

Religious Studies¹ and Globalisation: A Critique of Zimbabwe's Current Religious Studies Ordinary Level Syllabus

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Abstract

The research is rooted in philosophy of education and it argues that the Zimbabwean Ordinary Level Religious Studies syllabus is inadequate and insensitive to the virtue of religious respect in the globalised world. Firstly, ordinary level Religious Studies is based on either the synoptic gospels or a combination of Luke and Acts which are only part of the scriptures of one religion namely Christianity. Secondly, the syllabus is designed for a multi-faith society as reflected in schools yet other religions like African Traditional Religions (ATR), Islam, Buddhism, Baha'i and atheists among others, are excluded from the syllabus. Thirdly, the virtue of respect for other religions remains elusive to the syllabus because there is no comparative analysis from other religions to give an appreciation of interfaith dialogue. Fourthly, the syllabus does not give flexibility and open-mindedness that is needed in the globalised world because the method used requires the pupils to be descriptive rather than analytical. As such the research will attempt to critique the syllabus and give recommendations on how to improve the syllabus.

Keywords: Religious Studies, Globalisation, Multi-faith, Christocentric, Ordinary Level Syllabus, Zimbabwe

¹ In Zimbabwe the term 'Religious Studies' entails the intellectual study of 'religion,' while 'Religious Education' means faith-based instruction from a denominational point of view.

Introduction

The study examines the Ordinary Level Religious Studies syllabus in the light of globalisation. The global world makes the respect of other religions imperative. The teaching of religious studies at Ordinary Level in Zimbabwe dates back to colonial times. After independence in 1980 the government of Zimbabwe continued with a syllabus that is Christocentric in nature. Non-Christian scholars and religious people from other faiths have objected to the nature and scope of the Zimbabwean religious studies syllabus on several occasions but these objections have not resulted in any shift of the syllabus. This scenario is partly due to curriculum planners who are products of Christian missions in terms of their education and partly because the costs involved in syllabus change have remained prohibitive to the government of Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean Ordinary level syllabus indicates a continuation of the colonial legacy that saw missionary denominational catechetical focuses - i.e. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Reformed, Lutheran and Methodist – being turned to a more universal Christian teaching through a Christian-oriented syllabus.

The study of religion at Ordinary Level has several implications to pupils that include positively shaping life perception of religion because most pupils do not take up the study of religion beyond Ordinary Level. In addition, any biases or prejudices against other religious beliefs will be difficult to undo if pupils end their intellectual study of religion at Ordinary Level. The research argues for the broadening of the Ordinary Level Religious Studies syllabus because this will give a global shape to the phenomenon of religion. In Zimbabwe, the following statistics indicate the multiplicity of religion in society and this makes a multi-faith approach to the study of religion imperative; syncretic (part Christian, part indigenous beliefs) Christian 81%, Baha'i 0.32%, Muslim 0.73% and other 0.42%, Ethnoreligions 15.86%, and Agnostics 1.01 (Association of Religion Data Archives: 2013). Even if the category of unspecified other religions constitute 1%, it does not necessarily follow that they are unworthy of study because in the contemporary global migration patterns, there is a high probability of mixing with people from other religions. The syllabus, as it stands, is unfair to other religions because non-Christians complain that their children are being Christianised. The syllabus also poses challenges to advocates of Africanisation because it is alienating to the pupils' own

cultural religious values and experiences. The syllabus is therefore foreign to the experiences and values of Zimbabweans especially as enshrined in African Traditional Religion.

Brief Background to the Zimbabwean Ordinary Level Religious Studies Syllabus

Any given curriculum is shaped by a number of forces that include historical, ideological, epistemological, religious, economic and sociological factors (Zvobgo 2004; Ndawi & Maravanyika 2011:11). In line with the above observation, the current Ordinary Level religious studies syllabus in Zimbabwe does not exist in a vacuum but it is shaped by a number of factors. The current Ordinary Level syllabus was inherited from the British colonial government specifically from the Cambridge overseas examination syllabus. Ndlovu (2004:105) argues that the joint influence of Christian missions, colonialism and westernisation makes it difficult for many people to reveal their identity with African Traditional Religions (ATR). Christian mission schools that include Roman Catholic, Anglican and Dutch Reformed churches teach religious instructions to its pupils. This creates an alienation from ATR and a dislike for other world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i, and Buddhism and related religions. Colonialism fairly succeeded in making the African denounce his or her own religion as extremely evil and cruel in favor of Christianity which is seen as holy and righteous. This has resulted in 75% of the Zimbabwean population claiming to be Christian (Wakatama 2011:10). However, of the 75% who claim to be Christian, 50% lie in the intersection of both ATR and Christianity. The force of westernisation results in the embracing of modernity and Christianity is viewed as an expression of modernity which stands in sharp contrast with ATR which is by definition traditional. This dualisation of religions resulted in some form of religious imperialism from the west. Another powerful force that has shaped the current syllabus is the *ad hominem* fallacy that has been used against curriculum planners. When the multi-faith approach to the study of religion is suggested, an *ad hominem* argument that accuses planners of trying to undermine Christian education to which the planners are *de facto* beneficiaries is laid. This fallacy has the psychological effect of making the

planners look guilty thereby diverting them from the rational and logical task of syllabus transformation. In addition, education in Zimbabwe has been underfunded since the year 2000 following restrictive measures and isolation from western countries (Bond & Manyanya 2002). Syllabus transformation has serious financial implications that planners fear to commit themselves to because the current scenario requires the use of cheaply acquired or donated bibles and a few commentaries yet a transformed syllabus would need more scriptural texts and more commentaries. The resultant effect of the above forces is that talk of syllabus transformation is now part of rhetoric rather than a practical exercise.

