Jack, email communication, 15 August 2022).

It was somewhat difficult to understand activity number 6 of preserving Christian historical sites because there is a ministry with different departments and commissions responsible for looking after historical sites either religious or secular. Was there an agreement between the National Heritage Commission and Monuments’ Board on this specific objective? What are these Christian historical sites in Zambia? How do they contribute to the actualisation of the Declaration? It was learned that there

was an administrative agreement between the MNGRA and the National Heritage Commission that the MNGRA participates in the identification, documentation and preservation of historical and religious sites that have significantly contributed to the Christian evangelisation of the country (Jack, Personal communication, 17 August 2022). According to Jack, the MNGRA wanted the people of Zambia to understand the history of Christianity in the country so as to appreciate the Declaration and the present situation of Christianity. This statement seems to suggest that President Chiluba made the Declaration because over 90 per cent of Zambians claim to be Christians, it was not the case. Also, it was not because of the peaceful transition from one party rule to multiparty democracy and the role of the Church as the mid-wife of democracy that the Declaration was made. The Declaration was an announcement of a new dawn of rule of law, justice, development, zero tolerance to corruption, and so on.

The other argument why the MNGRA decided to take on the responsibility of preserving religious sites was that the National Heritage Commission, according to Jack, is only concerned with sites that were established before 1924 while the MNGRA took into consideration even those that had been created after 1924 when the country became a British colony (Jack, Personal communication via mobile phone, 17 August 2022). Reflexively, the author of this article asked Jack if the refurbishment of the heritage site where Dr David Livingstone, a Scottish missionary and explorer had died in 1873 was part of the actualisation of the Declaration project. He indicated that it had nothing to do with actualising the Declaration. He elaborated, ‘the National Heritage Commission had found some partners including the government who funded the rehabilitation of the monument. The involvement of the MNGRA was when the minister accompanied His Excellency the President, Dr Edgar Lungu with the British High Commissioner to officially recognise what had been done at the heritage site.’ It is instructive that the question put to Jack is put into context. The point is, in 2016, and perhaps for the first time ever, it was heard that Zambia was after all proclaimed a Christian Nation by Dr Livingstone when he was dying at what is today Chipundu in Central Province, when he made the following prayer:

Lord from the land upon which my knees rest, raise a mighty Christian Nation, a nation that will become a beacon of light and hope to the continent of Africa. A nation that will take the gospel to the ends of the earth (Kachingwe, 2016).

To ascertain, after one hundred and thirty nine years (139) that Dr Livingstone said this prayer would be, to put it mildly, a difficult undertaking. However, the question researchers have asked is, where did the idea that Dr Livingstone declared Zambia as a Christian Nation come from? The view of this article is that it is doubtful that Livingstone made such a prayer because his African helpers; Susi, Majwara, Chuma, Chowpere, Matthew and Muanyasere have never been cited as having Dr Livingstone say the prayer apart from him having died in a praying posture. Rob MacKenzie

(1993: 365-366) in his book, *David Livingstone: The Truth Behind the Legend*, cites what Majwara who was in the hut with Livingstone at the time of his death said to his friends: ‘When I lay down, he was just as he is now, and it is because I find that he does not move that I fear he is dead.’ But who was with Livingstone when he died in the hut at Chitambo’s village? Was it Majwara as Mackenzie wrote or was it Chuma according to Timothy Holmes? In 1874, Livingstone’s close faithful servants, Chuma and Susi were brought to Britain by James Young to help the editor of Livingstone’s journals piece together the last years of his life (Holmes, 1993). There is no mention of Chuma who according to Holmes was with Livingstone when he died recounting Livingstone’s prayer.

On an online platform, Haynes (2019) asserts that Livingstone’s prayer anchored the refurbishment of the David Livingstone Monument. However, when between 26 and 27 November 2022, the author of this article visited Livingstone’s monument and talked to some officers from Chitambo District headquarters, they said that the rehabilitation of the monument was perhaps funded by Scotland and the Zambian Government. They argued that it had nothing to do with the Declaration. They went on to argue that a number of heritage sites in the country had been rehabilitated since 2019. The response of the Chitambo District officers corroborated with Jack’s answer.

Measure number 4.2 has five activities. Activities 1, 2 and 3 are doable because they merely have to do with lobbying and legislation although lobbying does not automatically result in desired results. Measure number 4 begs two questions: What are these ‘religious materials’? Who is going to do the translation of the Bible? It was learned that the MNGRA would render moral and financial support if available, an undertaking of translating the Bible whether by the Bible Society of Zambia or a church or an organisation. Similarly, the MNGRA would have supported the development of materials that were meant to promote Christian values in the country (Jack, e-mail communication, 18 August 2022).

