

# **The Impact of the Declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation on Religious Education: Perceptions of Stakeholders**

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## **Abstract**

*The impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation on Religious Education (R.E.) can be looked at in terms of content, strategies and learners. In terms of content, some sections of society may consider R.E. as a means to overtly promote Christian beliefs, practices and ideologies. However, in Zambia schools comprise learners who are religiously heterogeneous. Furthermore, the 1996 National Educational Policy espouses liberal democratic values such as autonomy, liberty and fairness. The objectives of the study were to: establish the views of stakeholders on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation and Religious Education; examine the impact which the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation had on R.E. While most stakeholders argued that R.E. should become more inclusive, others asserted that due to the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, RE should be exclusive to Christianity. This trend, defeats the educational aim of R.E. which is, the acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. The dominance of a single religion in R.E. risks limiting awareness of religious diversity and deprives learners a genuine space for dialogue with other religions. It was in this regard that the study investigated the perceptions of senior secondary school R.E. teachers, learners and religious leaders on the impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation on R.E. The study employed the qualitative approach with interview and focus group discussion as methods of eliciting data from the respondents*

**Key Words:** Christian, Declaration, Liberal, Nation, Religious Education,

## 1.0 Background

In modern society, the place of Religious Education (R.E.) in publicly-funded schools is a contentious issue (Coulby, 2010; Parerkh, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Zambeta, 2008). Some people argue that R.E. should not be included as a school subject but be treated as a private matter because its epistemic knowledge is not subject to dialectic verification, refutation or falsification (Parerkh, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Zambeta, 2008). At the other end of the spectrum, other people make a case that R.E. which is open, inclusive and non-confessional, should have a place in public schools because it promotes values such as tolerance and co-existence amongst learners with diverse religious backgrounds (Richardson, 2007; Simuchimba, 2004). The contestation becomes fierce in situations where religion is supposedly seen to be conflicting with the ideals of equality and freedom in the wake of modern society which is dynamic and evolving, always being influenced by other communities (Osler and Starkey, 2005). To the contrary, inclusive and non-confessional RE has great potential to help learners from different religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds empathise and value their parallels and variations in diversity (Richardson, 2007).

Although Zambian R.E. syllabuses include other religions such as Indigenous Zambian Beliefs, Islam and Hinduism, the two senior secondary school syllabus heavily lean on Christianity thereby leaving other religions in the periphery in terms of content (Mujdrlica, 1995). In a way, the content of the two R.E. syllabuses is in contrast with the threefold aims of R.E. as articulated by Lahnemann (1985: 123) who argues that the aims of R.E. are to:

Enable learners to have a better knowledge of the religions they come from; develop interest in other religions; and, have a better understanding of the values and ways of life of learners who do not belong to their own religion.

To achieve the aims of R.E. as stated above, the R.E. curriculum needs to take into account all the existing major religious traditions including other issues affecting modern society. It is for this reason that some stakeholders have called for an inclusive type of R.E. devoid of confessional approach (Mujdrlica, 1995; Simuchimba, 2004).

The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation is another issue of concern for R.E. It is important for national leaders to guard against the imposition of any particular religion on the entire society in that it might lead to learners being denied the opportunity to learn different religious traditions. In the case of Zambia, the society is increasingly becoming multi-faith and multi-cultural (Simuchimba, 2004). Thus, the Republican constitution should be a neutral document that should not discriminate against atheists, agnostics or pagans, or those who believe in Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Jainism and Baha'i faith. If left unchecked, such a declaration might have a twofold effect in that it might lead to a feeling of religious superiority among the followers of the religion that have been accorded constitutional status and that of second class citizenry among the others.

Located firmly within the discourse of the context of R.E. in Zambian modern society which is becoming more multi-faith, multi-cultural, pluralistic and democratic (Simuchimba, 2004), this study explored the impact of the 181

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declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation on R.E. Unlike Simuchimba's (2004) study which focused on examining how the declaration had been used by Evangelical churches and ministries to justify calls for major policy changes in the Zambian society including the reintroduction of Bible Knowledge in schools among other changes this study went a step ahead and interacted with R.E. teachers and learners to gather first-hand information on the issue. This provided new knowledge on whether the declaration had an impact on R.E. or not.

