

K3,500

ECONOMIC CRISIS

Teachers' allowances X

Learning materials X

Motivation X

Constitution change X

Doctors

Bye elections ✓

MPs Gratuity ✓

6/5 million ✓

100% + ✓

foreign trips ✓

- * Creative Education
- * Teachers - Unsung Heroes
- * Disadvantaged Women
- * God, Creation and Evolution

Melvin Simuchimba

In Zambia, three important developments have contributed to making Religious Education (RE) the controversial curriculum subject area that it is today. These are: the country's reversion to democracy and liberalism in 1991, the declaration of the country as a 'Christian Nation' by the state also in 1991, and the adoption and publication of *Educating Our Future*, a liberal national education policy document, in 1996. What makes RE controversial in a democratic society (like Zambia) is that it deals with different people's most deep-rooted beliefs and values which naturally tend to clash and therefore have to be moderated through a state-controlled syllabus. Since 1991, there have been calls in some sections of the Christian community for the replacement of current syllabuses, which include aspects of other religions (Islam, Hinduism and Zambian Traditional beliefs) with Bible Knowledge, which is exclusively Christian. Religious educators have been divided over whether RE should follow a more educational approach as required by the Ministry of Education policy guidelines or a catechetical approach, which is in line with the declared 'Christian status' of the nation. There have also been calls by some extreme quarters of the Christian community to remove trained lay teachers of RE from the classrooms and engage pastors to teach the subject. Similarly, non-Christian sections of Zambian society, notably the Muslim community, have expressed concern at what they see as unfair and distorted coverage of their beliefs and values in Zambian RE.

Social and Development Studies

In line with the vision and guidelines of *Educating Our Future*, the Directorate of Curriculum and Education Standards through the Curriculum Development Centre recently completed revising Lower and Middle Basic Education/School syllabuses. This exercise involved integration of about fourteen different subjects into five broad learning areas, apart from Community Studies, which will deal with practical cultural and economic activities in local communities. With regard to RE which is our concern, the integration meant the merger of Social Studies (SS) comprising aspects of Geography, History and Civics

with RE (or Spiritual and Moral Education) into a new subject area called Social and Development Studies (SDS).

Is there a problem?

The on-going discussion in *The Challenge* magazine has given the impression that there is a serious problem with RE as a curriculum subject in Zambia. Apart from Fr. Thomas McGivern (Vol. 7, No. 1, 2005), the other writers or contributors, i.e. Fr. Ben Henze (Vol. 6, No. 3, 2004), Fr. Brendan Carmody (Vol. 6, No. 4, 2004) and Dr. Austin Cheyeka (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2005), have by and large argued that SDS will lead to the demotion, marginalisation and eventual extinction of RE or the traditional teaching and learning of religious, spiritual and moral values in schools. Among other things or issues, the contributors are not happy with the lack of consultation of stakeholders when the initial decision to have an integrated curriculum was made, the manner in which the integration of RE and SS has been done, the ratios of RE to SS topics in SDS, learning time allocation on the timetable, the writing of SDS pupils' books, etc. Although I agree with one or two of these sentiments, my general view and argument is that there is no serious problem with school RE in Zambia and that the introduction of SDS at Lower and Middle Basic Education level(s) is just part of normal and positive curricular reforms.