The Zimbabwean Ordinary Level Religious Studies Syllabus

The Ordinary Level syllabus is made up of subject **A** (2042) and subject **B** (2043). Subject **A** consists of the life and teachings of Christ according to Matthew, Mark and Luke. On the other hand, subject **B** consist of two books namely Luke and Acts of the Apostles (Dembetembe *et al.* 1994). The above components constitute what is known as Bible Knowledge although it appears as Religious Studies in the curriculum. The syllabus aims at helping pupils to develop (1) a critical approach towards the study of religion, (2) an insight into the religious and spiritual areas of experience (3) an awareness of the contributions of religion to development (4) a consistent set of beliefs, attitudes and practices that lead to religious growth (5) the ability to investigate, analyse facts and draw conclusions out of religious issues [Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) Syllabus, 2008-2011]. These aims and objectives, however, do not correspond to the content of the present syllabus. The content as highlighted earlier on is largely Christian and exclusive of other religions. The aims and objectives are all encompassing, that is, they do not speak of one religion. Therefore, there is a mismatch between the aims and the content of the syllabus.

In its assessment objectives (or the examination questioning and answering), the syllabus requires pupils to recall, select and present relevant factual information in an organized manner. In addition, pupils are expected to show an understanding of the language, terms and concepts of Religious Studies. They are also expected to understand the principal beliefs of the

religions being studied and the way these beliefs are related to personal and corporate expression of religion. This is further compounded by the fact that the teaching method and content of the syllabus is contrary to the ZIMSEC expectations. As stated in the ZIMSEC syllabus, the teaching should involve, (1) the use of pupils' background experiences that are real to them; (2) group discussions that result in sensitivity and openness towards other religions; and (3) use of texts such as the Bible, Quran and Vedas. Yet, the content of the syllabus is summarized as the (A) the life and teaching of Christ as contained in the synoptic gospels and (B) the life and teaching of Christ as contained in the gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles.

Globalisation

The importance of globalisation to matters pertaining to religious education cannot be underestimated. Generally, the term globalisation refers to the reduction of spatial and temporal dimensions of human life. That is reducing and connecting the world into almost one village that is doing away with all constraints be they physical, spiritual and/or intellectual. Walters alludes to this by saying that globalisation is,

A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding and which people act accordingly (Walters 2001:5).

The idea that Walters forwards emanate from the fact that globalisation is an integration process or a process whereby the spatial limitations are put at bay. In some sense, one can argue that the globalisation process is a way of amalgamating, interacting, assimilating and joining different forms of life (be they geographical, political, social and economic) and creating an acceptable way of living in a global village (Masitera 2010: 3). There is therefore, a sense in which people get involved in conscious and unconscious interaction, the interaction inevitably results in alteration of people's lives. Thus, globalisation marks the end of 'mono-cultures' and also marks the creation of 'multi-cultures' or co-existence. Co-existence and multi-existence of cultures is what characterises the modern world.

The early manifestations of globalisation were however characterized by unintentional and intentional non-recognition of others. In the ancient period up until the year 1500 C.E., the interaction was basically based upon agreed upon terms for exchange of goods or trade (Ellwood 2001:12; Waters 2001:2; Steger 2003:19). In the second phase there was now the idea of domination. Globalisation thus, in the early stages aimed at economic dominance under the guidance of capitalism. Not only did it end as an economic adventure and domination, the dominance eventually pervaded into other spheres of life such as political, social, and cultural spheres (Gelanis 2000:6-10). As such, it is plausible to argue that the dominance eventually turned into colonialism. Thus, the early interaction became one-sided.

Through colonialism and imperialism, the domination of one culture and civilisation followed. Imperialism as defined by Johnson (2000:375) is "the creation and/or maintenance of an unequal economic, cultural, and territorial relationships, usually between states and often in the form of an empire, based on domination and subordination". Furthermore, the term can equally be applied to domains of knowledge, beliefs, values and expertise. As such, it is easy to perceive why in colonial times there was the creation of certain cultural dominance. In certain incidences, forced adaptations follow especially on the part of the conquered. For example, in Zimbabwe the black natives were forced to adapt the British lifestyle. By lifestyle, the reference is on the way of living that the people follow – as such the native black were to learn the British culture, civilisations, and traditions. By culture the idea of education, dressing and food, form of governing, etiquettes, superstitions, language and even history among others are advanced. It was these British cultural and traditional aspects, which helped in destroying and distorting the natives' own perceptions of life. However, the crux of the matter is to divulge the extent to which imperialism and colonialism advanced mono-cultural aspects of the colonisers over that of the locals. The idea still is that it was only the thinking of the 'powerful' imperialists and colonisers that became dominant. There was in a sense non-acceptance of any other culture and/or tradition, it was only the British civilisation, or that of the imperialist or colonialist that was to take the centre stage in peoples' way of life.

