

# PERCEPTIONS OF CITIZENS TOWARDS THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION AS A TOOL FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING: THE CASE OF ZAMBIA

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## ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates the perceptions of Zambians towards Christianity as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building in the country. The discussion follows, albeit in brief, the history and growth of the Christian movement in Zambia culminating in the contemporary status where politics and the Christian religion have intertwined with the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in the 1990s by the late former president Frederick Chiluba as the point of departure. In the recent years, current President Edgar Lungu declared 18<sup>th</sup> October as a public holiday on which Zambians are to pray to God and fast. He further ordered the construction of the National House of Prayer (NHP), an interdenominational institution, to accommodate all kinds of believers who come to worship. NHP was to also hold various national events of a religious nature, sinking further the role of politics in Christianity. Some have contended that the intertwining of politics and religion in Zambia is important for conflict resolution and peace building among political players within the Zambian political arena. However, others do not seem to subscribe to that. Using the 5-point Likert Scale as a tool for data collection, the question of the Christian religion and its role in conflict resolution and peace building in Zambia was investigated. The study sought to inquire on the perceptions of Zambians towards Christianity as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building in Zambia especially within the political arena. The results gathered show that most Zambians perceive religion (Christianity) as an important tool for conflict resolution and peace building, but seem divided on the symbols. These include the declaration of Zambia as Christian nation, the designation of 18<sup>th</sup> October for prayer and fasting and the building of the National House of Prayer.

**KEYWORDS:** Perceptions, Christian Religion, Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Peace, Peace Building.

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## **HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN ZAMBIA**

Muwowo and Buitendag (2010) state that Zambia's Christian history is traced back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century when European and North American missionaries established mission centres around the territory now called Zambia. These mission centres were established with the view to teach Christian values and largely overlooked local cultural values accounting for the rise in dominance of Christianity in the nation. The famous explorer David Livingstone of the London Missionary Society (LMS) was one of the earliest pioneers, who saw the commencement of European missionary ventures in the territory now called Zambia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Christianity became more pervasive when industry first started to expand rapidly on the Copperbelt region according to Muwowo and Buitendag. Many people migrated from the rural areas to work in the newly opened mines in the region. When they did so, the members of the different tribes found common ground for the development of new relationships between the tribes, resulting in much intermarrying and the development of cross-cultural relations, which became a basis for unity. The establishment of such unity in the midst of much diversity gave rise to the establishment of the largest Protestant Church in Zambia, namely the United Church of Zambia (UCZ), on 16 January 1965 at Mindolo in Kitwe. The Church itself was to become a union of different Christian missionary groups, such as those of the London Missionary Society (LMS), of the Free Church of Scotland, of the Paris Evangelical Church of France, of the Methodist Church of Britain, of the Primitive Methodist Church, and of the Copperbelt Union Church, among others. The different denominations were to form one large church missionary enterprise, which would approach the missionary work to be done for Christ in the spirit of oneness in Christ. Since that time, Christianity has spread to every district of the

country, being relatively unchallenged by the proponents of other faiths. Findings of the nationwide census conducted by Central Statistics Office of Zambia in 2000 revealed that 87.5% of the respondents reported membership to some Christian church at some stage (Muwowo & Buitendag, 2010).

## **CHRISTIANITY IN CONTEMPORARY ZAMBIA**

When President Fredrick Chiluba was elected as the second President of the Republic of Zambia in October 1991, he declared Zambia a Christian nation on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1991. Subsequently, the Zambian Parliament adopted and included the Zambia Christian nation declaration in the Constitution (Mwansa, 2008: p.558). Fast-forward to 2015, according to Adamu (2016), Zambia's 6<sup>th</sup> President, Edgar Lungu declared October 18 as a national day of prayer. Furthermore, President Edgar Lungu appointed a 12-member Advisory Board, and a Fundraising and Technical Committee to spearhead a project of constructing a National House of Prayer, and also created a Ministry of National Guidance and Religious Affairs.

## **ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE BUILDING EFFORTS**

The Christian tradition has made significant contributions to world peace at a number of different levels (Albert, 2011). Among these are public statements by Church leaders, programs of action at local and international levels, organisations dedicated to bringing about peace, courses of study, commemorative days and so forth. In recent decades, Church leaders have frequently made statements in support of peace. In some cases these statements have been specific appeals for peace in particular circumstances, however, on other occasions

they have also published more comprehensive statements on the need for peace and the means of achieving it. The teachings of Christianity, guided by the Bible (word of God), have constantly encouraged the members to ensure peace and harmony in the society.

Christian leaders have always publicly stood for societal peace and harmony and against violence. It is now widely accepted that violent conflict is the major hindrance to the development of the African continent. It inflicts human sufferings through death, destruction of livelihoods, constant displacement and insecurity (Barash, 2000). Violent conflict disrupts the process of production, creates conditions for pillage of the country's resources and diverts their application from development purposes to servicing war. Violent conflict is thus responsible for perpetuating misery and underdevelopment in Africa. (Adetula, 2006).