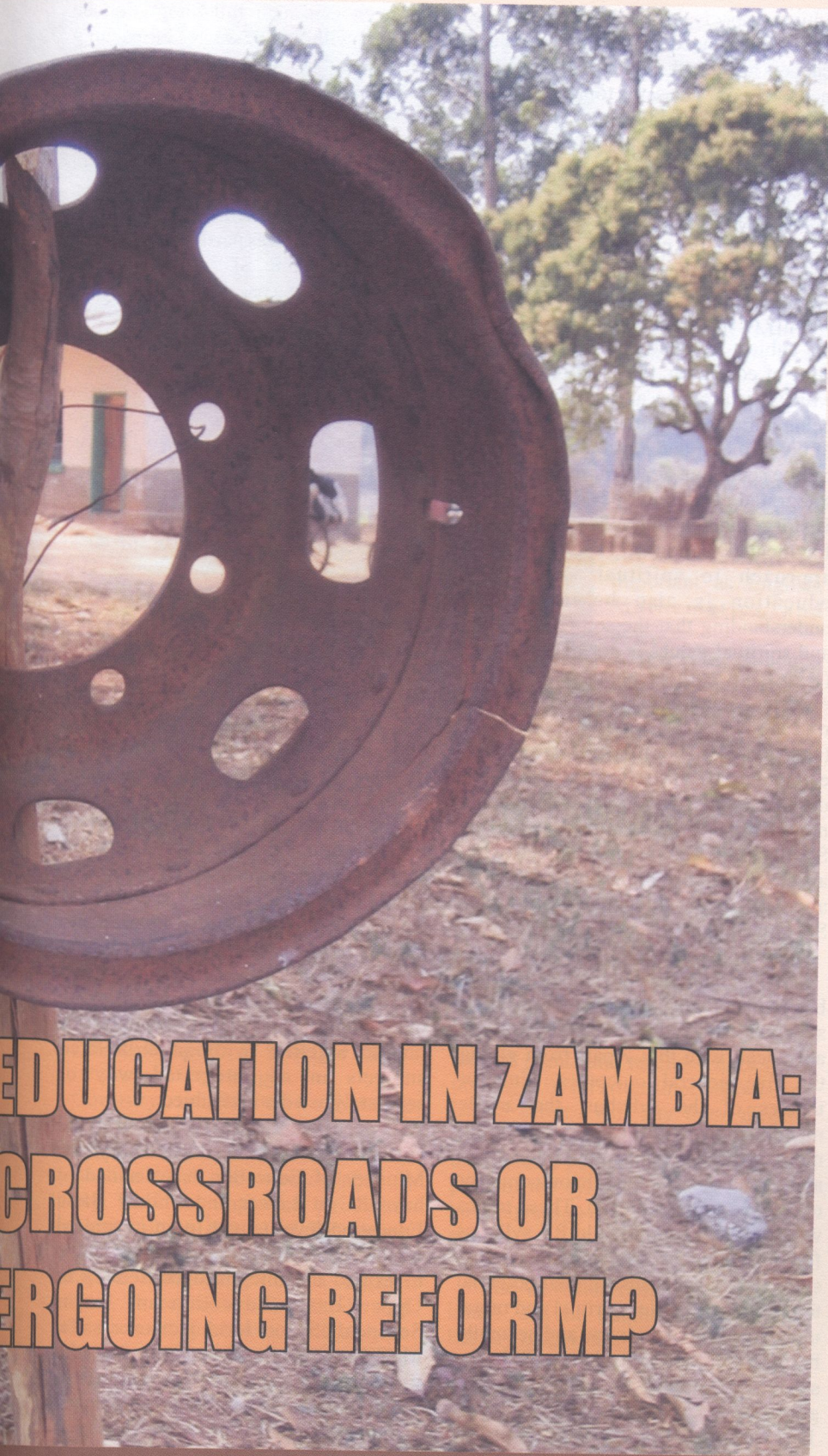
Educating Our Future

It should be noted that the basis of the on-going educational and curriculum reforms in the country is *Educating Our Future*, the national policy document on education. The policy document was adopted after extensive research by educationalists (including UNZA specialists) and consultation of different sections of society or interest groups, including the churches, at several workshops and seminars. The document spells out the goals, aims and principles of education in modern, democratic Zambian society, including curriculum integration at Basic Education level. So perhaps the Church was aware of and agreed with what was to come in the area of RE. In fact, in its August 1998 reaction to the publication of *Educating Our Future* by the state, the Zambia Episcopal Conference generally welcomed the



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The last three issues of *The Challenge*
This article continues the debate by def



EDUCATION IN ZAMBIA: CROSSROADS OR ONGOING REFORM?

...ine have raised a debate over the teaching of Religious Education in Zambia.
...g the position taken by the Curriculum Development Centre.

policy document as being positive (see ZEC 1998).