The legacy of imperialists and colonialism still strive today albeit the claim of having three decades of independence in Zimbabwe. The words of Lord Lugard find their fulfillment in religious circles:

As Roman imperialism laid the foundation of modern civilization, and led the wild barbarians of these islands (Britain) along the path of progress, so in Africa today we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of the earth- the abode of barbarism and cruelty- the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilization... we hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, and to govern (Lord Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 1922, Quoted by M. Carnoy, unpaginated second page).

Part of the so-called 'torch of culture and progress' is without doubt the imposition of the colonisers' way of life and with it the Christian civilization on the colonised. Christianity thus became part of people's way of life and also in the educational circles. Education, modeled along the coloniser's thinking, therefore becomes an enforcer of cultural imperialism. Once again, the words of researchers of yester century still hold water,

The public school system is a powerful instrument for the perpetuation of the present social order... The child... is trained to submit to authority, to do the will of others as a matter of course, with the result that habits of mind are formed which in adult life are all to the advantage of the ruling class (Kelly, *The Modern School in Retrospect* 1925; Quoted by Carnoy).

In the same vein, colonial education followed the pattern of the colonial or occupying forces. Religious education in particular, in Zimbabwe, became more of catechetical teaching and also biblical teaching alone. The main intention of the religious education was mainly to ensure that Africans lose their religious identity and follow or adapt the European Christian view. It thus meant that in the general outlook, the Christian thinking was to overshadow any other form of religion and in some quarters it has been argued the aim of Christian thinking and religion was advanced to locals so as to ensure that they become submissive to the powerful imperialists and colonisers.

However, though that was the case in the early versions of globalisation, the modern version of globalisation is not exclusive in nature

but inclusive. It aims at establishing enabling environments that support multiple existence and ultimately recognition of all people. It is the modern thinking which argues that inclusivity and recognition lead to better and acceptable societies, such a scenario is achieved through discussions, recognition, acceptance and tolerance of other religions. What this essentially means is breaking down those barriers that do not enable multiple cultural existences. Kale (2004:95) summarises the whole idea of globalisation as including (1) the integration of markets, nation-states, and technologies; (2) the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world in its entirety; (3) a reduction of geographical constraints on the world's social and cultural issues; (4) the dissemination of practices, values, technology, and other human products throughout the globe; (5) a process through which sovereign national states are crisscrossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities, and networks; (6) and a historical transformation in the economy (of livelihoods and modes of existence), in politics (a loss in the degree of control exercised locally), and in culture (the devaluation of a collectivity's achievements). As such there is a conscious process of integration taking place (Ellwood 2001:12), the conscious integration that is guided by mutual sharing and enrichment that emanate from respect, recognition, toleration and engagement of each other among members of the universe. Through engagement and the like, some scholars have theorised that there are greater chances of advancing autonomy and freedom among members of the world (Hemming 2011: 1063). The process is meant to be enriching rather than manipulative and exploitive. The process also aims at forming a shared value, belief and practice system that is acceptable and respected by all; the process thus also aims at promoting positive values especially those that respect diversity (Hopkins 2007; Sergioanni 1994 cited in Hemming 2011: 1064). It therefore follows that the imperialist and colonialist-led globalisation (as well as educational Christian education) is of no relevance in the modern version of globalisation which encompass a multi-cultural approach.

As noted before, the religious education system during the colonial period was one-sided, myopic, manipulative and exploitive in outlook, yet the same kind of religious education system has continued in the Zimbabwean post-independent curriculum. Reference is not only on the issue

of independent Zimbabwe but, to Zimbabwe in the modern globalised society. The Zimbabwean situation is one coloured by myopic and restricted Christian thinking. By briefly analysing the meaning of the terms religious or religion and education will certainly aid in advancing the main argument of the paper that there is certainly limitation and non-recognition on continual using of Christian religion as the basis of religious education.

Religion as a Common Phenomenon

Scholarship alludes to the fact that there are various definitions of religion. As early as 1912, Leuba was able to catalog forty-eight definitions of religion. Without doubt one can list many more today. This is affirmed by the widely acclaimed position that religion as an ontological reality can be approached from various social disciplines. *The Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* (Reese 1999: 647) offers the following explanation for religion: Religion – from the Latin *religare* (to bind back) – typically refers to an institution with a recognized body of communicants who gather together regularly for worship, and accept a set of doctrines offering some means of relating the individual to what is taken to be the ultimate nature of reality. Davies (1988) propounds that there are anthropological, sociological, historical, theological, philosophical and psychological approaches to the definitions of religion. He offers the following descriptions:

* **Anthropologists** describe religious beliefs and practices as they find them in living communities. Religion helps them to unite people in a shared experience and explanation of life. It provides a pattern of human behaviour, often in response to the hazards of life.

* **Sociologists** stress the social dimension of religious ideas. Religion provides a way of looking at the world. It gives the individual a sense of purpose and meaning.

* **Historians** describe religion in terms of events resulting from beliefs (Davies 1988:10 - 11).

* **Psychologists** try to understand, predict, and control the thoughts, words,

feelings, and actions of persons when they are acting religiously. And to act religiously can be better understood by appealing to the explanation given by William James (1902) when he said “Whatever men do in relation to that which they consider to be divine” (James 1902:42).

* **Philosophers** understand religion as a collection of cultural systems, belief systems and worldviews that establish symbols that relate to spirituality and moral values.