Peace is an experience that everyone desires and wishes to enjoy endlessly. Traditions, cultures, religions and societies do have different prescriptions to attaining and enjoying peace. Whenever and wherever there is peace there tends to be development and longevity is enjoyed (Salawu, 2010). To this end, Christianity which is one of the predominant religions in the world today teaches peace and encourages all adherents to the faiths to pursue peace and live peacefully with one another. The above statement now seems to be questionable with the rise of intra, inter and ethno-religious conflicts in the world.

Christianity as a word means followers of Christ or Christ like. Christians therefore are those who follow and act the teaching of Christ in all ways of life. One of the climaxes of Christianity or Christian virtue is peace. Christians are enjoined in the Bible to embrace and live peacefully with their neighbours. The term 'peace' in Christianity is translated from the Hebrew word 'shalom', which is a key word in

the Bible and its at the center of how God wants human beings to live on earth. One of the key things Jesus came to give humanity is peace and thus expects people s to live in peace as cited in the scriptural verses above.

Peace was not only what Jesus taught but He also lived it, this in most cases is what scholars call pacifism, as Jesus never taught violence, even at his arrest by the Pharisees and one of his disciples struck the ears of the priest, Jesus rebuked the disciple and said that "those who live by the sword shall die by the sword" (Mathew 26:52, NKJV). In another place Jesus taught the people not to retaliate any evil done to them as it used to be, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, if one should strike you on the right cheek, turn the left cheek (Mathew 5:38-39, NKJV) but now to always forgive those that offend them and he charged them to forgive their neighbours even seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22, KJV). With all these scriptural teachings of the church, Christians are supposed to live in peace and harmony in the society.

## **CRITICISM TOWARDS CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS IN ZAMBIA**

It has been pointed out by some however, that despite the desire by the political powers to govern Zambia by Christian values, political tension has continued to rise especially around the time of presidential and parliamentary elections. Tembo (2015) states that the eminent rise of tribal politics during elections results in a lot of political violence. Vulgar and abusive language is commonplace. There is physical violence. This has brought to question the value of the existence of Christian institutions such as the church in conflict resolution and fostering peace. One of the key critiques of the Christian religion's inaction in times of conflict is Elias Munshya, a Zambian lawyer domiciled in Canada and an avid blogger on Social Media. Munshya (2015) called for the

church in Zambia to take a practical approach regarding their contribution towards peace building in the country. He particularly challenged the Pentecostal churches in the country, who he claimed were full of rhetoric, but inactive. Further still, some have suggested that the church in Zambia was too divided within itself and thus did not have what it took to reconcile conflict in society and thus was incapable of fostering peace in Zambia.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

It is clear that advocates for the involvement of Christian institutions such as the church have perceived the church as one that lacks the requisite competences, ethos and even drive to intervene in conflict situations. Most however, believe the church has a key role to play in resolving conflicts and also in building peace in the country. Preliminary review of literature revealed that there was insufficient studies done and therefore inadequate data with regard to the perceptions of Zambians towards Christian institutions as tools for conflict resolution and peace building. The problem that exists thus, is the lack of empirical data that clearly demonstrate the perceptions of citizens towards the Christian religion as a useful tool in resolving conflicts in the country. This study was undertaken as an investigating aimed at closing the information gap regarding perceptions of citizens towards Christian institutions as tools for resolving conflicts and building peace in the country.

### **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

The study done was a qualitative one, using the 5-point Likert scale for collecting data, which was analysed using simple descriptive statistics. The tool had seven (7) statements to which respondents were reacting to that scaled their perceptions of a particular point. The following were the statements:

1. Declaring Zambia as a Christian nation by President Chiluba was a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.
2. Declaring Zambia as a Christian nation by President Chiluba disadvantages other religions in Zambia.
3. Incorporating the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in the Constitution is a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.
4. Incorporating the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in the Constitution disfranchises other religions in Zambia.
5. The designation of October 18<sup>th</sup> as a day of prayer and fasting is a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.
6. The establishment of the National House of Prayer is a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.
7. Religion plays a major role in peace building and conflict resolution.

The collection of data mounted on the Survey Monkey platform and circulated via email, whatsapp and on facebook. A total of 100 respondents came forward and provided responses.

### **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study relied on qualitative data analysis tools using descriptive statistics, particularly analysing a measure of central tendency, in this instance, the mode. Each statement required the respondent to indicate the category that best suits their perceptions towards the idea presented in the statement, ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The responses are presented as follows:

**Statement 1:** Declaring Zambia as a Christian nation by President Chiluba was a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	37	37%
Agree	30	30%
Neither Agree or Disagree	13	13%
Disagree	15	15%
Strongly Disagree	5	5%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 37 strongly agreed with the statement while 30 agreed with the state. The other end of the spectrum shows that only 5 and 15 strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. From the findings, Zambians perceived the declaration of Zambia as a

Christian nation was a positive move towards building peace in Zambia and that it was good for conflict resolution. It can be concluded that the perception of Zambians towards the declaration is largely positive.