It should be further noted that the Curriculum Development Centre under the Ministry of Education is the only body or Department mandated by law to carry out any school curriculum reforms or subject syllabus changes in Zambia. In doing so, the Chief Curriculum Specialist, through his or her Principals and Subject Curriculum Specialists, may or may not invite or consult other stakeholders like UNZA's School of Education, Colleges of Education, teachers and parents as it deems fit. However, before any curriculum changes are effected, baseline surveys in which some schools and local communities are consulted and the curriculum needs in the country partly established are conducted. It should also be appreciated that in such work, it is not practically possible to satisfactorily consult every one, and not all interest groups can take part.

Admittedly, there was no qualified RE Specialist or National Inspector for RE to protect the interests of the subject at the time of decision making, but even if they were there, there is little they could have done to prevent the implementation of subject integration at the Lower and Middle Basic level of education. CDC was merely implementing something that was agreed upon by Zambians through a broad-based consultation process led by Government with the assistance of international aid donors.

Perhaps I should mention that as part of consultation, I was invited by CDC in my capacity as RE teacher educator based at UNZA to participate and give professional advice to the SDS team (on matters concerning RE) during the last stages of the syllabus reform exercise.

Rationale behind subject integration

The rationale behind an integrated Basic Education curriculum in Zambia (and elsewhere) is that children, especially those at lower levels of education, experience life in a holistic and integrated manner rather than in a fragmented and compartmentalized way. As children are born and exposed to the world of experience, they do not know nor understand the difference between language and mathematical experiences

or religious and scientific ones. These differences begin to be imposed on their experience and understanding as they begin to go to schools. As such, Primary or Lower to Middle Basic Education pupils are likely to learn or acquire knowledge better through an integrated approach to education which they are closer to than a fragmented one. It is for this reason that current approaches to curriculum planning and syllabus design for lower levels of education prefer integration to compartmentalisation of subjects.

More skills-based in approach and emphasis

Another important reason for opting for an integrated curriculum is that it allows the education system to be less content-based and more skills-based in approach and emphasis. One cannot doubt the fact that since the 1970s, the education system in the country has progressively become a vehicle for accumulation of knowledge and facts for purposes of passing examinations only, with little or no acquisition of general life skills such as critical thinking, analytical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making and self-reliance. So integration of the grouping of related subjects into learning areas namely, Languages, Numeracy or Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social and Development Studies, Creative and Technological Studies, and Community Studies will greatly help to contribute to reducing on mere memorisation and reproduction of facts and enhance the acquisition of various specific skills such as numeracy, literacy, innovation, self-expression, design, and of course, religious and moral literacy.

Additionally, most educators will agree that practically, teaching and learning at all levels of education can be easier if an integrated approach to planning is followed. In Zambia, it is a well-known fact that there are many overlaps and significant similarities in our school subject syllabuses, which can easily form the basis of integrated planning and teaching. For example, since 'water and its use' is covered in one way or another in Geography, History and RE which are in the same Department (Social Sciences) at school level, planning can be done in such a way that whichever subject teacher covers the topic first in a given class deals with the other two

subject aspects as well so that there would be no need for the other subject teachers to teach the topic in any detailed manner again. The same topic above can be similarly planned for and covered in Agricultural Science, Biology and Environmental Science in the Natural Sciences Department.

Integration of RE and SS into SDS

It should be noted that *Educating Our Future*, the national education policy document does not mention RE directly or specifically; rather it refers to the subject indirectly in the goals and aims of education, the most relevant of which is to produce 'a learner capable of being animated by a personally held set of civic, moral and spiritual values'. As can be seen, this goal points more to an integrated teaching of RE, Civics, History, and Geography than to a fragmented approach. The integrated approach to spiritual and moral education is also based on the understanding that the source of moral and spiritual values is not only religion (RE), but other areas of human experience such as past events (History), nature and the environment (Geography), and politics and economics (Civics). That is also why, despite being taught separately until now, RE has been examined as part of SS. So, as Fr. McGivern explained in his article, there is nothing new or strange about RE being under the umbrella of SS, now SDS.