### **2.0 Literature Review**

Religious Education in Zambia has over the years evolved through different stages namely: pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Prior to the encounter with missionaries, indigenous people were fully involved in the religious dimension of life. Every aspect of African life was punctuated by religious experience. For instance, birth, puberty, marriage ceremony and death were accorded a spiritual significance (Snelson, 1974). Haar (1992) contends that African religious life was intertwined with all the facets of society, such as political, economic, social and educational dimensions. Additionally, Dickson (1979) states that there is a strong attachment between African culture and religion so much that religion enlighten the African life in its entirety. As such, religion is given so much prominence in the African setting that all activities, education and relationships are permeated by religious dimensions (Bussia, 1964). Noteworthy, Snelson (1974) pointed out that religious teaching was centered on the supreme being, a remote but all-pervading Creator, and the more intimate tribal gods who controlled the tribe's fortune.182

With the arrival of the early missionaries in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) in 1883, the provision of education was closely linked with religion in the sense that the missionaries used education as a tool for conversion of indigenous people to Christianity with different denominations providing dissimilar varieties of Christianity, some of which were perceived to be fundamentally diverse from the others (Carmody, 2004). However, in April, 1924 the British government took over the administration of Northern Rhodesia and declared it a Protectorate which lasted up to 1964. In the church state relationship, the government sought to collaborate with different missionaries to ensure that the role of religion was tailored towards character building of the indigenous people (Carmody, 2004). This is attested by the Education Policy in British Tropical Africa which indicates that:

The greatest importance must be attached to religious teaching and moral instruction. Both in schools and in training colleges, they should be accorded an equal standing with secular subjects. Such teaching must be related to the conditions of life and to the daily experiences of the pupils. It should find expression in habits of self-discipline and loyalty to the community. With such safeguards, contact with civilization need not be injurious, or the introduction of new religious ideas has a disruptive influence antagonistic to constituted secular authority (Carmody 2004: 109).

Zambia attained its political independence from Britain in 1964. However, the paradigm of denominationalisation of Religious Education was perpetuated up to the 1970s as was the case in the colonial dispensation. Two parallel programmes in the running of Religious Education emerged. In church run schools, Religious Instruction 183

(RI) as R.E. was called then, was timetabled and taught like any other subjects, while in government schools, the subject was not on the main timetable but was taught after normal classes by different religious leaders from different denominations (Kamanga, 2013). In either case, R.E. was, nevertheless, meant to promote religious absolutism. The beliefs and values of one religion were taken as absolute truth hence Religious Education could be said to have been confessional, doctrinal, and exclusivist in nature. In the light of denominational R.E., each denomination had its own Religious Instruction (RI) syllabus for primary and junior secondary school, while the Cambridge Bible Knowledge syllabus continued to be used at senior secondary school level (Simuchimba, 2004). Owing to operational challenges, however, the authorities sought to remedy this scenario by challenging different churches to develop an interdenominational Religious Education syllabus which was to be implemented throughout the nation irrespective of the school's religious background (Mujdrlica, 1995; Simuchimba, 2004). The decision was made in a deliberate effort towards the provision of meaningful and relevant education to the Zambian society because curriculum design is developed with awareness of its philosophical position and links to what society believes is important for children to learn (Colby, 1983).

The growth of an ecumenical Religious Education in Zambia can, to a large extent, be attributed to the Gaba Pastoral Institute of Uganda (Smith, 1982). In consultations with different churches and lecturers from various Teachers' colleges in Zambia, the institute developed two syllabuses namely; 'Developing in Christ' for junior secondary schools and 'Christian Living Today' for senior secondary schools. The aim of R.E. then was to contribute fully to the life and development of the 184

country by molding mature and responsible students (Carmody, 2004; Masterton, 1987; Mujdrlica, 1995). In 1975, the new syllabuses were put into operation in the Zambian schools. At junior secondary school, the syllabus consisted of 'Developing in Christ' was taught in form One and Two and a Zambian Supplement taught in form Three with 'Christian Living Today' adopted at form Four and Five level. In this manner, Christian Living Today became an alternative syllabus to the Cambridge Bible Knowledge Syllabus which was before then, the only Religious Education syllabus offered in secondary schools (Mujdrlica, 1995).

Perhaps, a major shift in the educational system was witnessed in 1977 following the educational reforms which the government instituted (Ministry of Education, 1977). The fundamental aim of these reforms was to produce an education that was properly attuned to and met the aspirations of the Zambian people. With the stated reforms, Religious Education changed from its exclusive outlook in the denominational and ecumenical stages to being educational. Further, the revision of both the junior and senior secondary syllabuses in conformity with the 1977 educational Reforms ultimately led to the contextualising of religious Education. Additionally, aspects of Zambian Humanism, which was the national philosophy at that time, Islam, Hinduism and Indigenous Traditional beliefs were incorporated and became part and parcel of Religious Education. This inclusion saw the subject's name change to Spiritual and Moral Education with its aim stated as:

To enable pupils to appreciate spiritual, moral, and religious values and behaviour based on them. This appreciation is drawn from the four main religious traditions in Zambia, namely Christianity, 185

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Hinduism, Indigenous Zambian Beliefs, and Islam, and from the religious elements of the Zambia philosophy of Humanism (MOE 1984: 4).

