

# **Exorcising the Colonial Jinx: Towards Reconciling Diversity and Pedagogy in Zimbabwe's Religious Education Curriculum**

by

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## **Abstract**

The teaching and learning of Religious Education in Zimbabwe, particularly in Secondary Schools, has largely remained Euro-centric and Christ-centric irrespective of numerous researches pointing to the need for the curriculum to embrace the religio-cultural diversity of the inhabitants. Although the syllabi aims have a slant towards multi-faith, the content is narrow and exclusive to the extent that teachers and learners have limited chances of venturing into a more detached and sensitive exploration of other worldviews. By overtly promoting European and Christian centred beliefs, practices, attitudes and ideologies, the syllabi relegate other faiths, even the endogenous faith, to the tolerated extras. The exclusivist and inclusivist approaches, commonly employed, are irrelevant to the needs and aspirations of this pluralistic nation. The approaches also defeat the intention of the modern study of religion which considers religious pluralism as an aspect of life and tries to understand it historically and cross-culturally. Proceeding phenomenologically, this study contends that, it is no longer possible for Traditionalists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and even atheists to isolate and/or insulate themselves from other faiths. The study was also informed by the teaching practice observations carried out during the assessment of the University of Zimbabwe Graduate Diploma in Education students as well as students from Mutare Teachers' college. The rational for observing students on teaching practice from these two institutions was that they both train Religious Studies Secondary School teachers. The greatest setback in the implementation of multi-faith is among other things, the Christ-centric syllabi documents. In this regard, this article calls for genuine reforms to the syllabi in order to address the current cosmetic, haphazard, scissor and paste multi-faith appendages to the syllabi, examinations and the general classroom interactions.

## **Background to the Study**

The teaching and learning of Religious Education in Zimbabwe has undergone numerous phases and modifications as attested by the ever changing titles of the subject. For example, upon its inception into the formal education system, the subject was known as Christian Education, and then changed to Bible Knowledge and now Religious and Moral Education at Zimbabwe Junior Certificate, Religious Studies at Ordinary Level and Divinity at Advanced Level. As the names changed, the teaching methodologies were also supposed to change from exclusivism to inclusivism and subsequently multi-faith. The supposed three-tier development can be attributed to the fact that Religious Education gives people orientation to life hence as the orientation changes the subject is bound to be affected. The changes can also be related to new research findings and transformation of world societies from simple to complex pluralistic societies. The contention of this discussion is that changes towards multi-faith have remained a mere talk as evidence on the ground shows that the teaching and learning of Religious Education is still very much confessional or neo-confessional.

Religious Education was introduced into the formal Secondary School curriculum during the colonial era as a proselytizing instrument, hence its cultural bias and prejudice (Zvobgo, 1996). Taught through the exclusivist approach, the subject was meant to ensure that as pupils progress with their education, they would simultaneously progress in their Christian development. With the attainment of independence in 1980, the approach became unpopular as educationists and other stakeholders realized the need to incorporate other religions, particularly, African Traditional Religion, into the curriculum. A December 1989 workshop organised by the Departments of Curriculum Studies and Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy of the University of Zimbabwe as well as the Faculty of Theology of the Utrecht University (Holland), explored ways of integrating different religions into the Religious Education curriculum (Nondo, 1991). Although the consensus was that Religious Education must be taught from a multi-faith perspective, this remains a dream to the present day.

Constitutionally, Zimbabwe is a secular state and to continue teaching religion from a Christian perspective is tantamount to cultural racism. The country and its educational institutions symbolise a rainbow of beliefs and practices. Various religious traditions mingle and mutually borrow from each other consciously, sub-consciously or unconsciously. As noted by Goody, cited in Bourdillon (1990), Zimbabwe's religious market is so wide and diverse that whilst other people prefer to adhere to one religion, others prefer to pick and choose ideas from different systems and adapt them to their particular challenges rather than choosing between religions. Sources like <http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/religions.html>, estimate that Christians in cum Traditionalists constitute 50%, Christian 25%, Traditionalists 24%, Muslims and others 1% of the country's population.