Grades 1-7

With regard to how much RE has been integrated into the new SDS syllabus, I think Fr. McGivern's article ably dealt with this. Apart from giving the five general outcomes, aims or themes of the syllabus, the article mentioned the specifically religious and moral topics covered from Grade I to 7 and the number of specific outcomes or objectives to be achieved. These topics were selected from the old RE syllabus for inclusion in the integrated SDS syllabus firstly because of their potential to promote religious/spiritual and moral understanding or literacy, and secondly because of their correlation with the selected SS topics for each particular grade.

It is true, as Fr. Henze observes in his article, that the work done does not amount to full integration of religious and moral values in the new syllabus.

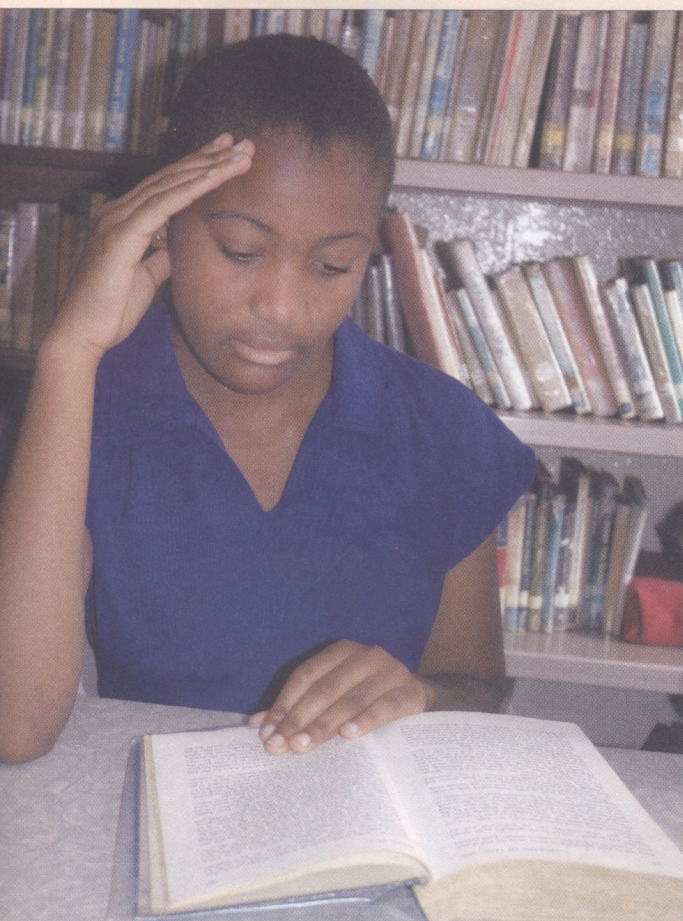
However, can such full integration be achieved without the danger of teaching the other subject aspects or Geography, History and Civics topics religiously? In their articles, both Fr. Henze and Dr. Cheyeka raised the danger of religious concepts being taught geographically or historically under SDS, but the same fear could easily be raised by geographers and historians. It was partly to avoid such problems that the SDS syllabus team decided to adopt a parallel or correlative-study approach in designing the integrated syllabus.

Has RE been marginalized?

The view that RE has been marginalised and swallowed up in SDS comes in when people see RE as competing only with SS, instead of three different subject components of SS, namely, Geography, History and Civics. If the fact that SS is made up of these three different subjects competing with RE for coverage in the new syllabus is well understood, the ratio of one RE topic to four SS topics will be found to be a fair and acceptable balance of topics in the syllabus. It should also not be forgotten that several original SS topics were dropped in order to accommodate RE topics.

The view above also comes in when people insist that because religion or Christianity in Zambia is important in people's lives (which it is), then RE should have religious aims and must be taught separately. However, according to the law or Ministry of Education policy since 1983, RE is a school curriculum subject with educational aims like any other. This means that it can either be taught together with other related subjects in an integrated way or separately as a distinct subject.