The changes brought about by the 1977 Educational Reforms came into being when educators sought to introduce a more multi-religious approach in the teaching of R.E. This form of the subject was introduced to help learners live together in harmony and to have a better understanding of what other people believe and do in order to promote an attitude of openness and tolerance, as well as a readiness to listen and ask questions instead of making judgments based on inaccurate information (Kamanga, 2013).

In the wake of the successful 1977 Education Reforms, there was a call for teachers and lecturers to take up the initiative of producing new education materials locally (MoE, 1977). Thus, the Zambian Religious Education syllabus 2044 replaced the GABA 'Christian Living Today' and the Cambridge Bible Knowledge' syllabuses although some evangelical teachers on the Copperbelt Province expressed misgivings over the removal of the Cambridge Bible Knowledge Syllabus (Masterton, 1987). Arguing that Religious Education Syllabus 2044 was philosophically Roman Catholic-biased, the evangelical teachers decided to reform the old Cambridge Bible Knowledge syllabus to produce an alternative R.E. syllabus 2046, in 1984. Ever since, the two R.E. syllabuses have been running side by side. Suffice to say, Mudalitsa (2006) contended that both RE syllabus 2044 and R.E. syllabus 2046 were of British origin. He argued that syllabus 2046 originated in the 1940s and was introduced in Zambia before independence under the name of Cambridge Bible Knowledge syllabus. On the other hand, syllabus 2044 originated in the early 1960s 186



and came to Zambia through East Africa as the 'Christian Living Today' syllabus (Ibid).

In 1991, Zambia reverted to multi-party system of governance and since then, the period has been referred to as the third republic. During this era, the country witnessed an invigorated spirit of emphasis on various liberties both in the political as well as the educational systems. On 29 December 1991, President Chiluba declared Zambia a Christian nation. The reasons behind the declaration were, however, not clear leading to some people calling it, a unilateral declaration. To ardent supporters of the declaration, Chiluba made the proclamation as a prophet rededication of the country to the will of God. Others though, took it that the declaration was more for political reasons than religious; the country was transitioning from the Kaunda era with its strong ideological background and to a greater extent, the fear of the Islamic threat (Kamanga, 2013; Cheyeka, 2014).

Undoubtedly, the declaration was met with mixed feelings across the Zambian society with mostly evangelical Christians calling for the domination of Christianity as well as the reintroduction of Bible Knowledge in schools while the Zambia Episcopal Conference as well as other citizens and those of different faiths had their reservations. On a religious front, the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation did not reduce the influence of other religious traditions on Zambian culture because freedom of religion is constitutionally guaranteed (Simuchimba, 2004). Politically, Cheyeka (2014) noted that the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation gave force to the Pentecostal movement for their continued involvement in the country's affairs and a Religious Affairs desk was established at State House. Educationally, the position of R.E. became contentious and the subject was said to have been affected 187

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by the declaration. The only non-religious source of RE content, *Zambian Humanism*, was removed from all the R.E. syllabuses (Kamanga, 2013) and there were calls for R.E. to be replaced by Bible Knowledge. The subject further saw a growing tendency of starting lessons with a prayer by overzealous evangelical Religious Education teachers who felt empowered by the declaration to turn the classroom into a church (Simuchimba, 2004).

In order to address various aspects of freedoms, the country enacted the *Zambian Constitution of 1996* and formulated the 1996 National Educational Policy titled *Educating Our Future*. Replacing the 1977 Educational Reforms, the 1996 document addressed the entire field of formal institutional education, emphasizing democratisation, decentralisation and productivity on the one hand, and curriculum relevance and diversification, efficient and cost-effective management, capacity building, cost sharing and revitalized partnerships on the other hand (MoE, 1996). Additionally, the policy clearly indicates the mission of the Ministry of Education as being able to guide the provision of education for all Zambians so that they are able to defend democratic ideals, and accept and value other persons on the basis of their personal worth and dignity, irrespective of gender, religion, ethnic origin, or any other discriminatory characteristics.

