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**THE STATUS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT SECONDARY SCHOOL
LEVEL IN ZIMBABWE-SIXTEEN YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

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ABSTRACT

While on the one hand Zimbabwean society expects Religious Education in schools to help children develop into responsible adults who are morally and spiritually mature, on the other hand at secondary school level the subject does not seem to be accorded the support that would enable it to fulfil its primary objectives of positively moulding the character of our youth. This paper sets out to identify some of the problems that affect this subject which would need to be addressed if it is to be effective.

INTRODUCTION

At independence the Government committed itself to the policy of scientific socialism. Although in itself the ideology of socialism is materialistic, and therefore has no room for the spiritual dimension, in the area of Religious Education (RE) in schools, the Government saw no contradiction between religion and socialism. According to Gerrie ter Haar: pg (1990:142)

The Zimbabwean Government has always emphasized the need to build the new nation on firm moral principles, a process in which religion and socialism could work together as part of one system. It believes that as an important cultural aspect of society religion can help to strengthen a genuine Zimbabwean identity.

In terms of the broader aims and objectives of education, one of the policies of the Government was:

To transform and develop the curriculum to make it relevant to Zimbabwe in terms of cultural, socio-economic and skills requirements. In this respect emphasis was placed on science, practical subjects and greater use of local materials in the development of the curriculum (Chivore 1991:38f).

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In a context where emphasis was on designing a curriculum which would empower children for self-reliance and for the economic and industrial development of the country, RE could not be regarded as a priority in terms of resource allocation.

At any rate, children who were born after independence in 1980, and who started going to school at the age of seven, would be in Forms II and III in 1995 and 1996 respectively. Until 1990 the education of these children would have been officially imbued and inspired by the socialist ideology of the Government, a thrust which in 1991 gave way to the first five year phase of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). With ESAP giving way in 1996 to yet another five year phase of economic transformation, namely, the Zimbabwe Programme for Economic and Social Transformation (ZIMPREST), it might be worthwhile to step back and reflect on the status of RE at secondary school level in terms of its capacity to influence positively the development of firm moral principles among the new generation which will enable them to build a spiritually healthy nation for tomorrow.

The writer's contention in this paper is that the subject RE is accorded a low status by the Zimbabwean society, and that as a result of this negative labelling it is failing to effectively achieve its primary aim and role of helping to develop the youth of this country into citizens who are religiously and morally mature.

It is also the writer's view that to the extent that Zimbabwean society emasculates RE through its negative labelling of it, it also has the capacity to help make the subject have more influence on our youth by regarding it in a more positive light. This societal change of attitude should be possible, because in the history of the Church down the ages, Theology used to enjoy a place of prominence among all the subjects on the curriculum, and in Zimbabwe the teaching of religion in the form of Christianity was the primary reason for the establishment of mission schools in the first place (ter Haar et alia 1992:53).

The status of a subject, whether high or low, is a value judgement and as such it is not directly observable or measurable. This means that the status of a subject can only be inferred indirectly through observable factors or variables that are brought to bear on it. Thus, in trying to determine the status of RE, the writer set out to identify and explore the problems that are faced by teachers and students in the teaching and learning of RE at secondary school level in Zimbabwe. The focus was on the problems as identified in the period 1995 and 1996.

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

To identify and explore the problems that are peculiar to the teaching and learning of RE the writer enlisted the help of the Grad.C.E. students doing RE, i.e. 40 students in 1995 and 44 in 1996. Their findings in the field during Teaching Practice (TP) would be corroborated by the writer's own observations during his TP supervision visits to these students at their schools.

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Before the students left college at the end of Term I they were given an assignment which required them, 'In the light of their TP experiences during Term II, to identify the problems and difficulties in the teaching and learning of RE at secondary school level in Zimbabwe, and to suggest educationally valid solutions to these problems.'

In gathering data, students were asked to observe what was happening at the school regarding RE vis-a-vis other subjects and to interview some teachers and parents, the administration, plus any other people who might be in a position to make some meaningful contribution on the matter. It was primarily from this exercise that the problems affecting RE in secondary schools were identified.

When the students came back to University from TP for Term III, apart from submitting the above assignment, they were also tasked to discuss in seminar groups their TP experiences in the teaching of RE as a way of establishing whether the problems identified individually were widespread. The seminars were guided by a set of questions to give focus to the discussions, while the groups were divided according to which of the three RE syllabuses students had been teaching, i.e. whether the ZJC, the 'O' level, or the 'A' level syllabus. The written reports from these seminar groups provided yet another source for the problems affecting RE in secondary schools.