* **Theologians** are concerned with the beliefs themselves, the question of whether they are true or false, and with people’s response to them.

The different approaches are valid in different ways and within their own limitations. The basic difference is that of standpoint: there is the way of the scholar and the way of the believer. In Zimbabwe today Ordinary Level students are disadvantaged by the content of the prescribed religious education they are offered. Living in a context coloured by religious diversity, it is expected that the recommended format of a multi-faith approach be the norm rather than an exception in a classroom setup offering religious studies. Instead, they are coerced to imbibe the religion of the Western scholar and believer, namely Christianity. The syllabus pays no attention to the fact that the learners have a religion of their own. The attitude is a clear denial that

no human face is exactly the same as another human face, but it is like many others in having two eyes, a nose, two lips, and two ears. In the same way, no two people ever respond to God’s presence in exactly the same way. Each person’s prayer is personal to himself, and each person’s response to God has its individual quality and characteristics (Brown 1975:8).

An attitude that denies learners access to their familiar religion at Ordinary Level has far-reaching consequences. Among them are religious intolerance, negation of the spirit of ecumenism and the systematic promotion of ethnocide. To this list Carnoy (1974: part of book title) adds “Cultural imperialism”.

Zimbabwe as a country constitutionally embraces religious pluralism by virtue of categorically pronouncing freedom of religion. Religion is part of the indigenous person's life system from birth to death. In this vein Schmidt argues that "since religion is so characteristically human, scholars in a number of fields have argued that it is appropriate to think of human beings as religious animals" (Schmidt 1980:7). Jung (1996), a psychologist, argues that religion is a common phenomenon that is justified by his positing what he terms the 'collective unconscious'. Mbiti (1990), a prominent scholar of African Traditional Religion pronounced that Africans are "notoriously religious". Therefore, just as Aristotle had defined man as a "rational animal", Jung (1996), Schmidt (1980) and Mbiti (1990) give another dimension in regarding man as a 'religious being'. In line with this assertion, it augurs well to argue that man is inherently religious, an indispensable definer of what man is. Be that as it may, this does not necessarily translate to an acknowledgement of only the Judeo-Christian God as we are made to think by the contents of the Ordinary Level syllabus. Indeed human beings are a 'world-building' animals' who besides being endowed with a biological nature "also create a 'second nature' that is, they create culture, a complex of meanings and social relationships" (Schmidt 1980:9). This 'second nature' is not the preserve of a minority few. Rather, the entire human race is endowed with it, and should be allowed access to it within the confines of the classroom.

Religion basically refers to the relationship that exists between people and the supernatural being. In other words it is the expression of people's faith in accordance with the beliefs' expectations (Cox 1992:5). Being religious then means carrying out the expectations of the religion. Though there seems to be limitation to what the term refers to it is important to note that the term also has the idea of including others, as in the case with the spreading of the faith. As such there is incorporation of people who would formerly not be part of the religion, the incorporation though demands renunciation of, if any previous beliefs. Though this must be the case, in contemporary religious systems there is a move to try and destroy certain religious barricades and hindrances to co-existence. In a sense, there is now the move and attempt at inter-religious dialogue that aim at understanding differences and fostering better relations in order to ensure acceptable forms

of living together. This has been done through inter-religious dialogue and through inculturation.

Globalisation and Religion

Some religions seem to respond to the phenomenon of globalisation positively, accepting or endorsing religious pluralism, for example, some Christian ecumenical movements and Baha'is (Haynes 2011:1). Other groups emphasize differences in the global sphere, seeking to preserve their particular values from being 'eroded' by globalisation particularly Muslim, Jewish and other 'fundamentalists' religions. Sometimes radical religious ideologies have become the vehicles for a variety of rebellions against authority that are linked with myriad social, cultural, and political grievances. Presently, however, circumstances of globalisation dramatically undermine the notion that all members of a society must necessarily hold the same ideas in relation to religion. The positive religious implication that is brought by is that globalisation encourages idea that religion is a matter of individual choice. This is necessitated by the western notions of religious practice and the mixture with other cultures demonstrates a flexibility towards religion that detaches religion from paternalism that subordinates the religious wishes of individuals. Globalisation helps individuals to see religion as a right through the universal declaration of human rights which asserts,

Everyone has the right with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. To freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community (Article 18, United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights).

The social role of religion in developmental issues is seen in the way religious organizations try to solve conflicts and build peace. Haynes (2011: 2) argues that religion can be used as a vehicle that protests the harmful side of globalisation. Globalisation has challenged religion to be more relevant to diversity since migration and technology expose people to a diversity of

religious beliefs. It has questioned religious doctrines with respect to the validity of the information purported to be supreme and absolute truth. It has also raised objections that require religion to demonstrate respect of alternative perspectives as valid conceptual schemes. Ideally, the manner that people trust in God in Asia, in Europe and in America is very well known: but let us know if it is possible to put together the African and the other systems of religion in the world. God is not African, Asian or European, God is Global. This global view of belief makes globalisation relevant in revisiting and reassessing of religious positions that are intolerant and disrespectful of other religions. Globalisation encourages religious openness and flexibility as opposed to fundamentalism and rigidity.

