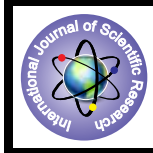


## Kenneth Kaunda and the Quest for an African Humanist Philosophy



### Philosophy

**KEYWORDS :** Kenneth, Buchizya, Kaunda, Quest, African, Humanism, Socialism, Zambia

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### ABSTRACT

*After succeeding British rule, the government of Kenneth Kaunda chose 'Zambian humanism' as the Zambian national ideology and philosophy. It was a form of African Socialism, which combined traditional African values with Western socialist and Christian values. At the centre of this humanism were God and the human person, for God was known through the human person and also served through human beings, this creates a very strong connection between God and the human person in the humanism of Kaunda. He emphasized the role of education, non-violent resistance and hard-work in the process of liberation. While this piece observes that Kaunda represents a figure among the people of Zambia that cannot be forgotten too soon and his philosophy, a concrete effort towards the restoration of his people, it also raises fundamental questions as to what extent the Zambian humanism worked?*

### Introduction

Kenneth Buchizya Kaunda popularly known as KK was born on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1924 in Lubwa Northern Province of Northern Rhodesia now Zambia, to Malawian parents at the hills of the watershed between the great Luangwa and Chambezi Rivers. His father was David Kaunda, a great African missionary of the Church of Scotland who died while Kaunda was eight. His mother was a teacher, who though poor, was able to save some money to allow him to attend school. He was born at the twentieth year of the marriage of his parents, the eight in the line of children. He had his primary education at Lubwa and his secondary schooling at Lusaka. In August 1940, Kaunda (1981) wrote, "... the first secondary school was opened at Munalali in Lusaka and in 1941 I was chosen along with twenty-nine other students from schools throughout the territory to take my form on at Munalali" (p. 13). This marked the beginning of his secondary school education. He was then just 17 years old. And there he heard so much about the experience in South Africa and the meaning of apartheid for the first time. In his autobiography he wrote,

For the first time I understood the meaning of the word apartheid. I heard innumerable stories of the indignities which my fellow Africans suffered at the hands of fellow white men in the Union. Sometimes Sonquishe would say to me: 'Kenneth, it is almost too late for us to do anything about it in South Africa; we've lost our chance, but here it is not too late. Young men like yourself must make sure that what happened to us in the South will never happen up here. (p. 17).

This among others steered up his hunger for the liberation of Africans from their white oppressors. After completing two years in Teacher Training course, he was called back home to work at the Lubwa school for boys. Later he went to Tanganyika in search of a greener pasture to take up a teaching post with his friends, but the conditions of service were not favorable, so they returned. He also joined the military at Lusaka only to be dismissed after a day of service, reason being that, in his own words: "... I think news must have reached the army that we were undesirable characters" (p. 24).

In 1950, Kaunda entered politics as an organizer, quickly rose to the forefront of the anti-colonial freedom struggle, and in 1960 emerged as president of the United National Independence Party (UNIP). This struggle against the white race was informed by a couple of experiences of discrimination. Notable among other experiences was that Africans were not allowed to enter the European shops by the front door. If they wanted anything, they had to go through the hole on the wall. Ikeda (2005) quoted Kaunda's narration of his own experience thus,

I went inside and asked politely for a book. . . . Pointing to the door, [the proprietor] said viciously, 'Get out of here.' I said again, 'I am only asking for a book and I can get it nowhere else in town.' He said, 'You can stand there till Christmas and you'll never get a book from me. (p. 1).

Blacks were not also allowed to eat in the same restaurants with whites. So many times he was thrown out of restaurants and shops simply because he was black. At the time, the colonial government made little investment in education and medical care. It was so glaring after the British left, for only less than a 100 indigenous people were graduates. Parents worked from dusk to dawn to see that their children went to school. Thus at the age of 25, he began a successful non-violent campaign against the white-dominated Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, riding on his bicycles and with his guitar hung across his neck went about singing freedom songs. He later won a landslide election as prime minister of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) in 1964. When independence was granted later that year, he was elected president.

Southern Rhodesia, which had also been part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, was renamed Rhodesia in 1964 and remained under white minority rule. He emphasized economic and social development at home, but he insisted on aiding Africans fighting the white-dominated government in Rhodesia, even at the cost of military and economic reprisals against Zambia. He was instrumental in arranging the London conference of 1979 that led to black majority rule in Rhodesia, which was renamed Zimbabwe in 1980. Re-elected to a sixth presidential term in 1988, Kaunda was defeated in 1991 by Frederick Chiluba in Zambia's first multiparty election in 19 years. Chiluba came into the scene breathing out a fury for change, but he and his government failed to bring about much of the progress they had promised. According to Guest (2004), "the reforms stalled as Mr Chiluba's venal cronies began to loot the country. Corruption under Mr Chiluba held Zambia back as surely as Mr Kaunda's socialism" (p. 26).