The manner in which data was collected suggests that this is a qualitative survey. In opting for this type of study, the writer felt that where the problems being explored are primarily due to attitudes, observation, supported by interview or face-to-face interaction would yield richer data than a quantitative survey based on a questionnaire, for instance (ff Borg and Gall 1989:321f).

For TP purposes, the full-time Grad.C.E. programme at the University of Zimbabwe traditionally deploys student teachers to schools in the urban centres of Harare, Chitungwiza, Bulawayo, and Masvingo (to cater for blind students). Confinement of TP to these four urban centres only is simply because of the financial and manpower constraints of the Grad.C.E. programme, rather than any other considerations. At any rate, the 106 RE students were, together with the rest of the students, deployed to the above four urban centres, going to schools in either the high or the low density suburbs.

Since the target population for data gathering was urban, it means therefore that the problems and attitudes identified are reflective of the Zimbabwean urban environment, rather than that of the smaller towns or the rural areas. But perhaps after an analysis of the data at hand, it might turn out that the views towards RE by the urban population might not be very different from those that might be found among people in the smaller towns or the rural areas.

This assumption is supported by the fact that the 106 students who participated in this study came from all the four corners of the country, i.e. in themselves they were a nation-wide representative sample which would be aware of the status of RE

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in their home areas. In their seminar group discussions, one of their tasks was to point out any differences between the RE problems they found out in the urban centres during their TP and those in their home areas. As it turned out, there were no significant differences that were identified by the students.

PROBLEMS IN RE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

While compiling the problems that had been identified by the students during their TP, the writer observed that where the problems are peculiar to RE as a subject, and these are the problems of concern in this paper, the underlying cause for these problems seemed to be that of attitudes, negative attitudes towards the subject of RE from the various sectors of society that are involved in education or are interested in its outcomes.

This observation suggests that we look at the problems peculiar to RE in terms of the attitudes of the main players in education and the practical problems they bring to bear on the teaching and learning of the subject.

GOVERNMENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS RE

Government attitude towards any subject on the school curriculum is primarily portrayed through the nature, quality and relevance of the national syllabus designed for the subject. Syllabus formulation is based on policy derived from the political and philosophical ideology as laid down by Government, spelt out by the hierarchy of the Ministry of Education and implemented by the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU). In the case of RE, CDU was given a directive in 1980 "to design a curriculum that would provide firm moral principles on which to build the nation while reflecting the heterogeneous nature of Zimbabwean society" (CDU 11980 Statement on Curriculum Design).

By 1985, CDU had gone through all the stages of curriculum design, i.e. the production, testing and publication of both a multi-faith syllabus document and its supportive resource materials for Grades 1 and 2, with that for Grades 3-7 to follow immediately after. In practice however, no work was carried out immediately after to make the syllabus for Grades 3-7 multi-faith such that it was the pre-independence Christian syllabus that continued to be operative at this level. According to the RE Subject Officer at CDU in an interview in April 1998, it is only now in 1998 that they have started working on a multi-faith syllabus for Grades 3-7.

With **Developing in Christ** as the title of the resource materials at ZJC, RE is still Christian at this level, although some of the aims are multi-faith. At 'O' level although the subject is now called Religious Studies, the content is still based on the Bible. This is so in spite of the fact that in 1988, CDU drafted the Zimbabwe School Certificate Religious Studies Syllabus with a multi-faith component (ter Haar et alia 1992:54). Although this new syllabus was supposed to be first examined in 1991, according to the present RE Subject Officer at CDU, in the

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interview referred to above, it was not pursued beyond the drawing board because the RE Subject Officer at that time was uncomfortable about introducing the multi-faith approach since he was afraid of Islam and did not regard African Traditional Religion as a true religion.

It is against this background that the majority of Grad. C.E. student teachers who addressed the problems related to the RE subject itself noted two main problems from both teachers and pupils that are directly related to the nature and state of the syllabuses.

