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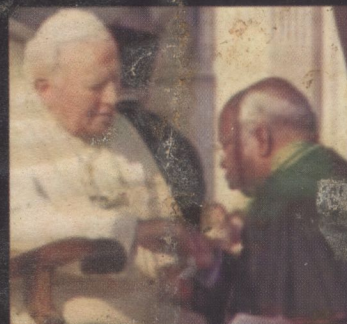
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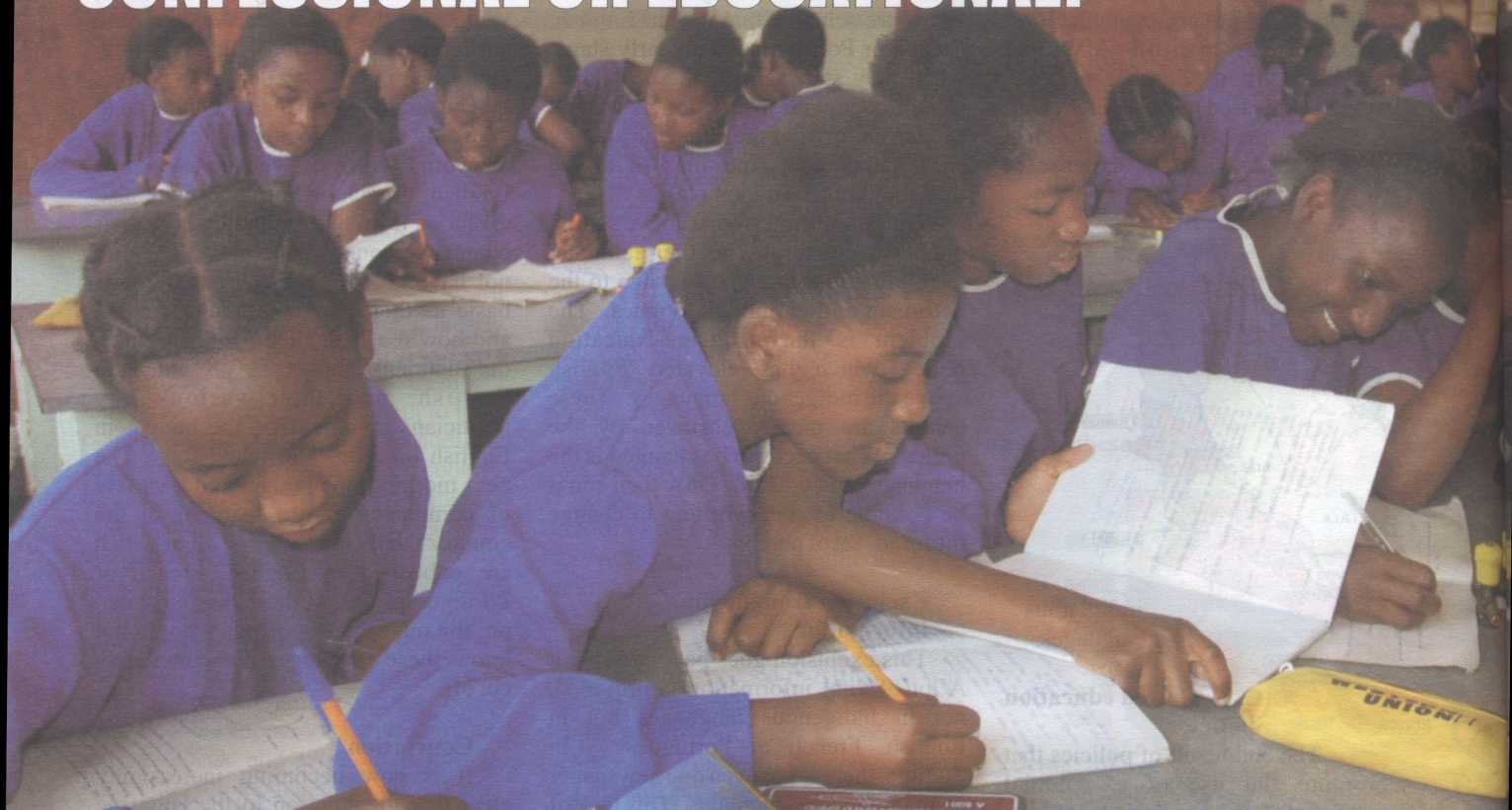
Milingo: A Catholic or Moonie

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RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CONFESSIONAL OR EDUCATIONAL?



J. L. Ilubala-Ziwa

Students of Religious Education (RE) in Zambia are now familiar with the literature on the subject, its development and where it is at the moment. The knowledge which has been developed is useful for teachers and other stakeholders. RE in Zambia has evolved through different stages. There have been transitory shifts towards a more liberal and educational approach to RE. This has been due to fundamental rules and realisations on the psychological development of pupils. The shifts have, however, been superficial since these syllabuses have remained the same in aim and content. The focus in this article is to show that RE in Zambian High schools is *both* educational and confessional. This is done by highlighting the challenges RE faces due to two influences, namely,

the church and the state. The church has impacted on making RE confessional and the state making it educational.