A Historical Survey of Religion and Education in Zimbabwe

Between 1500 and 1900 most of the world was under the control of Europeans. Only a few societies such as China and Japan were able to resist colonization. Two kinds of traditional colonies emerged in this period: European settlements, where the immigrants conquered the natives, took their land, and developed the country for the enclave European community; and occupied and administered colonies, where a few European colonists, primarily traders and soldiers, controlled the colony for the home country (Carnoy 1974:78). Zimbabwe qualifies under both kinds as realized by events that transpired since 1890. Worse still, a systematic way of bringing its religion and culture was crafted and made use of in the school system.

Ndlovu quoting Makuvaza (1996:66) says that religious education was initiated and started by the clergy. However, for the colonial government the teaching of Religious Education was primarily a strategy to 'wipe out' all African values and beliefs, and to inculcate Christian values and beliefs to the African in order to among other things bring 'enlightenment' and 'civilization' to the 'dark continent' (Ndlovu 2004:58). This was in line with David Livingstone's 'Triple Cs' (Christianity, Civilization and Commerce) for the natives. In the early years, 1899 to 1942, African learners were taught what was known as Scripture or Religious and Moral Instruction. These were biblical scriptures with a lot of emphasis on the Old Testament. Religious Education during these years did not provide for an open and

academic exploration of religion. The subject remained dogmatic, confessional and biblical as it aimed at promoting Christian values and beliefs only. The fundamental aim of the subject was therefore to convert as many Africans as possible to the Christian faith.

Makuvaza (1996:68-69) asserts that “from 1942 to 1980, the greater part of the colonial period, Religious Education at Ordinary Level was known as Bible Knowledge or Religious Knowledge”. Formal Religious Education teaching and examining in secondary schools in Southern Rhodesia started in 1942 with respect to the Ordinary Level following the Cambridge Certificate Syllabus. The content was still heavily bibliocentric and aimed at promoting Christian values and beliefs only. The repercussions are plenty. The system restricted the enquiry into religion as a human phenomenon. It was non-tolerant and highly discriminatory in that non-Christian religions were considered irrelevant. It ignored the fact that the majority of the learners were Africans and where by virtue of birth and origin adherents of African Traditional Religion and culture. It paid no recourse to a religion like Islam which is regarded as the oldest foreign religion in Zimbabwe (Humba 2005:1). Islam came to Zimbabwe by the early Arab traders in the 15th century. Surprisingly, it has not been accommodated in the Religious Studies Education at the level under scrutiny.

With the last point in mind, there is a sense in which, the word religion implies and is part of a process of establishing a global village. A village of recognition, acceptance, understanding and respecting cultures and religions that are different from each other. By implication, one would think that the same thinking and practice would apply to the teaching of religious education. However, this is not the case; the Zimbabwean ‘O’ level Religious Education Syllabus is by and large basically and essentially limited to Christian and biblical teaching. There is therefore, inconsistency in the aims of religious practice and the way religious education is being taught.

To complement the noted facts, it is plausible to argue that education also plays an important role of advancing interaction and engagement among different people of different cultures. Education according to Dewey is socialization endeavoring to intellectual development (Dewey 1961:81-82). Further, in Education there should be “a large variety of shared understanding and experience” (Dewey 1961: 84). In addition, Peters (1965) says education is the transmission of that which is worthwhile in an

acceptable manner. As a way of explaining the views of the two philosophers, one would argue that the essence of education is to share and formulate, as people of different cultural views, an acceptable way of living together. Thus in globalisation, a worthwhile exercise would aim at creating an enabling environment for multiple cultural existences. In some sense through education, people are molded into better citizens who acknowledge differences and respect each other.

There is ample evidence that schooling increases the incomes of those who go to school (a fact challenged by the immediate past decade of Zimbabwe's run-away inflation) and also increases their ability to function in a modern, complex and globalised society. From the standpoint of material advancement these are positive effects of schooling on individual material welfare (Carnoy 1974:6). When the individual goes to school, he or she has access to a larger slice of the economic and social pie (provided that everybody else has not gone to school along with him or her). The school is a society in miniature and the material absorbed at school more often than not, determines the way one behaves in the later years of life. A dosage of particular religious tenets will also shape an individual's appreciation or lack of it of other religious and cultural systems.

In Zimbabwe, attainment of Ordinary Level education for many is the ceiling of their academic journey. It is a qualification that enables one to start seeking a professional career. Such being the case it becomes a categorical imperative that before unleashing learners into the world, a survey of other belief systems be proffered to them. This is a way of curbing religio-cultural intolerance and an encouragement to accept the reality of globalisation.

Thus the idea of globalisation, religion, education and religious education somehow emphasize the thinking that there is need for understanding in or and in interchange of ideas including varying lived experience (Chifunyise 1997:14). Ultimately, the development of respect and recognition will necessarily follow from understanding and interchange of lived experience. Wherever respect and recognition exist, Steger would argue that such a system breeds the necessary character for interaction and interdependence which inversely are the necessary pillars in a globalised world (Steger 2003:13). The interaction has the aim of establishing an enabling environment for co-existence and multi-cultural existence.

Ultimately, globalisation, religion, education and religious education should help in the cultivation of diversity rather than ensuring uniformity, inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, sharing and acceptance of diversity, instead of rigidity and fundamentalism.