It seems that activity number 5 has been implemented already because the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) has duly positioned itself in championing the Declaration through the introduction of more Christian content on both radio and television. Nancy (not her real name) told the author via WhatsApp, the following: ‘ZNBC has indeed positioned itself to champion the Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation through the introduction of more Christian productions on both radio and television’ (WhatsApp communication, 5 August 2022). The Corporation has even created a television channel, ZNBC TV3 as a Gospel and evangelisation channel. It should be noted, however, that despite this development, the MNGRA did not fully utilise the service by producing its own programmes aiming at actualising the Declaration despite invitations from ZNBC (Jack, Personal communication via mobile phone, 6 August 2022).

Nancy at ZNBC shared with the author of this article some of the programmes on TV3 such as Bible Quiz, Sunday Service, Daily Sermons and Prayer Altar. Christian programmes are also found on ZNBC TV2. Apart from praise and worship and choirs (when videos of different Christian choirs are shown), TV 3 also broadcasts *Enter IN* (sharing of the Word of God by different clergymen and women) and *Gospel Cruise*, which shows videos of different gospel artists. ZNBC TV1 runs the Faith Gospel Hour and *REP*, which targets the youth as different clergymen and women moralise to them. It was pointed out by Nancy that all TV and radio channels air a lot of gospel music as fillers or interludes. As for radio, all ZNBC Radio 1, 2, 3, and 4, broadcast Christian programmes. Radio 4 broadcasts the Mid-Week Service from 20:30 hours to 22:00 hours so that the clergy can share the Word of God and in some cases, gospel artists are invited to show case their songs. Radio 4 also broadcasts the Sunday Breakfast Show – two hours of praise and worship ending with Sunday school. Radio 2 dedicates midnight to 05:00 hours in the morning to sermons by different preachers while Radio 1 broadcasts Christian programmes – sermons, gospel music and interviews with the clergy and gospel artists in all the major seven local languages in the country.

Overall, evangelisation efforts aimed at actualising the Declaration by state-owned media are in place and they are supplemented by private Christian radio stations such as *Christian Nation FM*, *One Love Radio* and *Radio Christian Voice*, which was established by a Pentecostal millionaire, Mr Robert Edminston of the United Kingdom, who wanted to support the Declaration. It was learned that Christian and secular community radio and television stations that are not owned by Pentecostals are not particularly aiming at actualising the Declaration but helping Christians to live truly Christian lives (Nancy, Personal communication via mobile phone, 6 August 2022). The impact of all the Christian programmes on radio and television whether public or private remains unknown, but the belief is that Christian programmes on radio or television are the focal dimension in shaping a moral society (Nancy, Personal communication via mobile phone, 6 August 2022).

The last measure; 4.3 and its three activities are straightforward. It was learned from Jack (e-mail, 18 August 2022) that the national day of prayer, the commemoration of Zambia as a Christian Nation, state funerals and state organised national prayers are state functions while churches and religious organisations' celebrations such as anniversaries, ordinations, inductions to which government officials are invited, fall 'outside' the interest of the government. Of course, the government jumps at every invitation to functions of churches and FBOs because these are in themselves constituents from which votes are drawn during elections. Therefore, they try to patronise those places so as to explain government achievements and deliver the usual message about the partnership between Church and State in the development of the country.

The author of this paper argues that all the outputs in the implementation plan are merely symbolic. Any nation with Christian citizens will have Christian symbols, but that does not mean that the country is a Christian Nation. To borrow from Zablon Nthamburi (1999: 142) who drew on the works of Martin Luther, ‘a Christian Nation must be characterised by divine goodness manifested in just administration of laws, helping the poor, protecting the vulnerable and the defenceless and endeavouring to promote the welfare of all citizens.’ President Chiluba particularly, singled out corruption as un-Christian and in the Declaration, he made a moral disapproval of what is a pathological issue in the country. Although ‘Christian Nation’ remains a political rhetoric, it was President Chiluba’s hope as David Nderitu and Julius Kipkemboi (2022: 219) help to explain, ‘a community that has embraced Christianity would have less integrity issues. This is because religion has been touted as a source of morality given its fundamental role in guiding and regulating human conduct.’

Conclusion

This article concentrated on objective number 4 – the actualisation of the Declaration in the implementation plan. It does appear and quite clearly so, that the measures and activities are merely representational. In other words, they do not turn a country into a Christian Nation. There is more to actualising the Declaration than what has been put in the policy and implementation plan. This article equally finds the output indicators of the actualisation of the Declaration too simplistic. A thorough understanding of Chiluba’s Declaration still beckons. Consequently, the article raises many questions that cannot blithely be dismissed: What do researchers to whom the Declaration has been of interest say about the proposed actualisation agenda? Is it feasible? Does what is in the implementation plan fit the definition of ‘Christian Nation’ in the policy document? What is the future of the Christian Nation? Will it remain a statement of strategic intent as Brigadier General Godfrey Miyanda who served as Minister without Portfolio, Vice President and Education Minister between 1991 and 2001 had described it? These questions and others call for a fresh conversation on the Declaration in relation to actualising it.

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