To ensure that the education system is in tandem with the tenants of pluralism, the policy document recognizes the ideals of democracy in its philosophical rationale as stated below:

Zambia is a democratic society. Hence, it is the values of liberal democracy that must guide its educational policies. The core values of liberal democracy are rational and moral autonomy, equality, fairness and liberty (MoE, 1996).<sup>188</sup>

From this perspective, the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation is at variance with what the National Education Policy of 1996 espouses in that it does not resonate well with a fast growing Zambian multi-religious society (Carmody, 2004).

### **3.0 Methodology**

This section discusses the research design, research study area, population, sample, sampling techniques, instruments used for data collection, procedure for data collection and data analysis. The article used a qualitative approach, specifically, a case study design which is an intensive study through which one can know precisely the factors and causes of a particular phenomenon (Ghosh, 1992). The design was chosen because the study's task was to collect information on people's opinions and other social and religious issues concerning the impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation on Religious Education. The study was conducted in Lusaka District. The population comprised all R.E. teachers, religious leaders from the three selected religions and pupils. The sample study comprised of 3 Religious Education teachers, 3 Religious leaders and 24 pupils, making a total of 30 respondents. However, this study used purposive sampling and specifically typical sampling as it only targeted those respondents who were expected to have adequate knowledge and information on the impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation on Religious Education.

Moreover, data collection was done through the interviews with the aim to have the participant reflect on his or her experiences and then relate those experiences to the interviewer in such a way that the two come to a mutual understanding about the meanings of the experiences or 189

of the account of the experiences. Besides, a focus group discussion was used to allow emphasis on the questioning and construction of meaning (Bryman, 2001). The two methods allowed the researchers to interact with stakeholders and gather their views on the impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation on Religious Education.

#### **4.0 Findings**

The data was presented according to the themes derived from the objectives of the study.

##### **Christian Nation and Religious Education**

When asked to comment on the understanding of Religious Education, a pupil from school A said that R.E. was a subject about God and other religions while the other pupils added that Religious Education was a subject which showed how different religions viewed life. The reason behind taking the subject was that the subject was compulsory at the school and that it helped them appreciate different religions. Furthermore, another pupil stated, “Religious Education is more than a church service which enables pupils to understand different cultural perspectives, develop life skills and help set personal principles as we interact with fellow pupils and other people from other religions.”

Commenting on what they knew about the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, the majority of the pupil participants indicated that the declaration was made by the late President Chiluba in 1991 and that it was a good thing as it set the Zambians apart and made the citizens to refrain from different vices.190

From School B, similar questions were asked and one pupil said, “Religious Education is interesting because it draws me closer to the Bible.”

Another pupil indicated that RE was a good subject because it taught about morality emphasized in different religions. She further added that she took R.E. because it was a compulsory subject at their school. Generally, the pupils noted that they learnt about other world religions not just Christianity. They added that the content of other world religions was enough and useful in the sense that it helped them to understand other people’s religious experiences, their beliefs and practices. Another pupil reasoned that:

Teaching and learning about one religion like Christianity in Zambia will discriminate other people of different religious beliefs. It is through religious discrimination that some countries do not have peace. So incorporating other religions in R.E. syllabuses was a good idea.

With regard to knowledge about the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, one pupil mentioned that it was President F.T.J. Chiluba who declared Zambia as a Christian nation because he wanted to maintain peace in the country by having a people who would be molded with Christian values. This would help to come up with a society free from violence.

At School C, pupils taking R.E. syllabus 2046 were asked to give their views about the subject. In response, one of the pupils indicated that R.E. was a subject that enabled them to learn about different religions and know more about the religions. She added that they took up R.E. because they were asked to choose from the optional subjects offered by the school and that they picked Religious Education because they wanted to strengthen their faith and know what other religious groups believed and how they worshipped. Moreover, the participants noted that they were taught other religions namely, 191

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Islam, Hinduism and Zambian traditional beliefs and practices.

One pupil indicated the following:

The content of what we learn in Religious Education is sufficient and helpful in the sense that it helps us know what other people believe in and have tolerance in terms of understanding religious issues; why other people behave in the way they behave or carry or rather conduct themselves in a particular way. Therefore, all religions should be taught in Religious Education in order for us to know and have a deep understanding of the origin of each religion even when we do not belong to them.

From School C, when asked about the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, one pupil indicated that the declaration was a plea for God's spiritual covering. In addition, another pupil indicated that the late former President Chiluba declared the nation Christian in order to avoid the anti-Christ that would completely distort the dominant Christian values that helped to maintain peace in the country since independence.