Therefore, as part of normal curriculum reforms in the country, the Ministry of Education has decided to have RE at Lower and Middle Basic Education level taught in an integrated way as SDS. Officially the plan at CDC is to extend the integrated curriculum to Upper Basic Education or Junior Secondary School level. However, as Fr. McGivern mentions in his article, the unofficial view of Curriculum Specialists in the Social Sciences Department (including myself) is that subjects like RE and Book Keeping/Office Practice should not be integrated with Geography, History and



(i) Due to lack of a full, separate examination at Grade 7, RE is not taken as seriously as other subjects both by teachers and educational authorities;

(ii) Due to lack of pupils and teachers' books, especially at Lower and Middle Basic Education level, teachers tend to shun teaching the subject;

(iii) Due to lack of fringe benefits such as sponsored workshops and seminars, teachers tend to think that the subject is not as important as English, Mathematics and Science;

(iv) Thus, although RE is timetabled, teachers use most of its periods to teach SS and other examinable subjects, especially Mathematics and

outcomes or objectives on RE topics are met. Currently, older teachers who left the Colleges of Education before ZATEC was introduced and who are therefore not very familiar with the integrated approach to education are being trained through short, in-service programmes within schools, zones, districts and provinces. So, before long, there should be no problem of teachers failing to teach integrated RE properly.

Problems, challenges and the way forward

Despite the foregoing, problems and challenges in the implementation of the integrated curriculum in general, and SDS in particular, remain. So far, it seems the most serious of these problems for RE/SDS is the manner in which the pupils and teachers' books are being written. I entirely agree with Dr. Cheyeka that unless at least one professionally trained religious educator is included in the SDS writing panels by all the publishers concerned, RE topics in the syllabus will not be properly interpreted, explained and illustrated in both the pupils and teachers' books. At the moment, Mwajionera Enterprises seems to be the only publishers who have done this and their SDS books are very good in terms of RE coverage.

So one thing ZARET and other concerned groups and individuals can do is to lobby or petition all publishers to ensure that they include a qualified religious educationist among their SDS book writers. They could also survey the approved books on sale and, where possible, advise heads of schools and teachers to decide to buy those that cover religious and moral topics better. ZARET, the RE Consultancy Group, the Church and other religious groups could also lobby the Ministry of Education through CDC to avoid extending the planned integration of all social science subjects which include RE to Upper Basic Education. Such lobbying and petitioning should, however, be done with the understanding that there is a big difference between Religious Education in the public school and Faith Formation in churches and faith communities.

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Civics at this level. This is because at this level of education, it is important to begin to introduce learners to critical understanding of religious and moral issues. I am sure all those concerned, including religious educators, ZARET, the RE Consultancy Group and the Church will support and encourage this stance.

Positive aspects of SDS (for RE teaching)

Contrary to the view that the integration of RE into SDS spells the death of RE at Lower and Middle Basic Education level, the new syllabus is likely lead to improved or better teaching of the integrated RE topics. Although many people would like RE to continue being taught as a distinct subject, there are some attitude and policy-related problems which have hindered the proper teaching of the subject in schools. Research conducted in some parts of the country by Joe Kamoko, Daniel Mubanga and Life Mutaka (all in 1994) on 'The attitude of RE teachers to the teaching of RE' revealed the following:

Science.

As may be seen, these problems will be taken care of by SDS. The new subject or learning area will be fully assessed and examined and contribute towards selection for Grade 8. The assessment and examination will be based on the general and specific outcomes set out in the syllabus. The lack of pupils and teachers' books will no longer be an issue since schools and DEBS offices will buy them directly from local booksellers. Teachers will therefore be compelled to teach the RE parts of the syllabus fully as they will have no reason or excuse to avoid doing so.

Are RE topics in jeopardy?

The view that religious and ethical issues will be taught as Geography, History or Civics and that teachers will adopt a purely comparative approach in teaching various topics in the syllabus is not correct. Given the syllabus booklet and pupils and teachers' books, I do not think any trained Lower and Middle Basic school teacher can fail to teach in such a way that the clearly stated