**Statement 2:** Declaring Zambia as a Christian nation by President Chiluba disadvantages other religions in Zambia.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	12	12%
Agree	20	20%
Neither Agree Or Disagree	17	17%
Disagree	36	36%
Strongly Disagree	15	15%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 36 disagreed with the statement while 15 strongly disagree. The other end of the table spectrum shows that 12 and 20 respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The responses provided to the second statement demonstrate that most

Zambians do not think that the Christian nation declaration disadvantaged the other religions in the country. Their perception is that it was a fair move by the late president.

**Statement 3:** Incorporating the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in the Constitution is a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	24	24%
Agree	34	34%
Neither Agree or Disagree	16	16%
Disagree	14	14%
Strongly Disagree	12	12%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 34 agreed with the statement while 24 strongly agreed. The other end of the table spectrum shows that 12 and 14 respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The perception of Zambians in this regard is that constitutional sing the Christian

nation declaration. It can be concluded that they desire to ensure that the declaration stands the test of time and that Zambia must be viewed as a nation that is predominantly Christian.

**Statement 4:** Incorporating the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in the Constitution disfranchises other religions in Zambia.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	12	12%
Agree	15	15%
Neither Agree or Disagree	16	16%
Disagree	46	46%
Strongly Disagree	11	11%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 46 disagreed with the statement while 11 strongly disagreed. The other end of the table spectrum shows that 12 and 15 respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The responses to statement 4 are in direct support to the response in statement 3. In statement 4, the respondents do not perceive the constitutionalisation of the declaration as disfranchising other religion. The belief that Zambia is Christian is deeply entrenched in most citizens so much that the thought of

disfranchising other religions is somewhat remote.

From the responses provided, Zambians generally have a positive perception towards the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation. All the responses with reference to the declaration gravitate towards a positive perception especially as it is viewed as a symbol of conflict resolution and peace building,

**Statement 5:** The designation of October 18th as a day of prayer and fasting is a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	14	14%
Agree	23	23%
Neither Agree or Disagree	12	12%
Disagree	30	30%
Strongly Disagree	22	22%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 30 disagreed with the statement while 22 strongly disagreed. The other end of the table spectrum shows that 14

and 23 respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. It can be seen that compared to the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, the declaration of 18<sup>th</sup> October as a day of prayer and fasting seem to be

perceived negatively as a symbol of conflict resolution and peace building. A substantial number of respondents seem to suggest that the 18<sup>th</sup> of October is not really a useful symbol for peace building and conflict resolution, although another group, slightly smaller though believe it is. The division for and against the

18<sup>th</sup> of October is clear with those against seemingly a little more than those for.

**Statement 6:** The establishment of the National House of Prayer is a positive move towards peace building and conflict resolution in Zambia.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	10	10%
Agree	24	24%
Neither Agree or Disagree	19	19%
Disagree	28	28%
Strongly Disagree	19	19%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 28 disagreed with the statement while 19 strongly disagreed. The other end of the table spectrum shows that 10 and 24 respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The National House of Prayer is another symbol in the Zambian society that seem to have slightly more critiques for its

existence as a symbol of peace building and conflict resolution. 28 out of 100 respondents said they did not agree with the fact that the National House of Prayer was a symbol for peace building while 24 agreed, bringing the division to nearly in the middle, with those against scoring slightly more though.

**Statement 7:** Religion plays a major role in peace building and conflict resolution.

Answer Choice	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Strongly Agree	35	35%
Agree	44	44%
Neither Agree or Disagree	10	10%
Disagree	6	6%
Strongly Disagree	5	5%
	100	100%

The responses to this statement clearly show that of the 100 respondents who participated in this research exercise, 6 disagreed with the statement while 5 strongly disagreed. The other end of the table spectrum shows that 35 and 44 respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. The question of religion's role in peace building and conflict resolution clearly receives resounding responses in the affirmative. It is clear that Zambians desire that

religion takes a leading role in resolving conflicts and build peace.

## CONCLUSION

It can be clearly concluded that while Zambians perceive religion to be a useful tool for conflict resolution and peace building, they seem to have doubts with regard to specific symbols. The findings in the study show that Zambians perceive religion as an important tool for

conflict resolution and peace building. The responses endorsing religion as a useful tool for conflict resolution and peace building were overwhelmingly in the affirmative with 79 out of 100 responses supporting the view. Only 11 out of 100 thought religion did not play an integral part conflict resolution and peace building. The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation by late President Chiluba is perceived to be a symbol of conflict resolution and peace building, while their seem to be a negative perception towards the 18<sup>th</sup> of October as a day of prayer and fasting, and the National House of Prayer.

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