Furthermore, regarding R.E. syllabuses, a teacher from School A indicated that Religious Education syllabuses had been changing over time but she taught the syllabus offered at the school because of the school ethos. In terms of methods of delivery, the teacher mentioned teacher exposition, role play and discussion methods as the most commonly used methods in R.E. The teacher further indicated that the content about other religions in R.E. was sufficient as different religious concepts were covered. However, she suggested that more detailed information should be added on other religions because the Christian part had more information than the other religions. In addition, she noted that all the major religions including the Chinese religions should be added because many people with different religious backgrounds were coming to Zambia and pupils needed to understand their religions.192

Commenting on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation, the teacher said, “The declaration is a mere declaration without major effects on the teaching of Religious Education. The large Christian content is a result of historical factors and not the declaration itself.”

At School B, a teacher teaching R.E. syllabus 2044, indicated that since he started teaching the subject, little had changed with regards to the content of R.E. at secondary school level. He added that though he was trained to teach both syllabuses, he taught syllabus 2044 because that was the syllabus taught at the school. According to the teacher at School B, he taught using different methods that he was taught at college though he found it challenging because of the time and material constraints. He added that the content in the syllabus about other religions was enough and it included all the most dominant religious traditions in Zambia. The teacher further noted:

It is fine to teach about the four main religions in Zambia. However, because of some social and economic factors, many people of different religions such as Chinese and Japanese have moved into Zambia with their children who sometimes take Religious Education as a subject at all levels of Education. Therefore, all identified religions should be taught in schools so that adherents of these religions could be familiar with the religions in Zambia and Zambians could also understand other people’s religious traditions. This can lead to tolerance among different religious groups.

With regard to the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, the teacher from School B indicated, “The late former President Chiluba did a good thing to give Zambia such a big religious declaration for as long as he allowed freedom of worship and did not violate other people’s rights.” 193

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He added that the declaration had secured the peace of the Zambian citizens despite some economic and political pressures the nation faced. He further indicated that in some African countries there was violence among religious groups due to lack of tolerance among the groups.

At School C, the teacher captured in the study described R.E. as a very important subject that should be compulsory and taught in all schools because its content reminded humans about the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of society. Like other participants, the teacher indicated that he taught R.E. syllabus 2046 because it was the syllabus offered at the school. He mentioned that Religious Education syllabus 2046 was a common syllabus that was offered in most government schools. He further stated that he mostly used teacher exposition, question and answer, and group work because of their effectiveness when it came to dealing with large numbers of pupils. He argued that the content on other religions was insufficient because the syllabus concentrated on Christianity. He added that the syllabus had more content from the Bible than from the holy scriptures of other religions that were included in syllabus. He therefore proposed that the syllabus should be reviewed in order to have a balance on content coverage. He also proposed that all the pronounced world religions should be included in the subject syllabuses as was the case at tertiary level. This would enable learners to understand people with different religious values.

In commenting on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation and R.E., the teacher from School C said, "It is something that came into being in the 1990s and has nothing to do with Religious Education syllabuses that were established in the early 1980s and are still in use up to date despite minor changes in some topics."194



### **Impact on Religious Education**

When asked about the impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation on RE, the majority of the pupils noted that the declaration had not affected RE in any way because the pupils also learnt about other religions and that if it did, the RE content would have been all Christian, as is the case in Muslim countries declared Muslim nations.

One of the pupils said, “The declaration does not make Christianity mandatory but it is only the values of the country that are based on Christianity.”

However, other pupils had the view that the declaration affected R.E. in that the content side-lined other religions like Zambian Traditional practices, which were not captured fully in the syllabuses. They noted that non-Christians might feel out of place and they might not be free to express their religious rights. In addition, one pupil observed that it was wrong for the late President Chiluba to declare Zambia a Christian nation since there were many religions in Zambia.

He concluded, “however, the declaration has no impact on how R.E. is taught since R.E. teachers do not make reference to it when teaching.”

Furthermore, the findings from the teacher at School A confirmed that the declaration did not have any effect on the teaching of R.E. He added that the large Christian content was as a result of historical factors and not the declaration. In the same line, the teacher from School B was of the view that the declaration had not affected the teaching and learning of Religious Education because it firstly gave room to religious freedom and that the R.E. syllabuses attempted to cater even for other religions which had very few followers in Zambia. In addition, the teacher from School C observed that the R.E. syllabuses had nothing to do with the declaration which was too recent. He suggested that the way forward would be for teachers to teach like professionals and not like pastors who inclined themselves to one faith.<sup>195</sup>

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Religious leaders from three different religious traditions were also interviewed to find out their views on the declaration to the R.E. Religious leader A indicated that he had little background of what was offered in R.E. pointing out that he only took the subject at Primary school but appreciated its content. He indicated that R.E. was basic but balanced and portrayed a positive attitude to faith. It was an educational subject which did not aim at swaying learners towards a particular religion. Accordingly, R.E. was an ideal subject because it covered all the major religions and it had well-balanced information that encouraged learners and those they interacted with to understand each other for the betterment of the Zambian society.