The first problem identified was that RE is still based on Christianity, and to be more precise, based on the study of the Bible, to the exclusion of the other major religions practised in this country. This is still the case in spite of the fact that in 1980, Government, acknowledging the multi-cultural and multi-faith nature of Zimbabwean society, adopted the policy of a multi-faith approach to the teaching of RE from primary through to secondary school (Nondo 199:45f). Unfortunately, this process towards the multi-faith approach seems to have been carried out only in terms of the aims of the syllabuses while the content remained primarily Christian, as in the past. In this regard Jansen (1990) has this to say:

'With the advent of political independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean state inherited a colonial curriculum which has been criticised as racist, elitist, Eurocentric, competitive, individualistic and capitalist oriented... Although the new government was aware of this defect in the curriculum and efforts have been made to implement a socialist ideology curriculum, very little change has been witnessed in Religious Education, except the change of the name of the paper from Bible Knowledge to Religious Studies. Most of the changes have been described as 'cosmetic, skin deep, smacking of retardation.'

The student teachers noted that the teaching of RE under these circumstances makes the adherents of the non-Christian religions feel inferior and demotivated when they find themselves having to study the subject from the point of view of Christianity only. In advocating for a multi-faith approach, students were perhaps echoing the opinion of educationists like Peter Woodward, who when writing about RE in the Birmingham schools of the 1970s says that, "some of the best teaching of religious education today is based on a multi-faith approach in a multi-cultural situation" (Jackson 1982:37).

The second related problem identified by the student teachers was that the 'O' level Religious Studies syllabus, apart from being based on Biblical texts, does not take full account of the pupils' life experiences and their personal needs. This, in a sense is why in the table of specifications for assessment objectives, 50% marks are assigned for recall, 35% for understanding while only 15% are for application. This means that in teaching the emphasis is on recall and understanding with little attention given to making the subject relevant to the pupils' lives.

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While one would perhaps not be justified to conclude from this scenario that the attitude of Government towards RE is negative, nevertheless the current state of the subject indicates at best what can only be described as a non-committal attitude towards the subject in the sense that to date Government has not ensured that CDU implements its directive on the multi-faith policy. Gerrie ter Haar (1990:141) puts it more bluntly when in the course of reviewing the overall education policy of independent Zimbabwe concludes that "religious education as such is not considered a priority in education by the present government".

From the viewpoint of Government as an employer, an example that was frequently referred to by the Grad. C.E. students is that of the recruitment policy of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), which is a government department. They do not recognize RE as one of the required subjects at 'O' level. An applicant who has only five passes including RE will not be recruited into the ZRP. But if the applicant has more than five passes of which RE is one of them, he/she can be taken, because effectively RE will be regarded as an extra subject which will not be considered.

This ZRP attitude towards RE in its recruitment policy is difficult to understand for a profession that expects high moral standards and integrity among its members. At the same time this policy undermines the value of the subject in the perception of pupils, because in their recruitment drive the police visit schools and address pupils enunciating this policy.

ATTITUDES OF THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION TOWARDS RE

Another factor found by the Grad. C.E. students on TP that militates against the subject of RE was the negative attitudes of some school administrators. The following practices by administration were pointed out as indicative of these negative attitudes.

To begin with, many urban secondary schools do not offer RE at all, because it is perceived as a useless subject which is not marketable for employment purposes. This was evidenced by the fact, definitely in Harare, that during TP deployment students experienced a lot of difficulties in identifying secondary schools that offered RE. The negative attitudes of those schools which do not offer the subject also filter to affect those that offer it.

In those schools that do have RE it is generally regarded as an easy subject, an easy option that is usually offered to the weaker pupils, or to the lower classes in schools where pupils are streamed according to ability. When RE pupils find themselves in classes that are labelled as less intelligent, it demotivates them in their learning.

Because of this labelling, these pupils do not distinguish themselves as any better in terms of their general behaviour and level of responsibility compared to those who do not do RE. In fact, instead of being models to other pupils, such RE pupils tend to create discipline problems both in class and around the school. As a result, the

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school, parents and society in general end up blaming and condemning the RE subject as being ineffective in achieving its primary objective of developing pupils into responsible beings, without taking into account the sociological and psychological problems affecting these RE pupils because of streaming and labelling.

Another problem related to streaming is that of transferred pupils. At times during the term pupils from schools that do not practice streaming transfer to those that do. This can create problems when the above average new-comers find themselves being placed in the below average classes in order to carry on with their RE studies.