Problems with the Zimbabwean Ordinary Level Religious Studies Syllabus in the Light of Globalisation

Epistemological Problems

The ordinary level religious studies syllabus is epistemologically narrow in the light of globalisation. The study of religion should take a global approach. According to Dancy (1999:1), “Epistemology is concerned with the origin, nature and scope of human knowledge”. Human knowledge is based on both the principles of reason and empirical observations. The study of religion should include both rational and empirical perspectives if it is to be adequate. According to Crittenden (1993:14), “liberal education should be preoccupied with rational intellectual development”. For Crittenden liberal education should introduce both empirical and rational forms of knowledge. In line with this, Religious Studies should be looked at from both rational and empirical grounds. The empirical perspective, which is inductive, is both phenomenological and scientific and it sources from religions on the ground. Through observations, the nature and practices of religions are obtained. The rational approach uses insight and creativity to deduce the connectedness and principles underlying observed religious phenomena. Carr (2004: 52) in fact, posits that given that the intellectual and spiritual import of religious narratives and myths is no less aesthetic and affective than cognitive, it seems difficult to see how pupils might have full access to such meaning in the absence of practical and emotional exposure to such symbolic resources.

Following the above approach, an intellectually honest study of religions at Ordinary Level reveals that each religion constitutes an area of rational inquiry in which there are distinctive concepts of expressing truth claims. All major religions should be studied so that pupils get a chance to compare and contrast truth claims of several religions in the country. To select components of Christianity at the expense of other religions is to undermine the point of respecting the fact of religious pluralism in

Zimbabwe and globally. A diversified study of religion should spring from the religious multiplicity on the ground. If truth claims of several religions are taught, then pupils are encouraged to appreciate religion without attempting to promote commitment.

Hirst (1970:33) maintains that, “if several religions are part of the syllabus, and then it will be possible for schools to teach about religion rather than teaching to be religious”. For Hirst to teach about religion implies a rational, public and objective enterprise whereas to teach to be religious entails an emotional, private and subjective approach. According to Phillips (1970:67), “[in schools]... religion should be elucidated and not advocated”. If Phillips’ observation is accurate, then a proper elucidation of religion entails recognition of the fact that religion is a diverse phenomenon and this diversity cannot be swept under the carpet in the teaching of religion.

Epistemologically, ‘true’ in religious discourse has a different meaning from ‘true’ applied to factual claims. Due to the fact that religious claims are trans-empirical and therefore unverifiable observationally, it does not make sense to ask whether religion as such is true or false. For Zimbabwean O’ Level pupils to genuinely recognise and appreciate this point, it is necessary that they study several religions simultaneously. There are, therefore, no logical grounds for discrimination on religions and it does not make sense to leave out other religions. According to Aquinas (1952:24) “ a distinctive function of intellectual knowledge is the ability to grasp the essential qualities common to a number of individual things”. If Aquinas’ observation is applied to religion, then young minds can grasp the common qualities of religion like belief in Supreme Being, moral doctrines and scriptures if the religions are multiple.

The epistemic hazard of teaching a component of one religion is that indoctrination becomes inevitable. Logically indoctrination implies a doctrine. According to White (1987:18), “a doctrine is a belief forming part of *religious*, scientific or political system” [the emphasis is ours]. When teaching the scriptures of one religion there is no room for comparison with the perspectives of other religions. Indoctrination involves three elements, that according to Short. Short (2003: 334) actually asserts that the first involves content in the form of beliefs that are contested and which are neither demonstrably true nor false. The second is an intention on the part of the indoctrinator to establish an unshakeable commitment to those beliefs

and the third relates to the method of instruction in which non-rational, a consequence of setting out to instill an unshakeable commitment to propositions the truth of which cannot be proven (Short 2003:334). As such indoctrination is the attempt to fix in the learning mind any doctrine; social, political or religious to the exclusion of contrary doctrines in a manner preventing serious comparison and evaluation. Epistemologically, teaching one religion in schools is methodologically negative in the sense that there is no regard for pupils' rational autonomy. Atkinson (1988:114) argues that, "no search for truth in knowledge can be regarded as valid unless it provides opportunity for disagreement and the expression of contrary views". If Atkinson's contention is accurate, it follows that the study of plural religions should be captured by the syllabus so that innocent minds can learn the contrary views of other religions. Truth or falsity should be based on reasoned debate of honest and critical minds.

Another danger of the exclusive study of either the synoptic gospels or Luke and Acts is that drill becomes the easiest method to use. Atkinson (1988:114) observes that drill does not give room for understanding facts and principles. When applied to the present discussion, the well-drilled pupil can accurately narrate the biblical stories without any grasp of the underlying principles. The current O' Level religious studies syllabus largely requires the narration of stories (about 90 %) and only 10 % requires critical analysis, comparison or evaluation. If the syllabus captures more religions, then focus necessarily changes from a banking knowledge system to comparative analysis and evaluation.

Still, another teaching method, which easily creeps in if the syllabus remains untransformed, is narration. According to Freire (1972:57), "in narration the teacher talks of reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised and predictable". Religious phenomena cannot be seen as static given the continuous changes on the ground in Zimbabwe. The narrated content, Freire argues, is completely alien from the existential experience of the pupil. Why should Biblical scriptures be narrated to pupils when the religious phenomenon of African Traditional Religions can easily be observed? Narration negates critical consciousness among Ordinary Level pupils. For Freire (1972: 60) "the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world".