Commenting on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, Religious leader A indicated that he appreciated the declaration because, generally, the Zambian citizens did not seem to be concerned about the declaration. It had not caused any overzealous attitudes among the people of Zambia. He further indicated that the declaration did not affect the teaching of R.E. because R.E. still accommodated other religions and Christianity as a religion promoted coexistence among different groups of people.

Data was also collected from Religious leader B so as to gather her views on the impact of the declaration on R.E. She was firstly asked whether she did R.E. during her school career to which she responded that she did the subject only at junior secondary school level. Her general view on R.E. in Zambia was that the content focused much on Christianity and Islam with little information on other world religions. Religious leader B further indicated that the imbalance in content for major world religions made the syllabuses not to be ideal because there was clear indication that the syllabuses enhanced religious discrimination. She suggested that all the major nine religions of the world should be included in order for pupils to have insight of other religions. 196

Religious leader B then concluded that the content for other religions was not sufficient and helpful. Therefore:

Though Zambia is a Christian nation, the Zambian Religious Education syllabuses should promote coexistence among all Zambians by including and having a balance of all religions. Furthermore, the principle of love which puts emphasis on embracing all kinds of people even those from other religions should be reflected in the syllabuses. With regard to the declaration, I find it to be a good idea because it protects the country from political vices. The declaration has not affected on Religious Education because the syllabuses were there even before the declaration was pronounced. The way forward is to further revisit the R.E. syllabuses to meet the needs of all Zambians. There is need to engage scholars and curriculum developers in research to explore all other world religions and include the content in the R.E. syllabuses.

Religious leader C was also interviewed to get his views on how the declaration had affected R.E. in Zambia. He started by noting that he had not done R.E. at secondary school level but had some basics of the subject from primary school. He added that as the director of one of the Church mother bodies, he had knowledge about the type of R.E. that was offered in Zambia because his organisation stocked all the primary and secondary school R.E. syllabuses.

According to Religious leader C, the R.E. content was too broad to be understood by the learners. This was because of the inclusion of other religions which distorted the Christian faith built in children before they started school. He added that R.E. should focus on Christianity because children should come face to face with the original faith they received from their parents or guardians. He noted that:

The inclusion of other religions in RE syllabuses is like a person who works in the bank and has not been trained to distinguish between the fake and true currency. By the time the banker 197

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realises that he is receiving fake currency, he will have lost out a lot of money. Therefore, if other religions are introduced to pupils at primary and secondary level, then it is as good as a banker who loses out because of fake notes. Let other religions be introduced at tertiary level because by then, the learners will have been matured enough to decide or choose where they should belong.

In response to the question whether the content on other religions was sufficient, Religious leader C was of the view that it was more than sufficient and that it was actually not supposed to be included because Zambia was a Christian Nation and embracing other religions was like having an open cheque which could be signed by anybody. However, the Religious leader acknowledged that tolerance of other religions was a good thing. He added that the Christian nation Declaration was not there to restrict anyone from converting to other religions the declaration should set limits in order not to have the same credit hours as the dominant Christian faith. However, the religious leader noted that:

The declaration has positively affected Religious Education in Zambia in the sense that it has made people realise the fact that it is not just any one who can teach the subject like the way other subjects are taught even by drunkards or immoral people. Putting the declaration in mind, RE teachers should realise that they are role models expected to have high moral standards. Failure to do so defeats the whole purpose of teaching the subject.

He therefore suggested that the title Religious Education was not appropriate. "I wish it was called Bible Knowledge or Bible Education, since it is Christian dominated. The syllabuses should further be revised with more consultations from the Christian Clergy."198

## **5.0 Discussion**

The main purpose of the paper was to establish whether the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation had any impact on Religious Education. The discussion is presented under themes drawn from the findings which are: Christian nation and Religious Education and Impact on Religious Education. Finally, the discussion ends with a conclusion.

### **Christian nation and Religious Education**

The first objective was to establish the views of stakeholders on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation and R.E. The findings showed that stakeholders had an understanding of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation and Religious Education.