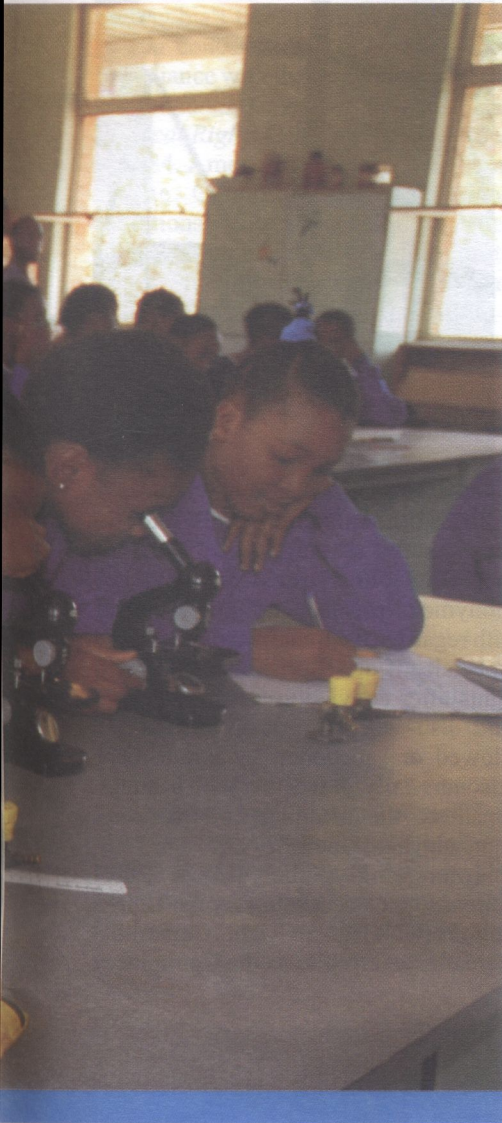
A confessional syllabus

A confessional syllabus aims at teaching pupils doctrinal issues of faith so that, in the process, they see the need for salvation. This brings in the issue of indoctrination and, according to one former inspector of schools in the Copperbelt province, Fr. John Henze, this means "reducing the pupils' range of choices in matters of value and lifestyle to a band-width preferred by a particular world view, whether held by the teacher, the school or the church." Thus, a syllabus that aims at reducing pupils' freedom to decide creatively is confessional and should not be promoted. This is how RE may be

analysed from the point of view of church influence.

An educational syllabus

A syllabus that is educational aims at equipping pupils with sufficient information, knowledge and skills that will help them make informed choices. This, therefore, means that RE syllabuses should be democratic so that pupils are encouraged to develop into independent, autonomous human beings. This is what the Zambian government intends RE to be like. In line with the Ministry of Education policy document, *Educating our Future* (EOF), the government tries to promote neutrality of each religious tradition by treating each tradition as equal. However, this is not possible since there are two syllabuses at high school level.



The one (syllabus 2044) is favoured by Catholic schools and the other (syllabus 2046) by Protestant schools. Moreover, the two high school syllabuses are restrictive and, to some extent, doctrinal. Pupils are deprived of rationality, moral autonomy and liberty. It is such disparities in RE syllabuses 2044 and 2046 that continue making them to be more confessional than educational.

Educating Our Future

Nevertheless, the two syllabuses have responded to some of the demands of the current 1996 educational policy document, EOF, which further states that education should be "based on enhancing the core democratic values of rational and moral autonomy, equity, fairness and

liberty." For example, the current syllabuses are different from Religious Instruction (RI) which was common in the early 1970's and which promoted indoctrination and religious absolutism. The focus has shifted to something more impartial, more educational and to some extent in line with the directives from the Ministry of Education (MOE). Additionally, though the content has not changed much, RE teachers are trained to use various teaching methods that promote liberty in the classroom. However, it is questionable whether RE teachers understand the RE content and use appropriate methods since disagreements usually arise at marking centres. Some teachers have rejected outright answers which do not appear in the marking key even though they are socially true.

Method of assessment

The syllabus for any particular subject in the school curriculum sets out aims and objectives. At the end of the teaching process, a method of assessment should be implemented in order to measure learning outcomes. The method of assessment or examination may vary but should be valid and reliable, two essential terms in assessment. It should not be doubted that examinations play the role of a gatekeeper and a management tool in processing human lives. It is for this reason that disagreements should not be common at examination marking centres or panels.

While efforts have been made to consider RE to be more inter-religious and non-confessional, recent trends might reverse this. This is due to the form and content of RE in sub-Saharan Africa that have been marked by the ideological concerns of different religious trends. This historical inheritance has also influenced the present situation in which - because of former control and despite recent innovations coupled with the declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation - Christian Religious Education still seems to dominate.

Upgrading

It is no wonder two experienced educationists, Fr. T. McGivern (former RE Senior inspector, Ministry of

Education Headquarters) and Fr. E. Flynn (former RE Senior Lecturer, University of Zambia) spearheaded the upgrading of syllabus 2044 with the involvement and commitment of MOE officials and other personnel specialised in the field. The report that was given by the two educationists above showed that the upgrading was necessary since the material contained in syllabus 2044 was produced in the 1980's and had a number of defects, such as the history section which seemed to be biased and focused on one particular church. The upgrading also addressed issues of national concern such as gender equality, environmental education, family life and HIV/AIDS education.

While theology is faith oriented and confessional, RE should help pupils to appreciate and understand the various religions in Zambia such as Hinduism, Islam and African traditional religions. As such, the RE teacher needs to develop allies who are not part of one's local church. The professional supporters include teachers of RE from different religions or Christian denominations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that the debate on whether the two syllabuses are educational or not has come a long way and is still going on. Nevertheless, the government has made it clear that the teaching of religion in schools should be undertaken in an open and unrestrictive way, where the pupil has freedom and can contribute to a new culture of tolerance. The government's directives are precipitated by global declarations such as the 1981 Declaration on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief. I maintain that the two RE syllabuses are both confessional (particularly in that they are dominated by Christian principles or doctrines) and educational (in that they endeavour to be in line with EOF policy document).

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[Editor's note: Articles on Religious Education in Zambia have featured in the following issues of *The Challenge* magazine: vol. 9, nos. 1, 2 and 4, 2007.]