In May 1996 the Zambian legislature passed an amendment to the constitution preventing presidents from serving more than two terms in office and requiring presidential candidates to be at least second-generation Zambians. The same court declared Kaunda a Malawian and also stateless. This effectively disqualified Kaunda for the November 1996 elections, which his party, the UNIP, then boycotted. Kaunda stepped down as head of the UNIP and retired from politics in March 2000. To help the spread of his ideas, he published several books: *Zambia shall be Free* (1962); *A humanist in Africa: Letters to Colin Morris* (1973); *Letter to my children* (1980);

Kaunda on violence (1987); Humanism in Zambia and a guide to its implementation part I (1987); Humanism in Zambia and a guide to its implementation part II (1988); State of the nation. Volume I: Politics and government (2007).

### **Kenneth Kaunda's Humanism**

When Kaunda took over from British rule, his government chose an ideology: Zambian humanism. It was a form of African Socialism, which combined traditional African values with Western socialist and Christian values. This ideology was eventually declared Zambian national ideology and philosophy in 1967. The choice of this ideology was based on the fact that Africa had always contained much indigenous socialism which the colonialists had tried to destroy, and so the Zambian humanism was an attempt to rescue pre-colonial values and traditions and to use these as the basis on which to build the modern state. Like every other humanism, it set out to create a society that places the human person at the centre of all activity, social, economic and political. Describing the Zambian Humanism, Kaunda (2007) wrote,

Zambian Humanism came from our own appreciation and understanding of our society. Zambian Humanism believes in God the Supreme Being. It believes that loving God with all our soul, all our heart, and with all our mind and strength, will make us appreciate the human being created in God's image. If we love our neighbour as we love ourselves, we will not exploit them but work together with them for the common good (p. iv).

The Zambian humanism was also a Christian humanism because of the place it gives to God. Kaunda (1966) wrote, By Christian humanism, I mean that we discover all that is worth knowing about God through our fellow men (sic) and unconditional service of our fellow men is the purest form of service of God. I believe that Man must be the servant of a vision which is bigger than himself; that his path is illuminated by God's revelation and that when he shows love towards his fellow men, he is sharing the very life of God, who is Love. (p. 39).

Thus, Zambian humanism is Christian because of the Christian principles basic in them: the concept of God as creator; including of the human person; the dignity of the human person; the equality of human beings, regardless of position in society. And because of the context it addresses, Schreiter (1985) refers to it as a local theology.

### **The basic principles of the Zambian humanism were enumerated by Kaunda (2007) as follows:**

- a. The human person at the centre – the human person is not defined according to his colour, nation, religion, creed, political leanings, material contribution or any matter.
- b. The dignity of the human person - Humanism teaches us to be considerate to our fellow human beings in all we say and do.
- c. Non-exploitation of Man by Man (sic) - Humanism abhors every form of exploitation of human beings.
- d. Equal opportunities for all - Humanism seeks to create an egalitarian society--that is, a society in which there is equal opportunity for self-development for all.
- e. Hard work and Self-reliance - Humanism declares that a willingness to work hard is of prime importance; without it nothing can be done anywhere.
- f. Working together - The national productivity drive must involve a communal approach to all development programs. This calls for a community and team-spirit.
- g. The extended family - under the extended family system no old person is thrown to the dogs or to the institutions like old people's homes.

- h. Loyalty and patriotism - only in dedication and loyalty can unity subsist.

To ensure the implementation of the Zambian humanism, concrete measures were taken by the government. It was taught in schools and colleges. Those who were civil servants also had to go through various training sessions on Zambian humanism and in fact, their promotion depended on how much of it they knew. A government ministry was created to take charge of the spreading of this philosophy: *National Guidance*. Seminars, workshops and short courses were also offered in universities on Zambian humanism. The media was also expected to play a very significant role in this direction.

Kaunda was very empathetic to the point that he stopped eating meat at a particular time in his life after he witnessed a horrible experience his people went through. Ikeda (2005) quoted him to have said,

I can still see clearly in my mind that day when I watched a group of poor African women being manhandled outside a white-owned butcher's shop because they were protesting against the quality and price of the rotten meat he was trying to foist off on them. I swore then never to eat anything my poorest fellow Africans could not afford. (p. 1).

Kaunda stressed the central role that education must play in the liberation of the African people. After Zambia's political independence, he built many primary schools and colleges to train nurses. On the humanitarian front, Zambia would become a leader in the fight against apartheid. Kaunda fought with a lot of vigour and passion and motivated the people to do the same. He wrote,

Today you have special branch of men and women following you wherever you go as if you were criminals; today you stand the chance of been sent to jail for shouting slogans like "freedom now"; today you are liable to be deported from your own home for the 'offence' of telling your people this was their country and their birthright to rule themselves. This is where we stand today. The terrible stories that have been written about struggling in India, Egypt, Ghana, and other countries that were once ruled by Britain, are taking place right her. (p.1).