Instead of narration, Freire advocates for a problem solving approach. Freire's critical views can only be applicable to the Zimbabwean Ordinary Level study of religion if and only more religions are studied. The plurality of religions is itself a problem that boggles the minds of Ordinary Level students and is worthy for examination by pupils. Sweeping the problem of religious pluralism while focusing on one religion produces uncritical minds which are part and parcel of colonial mentality and therefore unsuitable for postcolonial Zimbabwe which requires comparison and evaluation.

Ethical Problems

Although the status and interpretation of morality as an ingredient of religious traditions vary, most religions have in fact given a significant historical place to moral ideals and practices. Crittenden (1993:14) argues that religion should inform the core values of social morality such as justice, truth telling, honesty, concern and co-operation. Honestly, these core values of social morality cannot be a monopoly of Christianity. Pupils should be given a broad spectrum from which moral values are sourced and this entails the study of several religions. Ordinary Level pupils cannot adequately understand the present situation of morality in our society without appreciating the historical affiliations to religion and exploring the nature of the connection between them. A non-abstract and open appreciation of morality can be obtained if the moral teachings of several religions are exposed to pupils.

“Moral standards can be rationally assessed by appealing to the common needs and capacities of human beings, to the characteristic conditions which human flourishing depends and to human experience viewed on the broadest possible scale” (Crittenden 1993:148). Deductively, a broad scale of religious morality depends on the number of religions under analysis. It is morally imperative, therefore, to broaden the number of religions in the current Ordinary Level syllabus.

Religious Studies is ethically sound because it introduces morally appropriate elements. There are elements in morality and related conditions of human life that escape the full grasp of knowledge such as the mysteries of good and evil, suffering and death, existence of the universe beyond the reach of scientific explanation and the basis of the respect of all human

beings as moral agents. In all these, the practice of morality depends on awe, wonder and reverence that are akin to religion. Diverse religions can offer an open and flexible position about the said existential situation to Ordinary Level pupils. The study of several religions becomes morally imperative if the syllabus in question is to be ethically sound.

The study of one religion is seemingly unethical because it implies intellectual intolerance or bias. Section 60 of the new constitution of Zimbabwe states that

(Subsection 60. 1) Every person has a right to freedom of conscience which includes (a) freedom of thought, opinion religion or belief and (b) freedom to practice and propagate and give expression to their thought, opinion, religion or belief whether in public or in private and whether alone or together with others.

(Subsection 60. 2) No person may be compelled to take an oath that is that is contrary to their religion or belief or to take an oath that is contrary to their religion and belief.

(Subsection 60. 3) parents and guardians of minor children have the right to determine, in accordance to their beliefs, the moral and religious upbringing of their children, provided they do not prejudice the rights to which their children are entitled under this new constitution, including their rights to education, health, safety and welfare.

In principle, the constitution is tolerant of other religions. The current Ordinary Level religious studies syllabus is based on one religion and therefore inconsistent with the ethically sound provisions of the constitution. Plurality or tolerance should not merely be constitutional but it should permeate to the education system of the country. In selecting the content of the current O'Level religious studies syllabus, regard should be paid to all religions and to the presence in the school of groups of pupils belonging to particular faiths. "Pupils need to acquire a general knowledge of the main questions with which religions deal, the answers they give and the moral guidance they give and the differences and similarities between various religious commitments to non-religious ideologies" (ter Haar 1990:142).

Furthermore, learners at Ordinary Level who do not ascribe to the Christian faith are being unfairly treated as non-religious. It is as if we are still holding onto the archaic and non-progressive notions of the earlier evolutionists who postulated that there had been an original non-religious phase in human history. This is the line of Sigmund Freud who argues that religion is a creation of man in his famous expression of the “Oedipus Complex” and also his explanation of the origins of totems. Karl Marx, following the evolutionist path also dismissed religion as also the creation of man that serves as a tool to lull the minds groaning in the pains of the harshness of the world. On the contrary, there information, as argued by Ake Hultkrantz, “has, however, proved to be false” (Hultkrantz 1982:22). All we can say is that some groups, for example the Maasai in Kenya, appear to lack a belief in life after death in contradistinction to say the Shona in Zimbabwe who have a belief in life after death as realized in their acknowledgement of *Nyikadzimu* (the aboard of all the dead souls) (Mazambara, interview, 20 October 2011). The lack of some attribute of religion of a given societal belief and practice should not be translated to denote lack of religion. Hultkrantz further contends that some scholars of religion “consider that man’s religious consciousness was born during the time when man first appeared” (Hultkrantz 1982:22). No people or person can be treated as of a religious *tabula rasa* (blank slate); this idea even applies to atheists. It is important to note here that, an atheist is religious in some sense, the atheist holds certain beliefs not of the super-natural being, but a particular way of life. Archeological findings have shown artifacts that reveal that religion has been part of man since time immemorial. Ninian Smart concurs with the views of Hultkrantz in his assertion that “... religion has permeated human life since early and obscure times” (Davies 1988:11). It is therefore, tenable to propound that it is a cultural crime to treat the young minds as if their background is characterized by a religious void only to be filled by the Judeo-Christian religion at Ordinary Level. This is a clear continuation of a loathsome colonial legacy that dismissed Africans as irreligious and lacking the capacity of conceiving deity since ‘deity’ is a philosophical concept which ‘savages’ (Africans) can hardly comprehend (Emil Ludwig). This again was a blatant attack of the African of being regarded as non-philosophical besides being viewed as non-religious.