Religious Education as a curriculum subject had been changing over time and the syllabus offered in a school was mostly informed by the school ethos. Thus, while Catholic schools offered syllabus 2044, Protestant schools and most government schools offered syllabus 2046. So R.E. teachers taught either syllabus 2044 or 2046 because that was the syllabus adopted by the school, though they were trained to teach both syllabuses.

In terms of methods of delivery, the findings showed that teacher exposition, role play and discussion methods were the most commonly used methods in the teaching of Religious Education. Though teacher exposition is a teacher centered method, the R.E. teachers involved in the study used the method because the content compelled them to. It is not possible for R.E. teachers to teach about the doctrines, beliefs and practices without using teacher exposition method sometimes. We need to note here that, teaching methods play a crucial role in the process of imparting knowledge in the learners (Kamanga, 2013).199

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From the information gathered, it was clear that all the stakeholders had some understanding of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation and to a great extent; they held that the declaration was good for the country. The late former President Chiluba did a good thing to give Zambia such a religious declaration. The declaration did not get in the way of the Zambian citizens since the people were free to belong to any religion of their choice. Furthermore, the declaration secured the peace of the country despite the economic and political pressures other nations experienced due to politically motivated groups that exercised extreme religious freedom.

The article further shows that R.E. was a curriculum subject which promoted tolerance and coexistence. It did not aim at converting learners towards a particular religion, but to enhance understanding of the different religions practiced in Zambia. However, the response by one religious leader who submitted that R.E. should focus on Christianity because children should come face to face with the original faith, whether Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Zambian tradition faith or any other religion from parents, confirms Simuchimba's (2005) conclusion that the educationally, unacceptable, denominational practice of Religious Education being a vehicle of evangelism unfortunately continued to exist in Zambia. It is further challenged by Henze (2003) who pointed out:

Religious Education in school is inclusive and pluralistic, and it aims to be experiential and participatory, which is different from the denominational teaching found in church nurture groups. In this way, Religious Education challenges the church especially in the way they deal with traditional beliefs, other denominations and religions, as well as their teaching methods.

Even though this submission might be looked at as the odd one out, it ought to be considered with the seriousness it deserves, because it goes against the educational principles on which modern R.E. is premised and reflects the long standing view 200

held by some R.E. teachers who feel that they are duty bound to preach the gospel to their pupils (Kamanga, 2013).

Though there was an indication among some pupils that they took R.E. because of its value of promoting interpersonal skills as well as the appreciation of different religious traditions, most did the subject because it was compulsory in their schools. However, it should be noted that the compulsory status of R.E. in some mission schools could not be attributed to the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation but to other historical factors as shown in the study.

Furthermore, the findings showed that R.E. was taken as a subject by pupils because they were asked to choose from the optional subjects offered by the school and that they picked R.E. because they wanted to strengthen their faith and know what other religions believed in and how they worshipped.

## **6.0 Implications on Religious Education as a Curriculum Subject**

With the ongoing debates, on the political front, on whether the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation should be maintained in the constitution, one would expect that the declaration had an impact on Religious Education. From the onset, it can be asserted that even with the passage of time, the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation remains controversial. Due to various dynamics and how things have unfolded in the country, some people hold relatively the same views about the declaration while others have undoubtedly changed their stance. While overzealousness and outright unprofessionalism on the part of some R.E. teachers were observed as part of the immediate impacts of the declaration, the findings of the study showed that the declaration did not have any serious implications on R.E. and this was affirmed by Simuchimba (2004) when he contended that the declaration did not have much force in the Zambian society.<sup>201</sup>

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From the responses by the teachers on the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, the article established that the declaration was a mere declaration and that the large Christian content in both syllabus 2044 and 2046 was as a result of historical factors not the declaration. A look at the history of R.E. in Zambia pointed to the fact that much of what is taught is derived from the colonial government. As contended by Chita (2011), the missionary dominance in the educational system was without doubt the reason there always had been a place for R.E. in the school curriculum.

Even with the various revisions of the syllabuses, it is worth noting that R.E. has retained the same name, aim and with the exception of *Zambian Humanism*, relatively the same content that resulted from the 1977 Educational Reforms (Mudalitsa, 2016). In other words, in as much as it attempts to incorporate other religious traditions, the subject is Christian biased (Kamanga, 2013). With very little changes, R.E. syllabuses in use today were developed in the mid-1980s. As such, the Christian inclination could not be attributed to the declaration which was made in 1991.