The other complaint raised was that some schools offer Divinity at 'A' level to students who would not have done RE previously at the lower levels, simply to ensure that they have the required number of subjects at 'A' level. Again, this is because it is regarded as an easy subject that anyone can successfully attempt at any level.

A common practice that also tends to undermine the status of RE is its placing on the timetable. In many schools RE lessons are slotted in the first period when some pupils will not have arrived. Where this is the practice, it also usually happens that administration schedules assemblies on those days when RE is in the first period, thus cutting down on the teaching time for RE. Furthermore, RE is also made the last lesson before tea break or before lunch when pupils will be tired, hungry and restless. Some will be dosing, especially in hot weather. The reasoning behind this practice is that RE is an easy subject which pupils can handle even when their span of attention has deteriorated, having spent their energies on those subjects that are considered as the gateway to lucrative careers in future.

While it is acknowledged and appreciated that belt-tightening under ESAP affected every aspect of Zimbabwean society, including the education system in general, the strong feeling of the Grad. C.E. students on TP was that RE was denied its fair share of the scarce resources when it came to the provision of teaching and learning materials. Headmasters tended to allocate more money to the more prestigious subjects like Science and Maths, leaving RE with practically nothing to go on.

Those who are familiar with the ZJC **Developing In Christ** series know how vital it is for each pupil to have their own picture book in order to actively participate during the lessons. And yet the teacher will sometimes have only five copies to go round a class of more than thirty-five pupils. Also, some headmasters do not bother to provide copies of the Bible for pupils, leaving it up to them to bring their own Bibles from home. But when pupils bring family bibles, this creates confusion in class, because they will be reading from a variety of versions, whereas the school should opt for one or other of the recommended versions for both class work and examination purposes.

Because of their low estimation of the subject, some school authorities tend to assign the subject to untrained teachers. As one student in 1995 aptly put it in her assignment, 'Authorities take the subject as a very easy option which can be taught by any human being who has the title of teacher, qualified or not, especially those

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who have not done the subject and know little about it. These, therefore use the wrong methods of teaching which in most cases demotivate pupils.' The harm done to the subject by assigning it to untrained teachers becomes even more serious when it is considered against the background that in the majority of cases the RE classes will be composed of low performers.

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS RE

Those who teach the subject are usually labelled by the other teachers as 'Reverend', 'Pastor', or 'Mufundisi' (Shona title for minister of religion). This labelling tends to undermine their self-confidence, and as a result they see themselves as second rate teachers who are condemned to teach classes of low performers. It is difficult to get optimum learning in a class where both the teacher and the pupils are demotivated. And when at the end of the year these candidates perform poorly in the final examinations the teachers are blamed by everybody.

Teachers of other subjects can also show their low estimation of the RE subject through a number of subtle ways. For instance, when pupils go for a Science lesson they can be delayed if the teacher knows that the subject in the next period is RE. or the message may be conveyed by a poster, like the one seen on the door of a base-room in a Science laboratory which read: 'Dropping Science or Maths? say goodbye to 93% of jobs!'

PUPIL ATTITUDES TOWARDS RE

This was found to be an issue in schools that practise streaming and then offer the subject only to the lower streams. In such situations pupils study RE not for its intrinsic value as outlined in the aims and objectives of the subject, wherein the pupil is supposed to develop morally and religiously, but rather as an easy option towards getting a full certificate, i.e. RE is regarded as the fifth subject that can easily be passed at 'O' level.

Pupils doing RE under these circumstances have a low self-esteem, and do not enjoy the subject. As a result, instead of being affected by the subject positively, almost by way of rebellion, they reject the values they are supposed to nurture and they create discipline problems, to the frustration of their parents and society.

Also, some pupils have attitude problems towards RE because they see this subject as restrictive of the standards they would want to live by. In contrast, they find a subject like Aids Education more responsive to their adolescence related problems and needs. They like this subject because it directly and freely addresses sex issues which are shunned and avoided by RE, or are treated in a legalistic and authoritarian manner that they perceive as ignoring their existential problems.

Another related area that can contribute to a negative attitude towards RE is from pupils who come from Christian families in which they have experienced religion as repressive and the Bible used by parents as a tool for disciplining them. Thus

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when they find themselves having to study the Bible in the RE classes, they tend to see it as a continuation of that repressive regime they are subjected to at home, and they react negatively against it.

PARENTAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS RE

In general, it was observed that the attitude of parents towards RE depends on their own level of education. The less educated parents tend to have a non-committal attitude, because they have little understanding of the subject choice at secondary school and its consequences for the future lives of their children. Thus, they tend to accept without questioning whatever subjects their children have chosen, or have been directed to take by the school. By the same token, these less educated parents feel incompetent and inadequate to monitor the daily progress of their children who are learning at a level they themselves never attained. The only problem that can emanate from the less educated parents is from those who take a fundamentalistic view of their particular brand of religion. This happens in the case where the RE course has a multi-faith component and children tell their parents that they are learning about other religions. Thinking that their children are being converted to other religions at the expense of the family religion these parents can demand that their children be withdrawn from such RE classes, and if this cannot be done, they will strongly influence their children not to actively participate in the lessons when any religion other than their own is being taught.

However, strong negative attitudes towards RE usually come from the highly educated parents, because they have definite ideas about the kind of careers they would want their children to pursue. If these parents are in high salaried jobs, they want their children to emulate them. If they are in less lucrative jobs, they want their children to aim higher than they themselves achieved - a case of the failed parents' ambitions being realised in their offspring.

These educated parents want to be actively involved in the choice of subjects by their children to ensure that they register for only those subjects that they perceive as requisite for the careers and professions they want their children to pursue. Unfortunately, RE does not happen to be one of the marketable subjects that they would advise their children to opt for, if they can afford to do without it.

In situations where the child is obliged to go for RE because he/she has no prospects of doing well in one or other of the favourite subjects, the parents will not support the child's efforts in studying RE. They would rather have the child spend minimal time on this subject while devoting maximum time and effort to the subjects that are regarded as more marketable. If along the line parents realise that their child is unlikely to do well at 'O' level in the marketable subjects, they will, at great personal expense, organise for extra or remedial tuition for that child. But one hardly hears of parents who organise such remedial programmes for children who are weak in RE except perhaps where the child is repeating that subject in order to have a full 'O' level certificate.

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The attitude of these highly educated parents towards RE can be regarded at best as utilitarian. When they allow (they do not encourage) their children to do RE it is not primarily for its intrinsic value in developing the moral and religious values of their children, but rather for the purposes of ensuring that their children muster the requisite five passes at 'O' level.

This parental attitude towards the subject obviously also affects the pupils doing it. All they want from it is the certificate, without caring about its contribution to their total development. Hence the observation made earlier on that there was no noticeable difference in terms of character and personality development between those pupils doing RE and those who were not. On the contrary, if anything was noticeable at all, it was that the classes that did RE tended to be a major source of disciplinary problems at school.

ATTITUDES OF SOCIETY TOWARDS RE

Society is a composite of many groups with different and often divergent values, all of which in varying degrees impact on the education system. When we consider that the aims and terminal objectives of RE are to do with the spiritual and moral development of children, we have to concede that there are many powerful forces in our modern society that exert negative influences on pupils and these tend to undermine and negate the values that RE is trying to promote. An example that immediately comes to mind is the media in all its contemporary forms, which sees the youth as its most lucrative market for its materialistic and consumerist values. Clearly the youth are more attracted by the dictates of fashion and modernity than by the prescriptive teachings of RE. The youth would want the freedom to experiment and experience the attractions of life, like sex, alcohol and drugs, without the restrictions and inhibitions that are fostered by RE.

If RE is fighting a losing battle against the pressures of modern society in terms of changing and moulding the values and attitudes of the youth, unfortunately, even as an academic subject, it is also losing value in the eyes of that same youth, because it has no market value in the world of job training and employment.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The problems that have been outlined in this paper are not all of equal weighting. Some are more fundamental, e.g. those related to the syllabus, while others are perhaps peripheral, e.g. those related to timetabling. Nevertheless, the overall picture that they portray is that RE is accorded a rather low status at secondary school level in urban centres.

While this study was limited to urban centres for reasons pointed out at the beginning, it might be surmised that in rural areas the attitude of schools towards RE might be more positive. This could be so because most rural schools do not have adequate facilities and resources to effectively handle the science subjects, meaning that RE would be one of the arts subjects that they would be in a position to offer easily with their limited resources.