The current phenomenon of Globalisation entails that people migrate from one country to the next. This means that pupils will meet individuals of diverse religions locally and there is a likelihood of them migrating to foreign countries where they will mix with other people of different religions. The virtue of tolerance will be required in a global context, which is religiously plural. It will be difficult for pupils to tolerate other religions at a global scale if these religions do not constitute what they are studying. Morally, there is a danger of intolerance since pupils are likely to view Christianity as the only religion. Discrimination of other religions is both logically and ethically unsound and practically it is not very different from other forms of discrimination such as racism, tribalism, regionalism, gender bias and other forms of discrimination.

Logical Problems

While the current ordinary level syllabus in Zimbabwe wishes to allow pupils to draw logical conclusions and think critically out the study of a diversity of religious experiences, this objective may remain elusive as long as there is a study of a single religion namely Christianity. Siegel (2006:6) argues that a student is a critical thinker with respect to inductive conclusions if and only if she had the necessary skill for the mastery and application of the complex set of criteria for correctly assessing the warrantedness of inductive conclusions. Critical thinking about religion in the global context is enhanced if pupils are exposed to a number of religions in which they can draw similarities and differences. The study of one religion pacifies the curious young minds with respect to the global and complex nature of religions. Laudan (Siegel 2006:30) asserts,

At its core, rationality...consists in doing and believing things because we have good reasons for doing so...if we are going to determine whether a given belief is rational, we must ask whether there are sound reasons for it.

Reasons assessment is based on the ability of reasons to warrant beliefs that require proper inductive inference, avoiding fallacies and proper deductive

inference. The assessment of reasons in the context of religion is possible if and only if a multiplicity of religions is studied. A Christian-oriented approach will not only negate critical thinking but may inevitably result in the use of the narrative approach to learning because there is no room for cross cultural comparison of religion.

Exposure to a plurality of religions enables pupils to reason out clearly and draw conclusions regarding the belief systems of several religions. Pupils get to appreciate the fact that not all religious persons use the Bible, and even among those who use the bible, not all of them read the entire bible. In addition, pupils get to appreciate the existence of non-christian texts such as the Muslim Koran. Further, pupils will learn that in African traditional religion, there are no written scriptures and to appreciate that absence of written scriptures does not necessarily entail absence of religion. This wide spectrum of reasoning enables pupils to be global in approach and this allows them to fit well in the globalised world of religion.

Unreasonable prejudices are dropped when pupils are exposed to the practices of several religions and this enables them to logically appreciate religions which are not necessarily theirs. Mwesiga (2009:59) argues that exclusive religious education creates a superiority attitude among pupils of a particular religious tradition against others and this leads to classification of people in relation to their religious identity. This entails that pupils are likely to think that just because their religion is being taught in schools, then it is the most important. This fallacious thinking is more dangerous in the world of ordinary life because it may result in fundamentalism and religious conflicts. A global approach to religious education has to be appreciated from the point of view of phenomenology of religion where there is an attempt to understand another person's religious life "through laying aside one's own presuppositions, and through empathizing with the insider experience" (Jackson 1997:14). A multi-faith approach to the study of religion enables pupils to think about religion without being passive recipients of religious doctrines because there is a basis for comparison, dialogue, openness and flexibility. The active participation of pupils in reflecting other religions allows them to draw logical and independent conclusions on the basis of religious diversity (Holley 1978:19; Watson 1993: 42). The Christian-oriented approach that is in the current ordinary level religious studies syllabus may result in logical challenges to the idea of

unity and ecumenical spirit among pupils during and after schooling because the concept of unity in diversity is undermined in the present approach to the study of religion.

Recommendation and Conclusion

The study recommends that a new and broadened ordinary level religious studies syllabus should be designed on the basis of the following issues:

- A comprehensive Zimbabwean religious education policy that is non-discriminatory, non-exclusive but accommodative and global in the approach to the study of religion. The policy will be a theoretical guide to the review of the syllabus because the current scenario enables planners to take advantage of lack of policy and protect their personal interests and inclinations in the study of religion.
- Consultation based on a variety of stake holders that include members of African traditional religion, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Judaism among others.
- Funding and provision of new textbooks that are consistent with the multi-faith and global approach to the study of religion.
- Provision of workshops to religious studies teachers so that they can be familiarised with the new syllabus in line with the new content, objectives and methods.

The research sought to discuss the relevance of the Ordinary Level Religious Studies syllabus in the light of the global nature of the phenomenon of religion. It has been shown that the religious studies syllabus does not prepare pupils to respect religions which are not necessarily their own because the syllabus is currently narrow and exclusive of other religions. To make the syllabus more appealing and relevant, it has been argued that the syllabus should be transformed to include other religions. This entails the broadening of the broadening of the syllabus. To this effect, philosophical

justifications have been offered for the inclusion of African Traditional Religions, Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Confucianism and other religions so that the subject becomes a stimulating area of study, which is epistemologically objective, ethically desirable, ideologically unbiased and methodologically flexible. It is hoped that the transformation of the syllabus would accord the subject an important place in preparing the pupils to the reality of religious pluralism with an open and flexible mindset that avoids the pitfalls of religious intolerance, religious disrespect, religious fundamentalism that are the roots for religious conflicts in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

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