In relation to the above, the learners included in the study pointed out that the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation had not affected R.E. in any way because they also learnt about other religions. If the declaration had an effect on R.E., the subject content would have been all Christian. Furthermore, the findings gathered from the teachers showed that the declaration had not affected the teaching and learning of R.E. because it gave room to religious freedom in the sense that learners can share their beliefs in class. Additionally, R.E. syllabuses attempt to cater for other religions which have very few followers in Zambia. This view was at variance with the observations made by Simuchimba (2004).<sup>202</sup>



Additionally, the findings gathered from the religious leaders showed that the Islamic and Baha'i communities appreciated the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation as it was a good thing. The declaration enhanced tolerance among Zambians who belonged to different religions. It has not caused overzealous attitudes among the Zambian citizens. This represents a shift in opinion from the initial fears that were experienced by religious groups, other than Christians, in the years following the declaration. They genuinely feared that they might be victimised and subjected to misfits in a Christian nation. As things stand on the ground, every faith community can carry out its activities without any impediments and have probably come to accept, as Cheyeka (2014) puts it, that the implementation of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation was illusionary. The findings gathered from the religious leaders further showed that the declaration had not affected R.E. because the subject still accommodated other religions and that Christianity as a religion, promoted peaceful coexistence among different religious groups. Here too, one would argue that the fears, ignited by calls from mostly the Evangelical clergy, to have an exclusivist form of R.E. had been watered down as shown by the continued presence of other religious traditions in the syllabuses.

On the other hand, the findings gathered from an Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia religious leader showed that the declaration had positively affected R.E. in Zambia in the sense that it had made Zambians realise that it was not just any one who could teach the subject like the way other subjects were taught even by drunkards or immoral people. With the declaration, R.E. teachers should realise that they are role models expected to have higher moral standards or the subject would defeat the whole purpose of 203

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teaching the Christian faith. Clearly, the respondent here was reiterating the observations made by Simuchimba (2004) that certain sectors of society were calling for the clergy to take over the teaching of R.E. Presently, though, as the results suggested, R.E. is taught by professionally trained teachers regardless of their religious affiliation. The subject was also taught according to educational dictums and the unprofessional conduct of proselytising in the classroom and starting lessons with a Christian prayer was not evidenced. This could be attributed to the works of R.E. scholars who had since the declaration, called on R.E. teachers to be professionally neutral. It is also attributed to the training the teachers receive from universities and colleges of education, which requires all teachers to handle the subject openly without being biased to one religion.

Furthermore, the findings from the Evangelical clergyman showed that the Christian nation declaration was not there to compel any adherents of other religions to belong to Christianity but it had set limits in order not to have content equal to Christianity in the R.E. syllabuses. No such limits and safe guards should be included in either educational materials or policy documents. A look at the 2013 Curriculum Framework shows that R.E. is at crossroads. The 2013 Curriculum Framework has shaken the foundations of R.E. by making all subjects promote the values R.E. was originally meant to promote. Furthermore, in the 2013 Curriculum Framework, at junior secondary school level, R.E. is compulsory but the subject is not included in the Vocational pathway. At senior secondary level, the subject is optional in both pathways. In 2016, the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) announced that at junior secondary school learners in the Vocational pathway would also take R.E. to meet the required number 204

of subjects for certification. At this point, while it can be argued that R.E. has been given a lifeline, it is clear that the decision was purely academic or educational. The decision was not related to the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation.

## **7.0 Conclusion and Recommendations**

The article aimed at ascertaining the impact of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation on Religious Education. In line with the objectives of the article, it should be concluded that stakeholders have a fairly good understanding of the declaration and R.E. as a school curriculum subject. In terms of the declaration, stakeholders acknowledged that it was a good move because it, in a way, worked as a safeguard against different vices experienced by the learners and the teachers. With regard to the impact that the declaration had on RE, the study established that the declaration had no impact on the subject in that the perceived Christian bias in the R.E. syllabuses was a result of deep rooted historical factors, not the declaration. Furthermore, the religious activities which were conducted in R.E. lessons, such as prayer before teaching, were as a result of school ethos. In mission schools prayer had been going on from time immemorial.

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In view of the results of the study and the conclusions drawn, the authors recommend that stakeholders, especially religious leaders, should take interest in R.E. and support the development of a more liberal, critical and educational subject which places equal emphasis on the coverage of different religious traditions so as to reflect the current multi-religious scenario prevailing in the country. Furthermore, stakeholders should encourage teachers to remain professionally neutral in a bid to guard against a misguided understanding of the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation and being in tandem with 'Educating our Future', the MoGE policy document on education.

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