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At any rate, the only other subjects that were identified as sharing the same low status with RE were Shona, Ndebele, and some of the practical subjects like Fashion and Fabrics, Agriculture and Woodwork. The question is, what can be done to improve the image or status of this subject? In other words, what can we see as the way forward for this subject? In attempting to suggest some pointers to the way forward, perhaps there is need to go back to what was said about Government policy in the introduction.

Although it was noted that at independence Government stressed the need in our society for religion and socialism to work together as part of one system, the fact of the matter is that this positive statement was made against the general background of a socialist system that tended to look down on religion. In their various pronouncements Ministry of Education officials stressed the importance of Education with Production for self-reliance and the need for scientific and technical subjects for the economic and industrial development of the country. The general atmosphere generated by those Government pronouncements was such that it was not fashionable in those days to be either a teacher or a student of religion. On the other hand, school headmasters, as the implementors of Government policy on the ground, were desirous to identify themselves with this materialistic attitude.

As a result, some of the secondary schools dropped RE altogether after Form II, while those that continued with it to the higher levels offered it to the weaker pupils so that they could obtain full certificates. For this reason Divinity at 'A' level was even offered to pupils who would not have studied the subject at 'O' level.

When Government was forced to abandon socialism in favour of ESAP in 1991 in order to revitalize the economy, no re-think was done with regard to the role of RE. And now as we enter the phase of ZIMPREST and there is talk of re-visiting the education system as a whole so that it empowers the youth with skills for employment generation, it is hoped that the place of RE in this initiative will be considered.

To make matters worse, the economic reform programmes that Government is pursuing are putting it under extreme pressure to cut down on its spending in order to reduce its budget deficit. In these circumstances it is difficult to see Government regarding RE as one of the priorities in budget allocation for the development of this subject in terms of the syllabus, teaching and learning materials and personnel resources.

This notwithstanding, of late Government has been concerned about the deterioration of moral standards in Zimbabwean society, particularly among the youth. To try and redress this situation, Government is working to restore the traditional roles of chiefs, headmen and village heads so that with their enhanced status they can once again become the champions and guardians of our traditional African values - cultural, moral and religious, which are fast disappearing and leaving the majority population in our society without a solid moral and spiritual foundation to build on. One would want to believe and hope that this yearning to

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go back to the roots, to the basics of our traditional African values will also translate itself into a desire to have a vibrant and effective policy on RE.

At the same time, one problem that we have to face up to is that at secondary school we are dealing with teenagers, adolescents, who are struggling to assert their personal identity as young adults. Although according to Goldman reflecting on his experiences of the British schools of the 1960s, these adolescents are supposed to be intellectually ready for, and interested in learning religion, their reaction is the opposite, seeing religious and moral teaching as one of those childhood and childish impositions by the adult society which they are now desirous to challenge and discard (Goldman 1964:51). So no matter how attractively the subject is presented, it is starting from a position of disadvantage. By this age the youth will already have developed a definite position and attitude towards religion, even if it is not clearly expressed or reasoned out. At the same time, they are more attracted to the disvalues of modern society that are clamouring for their attention. What chance does RE have to positively influence the religious and moral development of the children of this land who are exposed to the subject a few periods a week, over two to four or six years, during which time they are for the greater part of their time continuously exposed to more powerful but contrary influences from the society at large?

But for the Zimbabwean society to expect that RE should play the role of moulding morally sound individuals is perhaps demanding more than the subject can deliver. As Edwin Cox maintains, the place of RE on the curriculum today can only be justified on the basis of sound educational principles rather than theological considerations (Hull 1982:51).

Perhaps one way of looking at the problem might be to think in terms of what John Hull calls convergent and divergent teaching in RE (Jackson 1982:101f). Convergent teaching is where "the personal faith of the teacher converges with the content of his lesson and with his hopes for the pupils." The teacher teaches what he believes in and is committed to with the intention and hope that his pupils will form the same view. Convergence can take the form of nurture, evangelism, proselytizing or indoctrination.

On the other hand, divergent teaching is where "the personal faith of the teacher diverges from the content and the aims of the teaching." A divergent teacher seeks neither to foster nor deepen a particular religion nor to discourage it. Rather he/she teaches religion for its educational value, seeking to increase pupils' understanding of religion as an important aspect of human experience, and to equip them with the language, skills and methods of enquiry that will assist them in their search for meaning in life.

It is the view of this writer that if the aims, objectives and content of RE were geared more towards divergent teaching, the status of the subject would be assessed and viewed in a different and more positive light.

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