For him, sad though these things were, they served one useful purpose and that is, they all were pointers to the fact that they are moving in the right direction. He repeated what he said while on exile in Kabompo: 'that British imperialist will never exile or imprison political fools'. He told them that if they fail to organize for independence because they feared prison or exile, it simply meant they were not ready to take over. Our task is now to mobilize all the forces we can for self-government now.

According Kaunda (1980), in every situation of violence, the oppressed has three options to choose from: passive resistance, succumb to oppression or to come out in open revolt against it. He argued that succumbing to oppression is undignified and unworthy of any self-respecting man. On the other hand, open revolt often lead to killing of countless people, those very people for whom freedom is sort. So he decided to resort to the third method- the method of passive resistance or non-violence or positive action. Ikeda (2005) quoted him to have said,

Our main armament was not guns but words--thousands and thousands of words, written and spoken to rally our people, to lay our claims before the British Government and the world, to express our anger and frustration at the denial of

our birthright to rule our own country. (p. 1).

And after independence he wrote, "Had we acted on the basis of a blow for a blow, the history of the last days of Northern Rhodesia and the first days of Zambia would have been written in blood." (p. 1).

In pursuing the development of the humanist society, Kaunda (1972) condemned laziness and called on conscientious workers to consider the interests of other fellow workers and members of society in general and the harm done to them through irresponsible behaviour such as laziness, drunkenness at work, or illegal strikes which can bring development to a grinding halt.

This day, therefore, provides the workers with an important opportunity to ponder over the real significance of work in our lives, the very high place which work occupies in the life of our Nation. No man, no nation can exist without work. All growth depends on activity — on work. Even animals have to work to obtain food. In our environment there can be no development, no progress, physical or intellectual, without effort. Effort means work. So work is not a curse; indeed, among human beings it is the most cardinal of the means to manhood and a key factor to the development of our civilisation. The defence of our liberty, freedom and independence means work. The furtherance of the aims of freedom and independence, the realisation of our economic, social and cultural goals, demands hard work. The greatest asset of any nation is the spirit of its people, its working force; and the greatest danger than can menace any nation is the breakdown of that spirit — the will to work, the will to succeed and the courage and determination to work relentlessly towards greater victories. (p. 62).

### Evaluation and Conclusion

To what extent did the Zambian humanism work? It looked so beautiful and promising, but its implementation proved very difficult. This could be attributed to the fact that Zambia is the first known country that has officially adopted humanism as the national philosophy and to have actively attempted to implement it. Thus during translation from theory to praxis there was no place to look on to. As an ideology, it was never strongly rooted among the Zambians. Mwanakatwe (1994) avers that government officials paid mere lip-service without deep and genuine conviction that Zambian Humanism was useful in the nation-building effort. Among academics and intellectuals, Mwanlimu (2009) avers that they were reluctant to accept and propagate humanism because they found it to be neither an academic philosophy nor an ideology. Reason being that it lacked the theoretical base by which the world

could be analyzed and from which action could be taken. According to Hall (1969), "Among the younger and better educated Zambians, there was also a sharp rise in cynicism" (p. 51).

A cursory glance at the situation in Zambia after Kaunda became the President, raises questions as to if the Zambian philosophy of humanism actually achieved its aim. This is because economic bankruptcy, political bias, religious discrimination, abject poverty and moral decadence, and even illiteracy were and are still very much visible in Zambia. What about the massacre of the members of the Lumpa Church? It was a complete negation of his nonviolence theory. The violence of the time as a result of his increasingly intolerance of opposition, the eventual banning of all parties except his own UNIP and his clinging to power until he was forced out of office in 1991 seem to confirm Frantz's observation that many of those who were colonized envied the power enjoyed by the colonial masters and thus wanted to be like them.

According to Mwangala (2009), the humanism of Zambia failed in economic terms. As a country, Zambia experienced several economic difficulties beginning from the mid-1970s which humanism failed to adequately address. By the mid-1980s the country was worse off economically than it had been at the time of independence. The reasons are very obvious: Kaunda's humanism, which was a form of socialism, was strongly opposed to capitalism as an economic system. It assessed negatively the profit motivation of capitalism. According to Kaunda's humanism, capitalism encourages the exploitation of human beings. In line with the new socialism, a number of private industries were nationalized, and the government became the main distributor of the wealth generated by the manufacturing industries. Secondly, Kaunda argued that he could not bear to see his people suffering, and so he was willing to forego sound economic policies simply because they caused suffering. For example, in the mid 1980s Kaunda refused to follow the IMF Structural Adjustment Programme which advocated the removal of food subsidies because of the hardships this would have created for the poor.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Kaunda represents a figure among the people of Zambia that cannot be forgotten too soon; although not totally because of his contribution as a philosopher but as one courageous leader who actively participated in the independence struggle and first president of their great nation.

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