While these percentages could have been exaggerated in some categories, the general picture is that the largest proportion of the Zimbabwean population can be described as dual faith upholders. The locals, broadly categorized as the Shona and the Ndebele, try to tap African spirituality when the need arises and Christian, Islamic or any other available belief in certain situations. It is not uncommon for the indigenous people to formally become a Christian, Jew or Muslim with little or no change to the way they think and respond to challenges they encounter. Various faiths, such as, the African Traditional religion, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i Faith and atheists; decorate the country's religious landscape. Given this environment, this study argues that it is prudent for the Religious Education curriculum to embrace and celebrate this plurality and benefit from its riches. The kind of Religious Education currently being taught in Zimbabwe's Secondary School is a mockery to the cultural diversity of the society and its constitution. It is against the pan-African ideology and cancerous to citizens in a pluralistic milieu. In regard to this sad reality, this study dissect trends in the teaching and learning of Religious Education and give reasons for the subsequent 'death' of multi-faith teaching in Zimbabwe's Secondary Schools with the view of trying to reduce and/or address the current gap between diversity and pedagogy in Religious Education.

## Theoretical Perspectives

The teaching and learning of Religious Education has seemingly undergone numerous changes from the pre-colonial period to the present, yet in reality the changes are cosmetic. Ideologies of the liberation movements, African nationalism/renaissance, and Black consciousness; new research findings; and the transformation of societies from simple, mono-cultural to complex multicultural ones, have all to a very large extent failed to exorcise the Religious Education curriculum from the colonial jinx. Religious Education pedagogy is still very much exclusivistic hence my contention that it is haunted by the colonial hangover. Exclusivism, according to Barth, refers to a situation whereby religious truth claims are restricted to only one religion, be it Islam, Christianity, Hinduism or African Traditional Religion (Ataman, 2008). In the context of this study, exclusivism is the view that Christianity and Christianity alone, is a uniquely true religion through which salvation and true revelation are found only in Jesus. Other religions are not worth examining and their expression should be proscribed. This fallacy pervaded the curriculum from the colonial period through missionary education and seems to be resisting the test of time. The Catholic maxim, *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*, meaning outside the church there is no salvation, have seriously impacted on the Religious Education pedagogy to the extent that other religious traditions are seen as not worthy studying (Ataman, 2008). This truism also gave birth to the dogmatic (confessional) approach in which the goals of Religious Education are Christian evangelism, indoctrination and nurturing.

Two teaching methods distinguish the exclusivist approach, that is, the dogmatic/confessional model which seeks to expose learners to the essential doctrines and teachings of Christianity; and catechetical approach which seeks to ensure that pupils are able to remember and memorise accurately some biblical verses. This is most pronounced at Ordinary level. These methods lead to what Hobson and Edwards (1999:18) refer to as “education for commitment.” The exclusivist approach considers Christian principles as the basic universal human values to which people from diverse socio-economic backgrounds should comply. The bible and Christianity’s claims to truth are seen as ineffable, infallible and unifying. From a phenomenological perspective this approach connotes religio-cultural supremacy, racism and ethnocentrism which culminate in the marginalization of other cultures. Christianity’s superiority complex and subordination or alienation of other faiths which continues to haunt the Religious Education curriculum, is propelled by the expressions and writings of many missionaries, evolutionary anthropologists, theologians, historians and sociologists.

According to Mbiti (1969) earlier descriptions of Africans, their culture and religion were largely inaccurate, inadequate, derogatory and prejudicial. Fr Goncalo da Silveira, for example, once described the Shona people as “frauds and agents of devil”, and his compatriot Fr Monclaro also described the Shona as “lacking all manners of worship and knowledge of God” (Mudenge 1988:62). Another Portuguese, Albino Pacheco said the mediums trusted by people “were charlatans, holders of illegitimate power by means of cheap and callous deception” (Lan 1985:45). Boxer in Bourdillon (1977:29) also cites Antonio Gome, a Portuguese Jesuit who described the Shona people as savages, “not true men but arboreal brutes incapable of participating in Catholic faith.” Robert Moffat and John Smith Moffat cited in Bhebe (1979:34) described the indigenous religion as ‘pagan’ and urged people to turn to Christianity for salvation. Similarly, John Lee and Joseph Lockin referred to the Mwari (Shona God) ‘cult’ as nothing but coarse ‘fetishism’ and a “den of desolation, misery and crime” (Bourdillon 1977:47). All these descriptions perpetuate Western supremacy, racial arrogance, cultural bias and prejudice. These attitudes have managed to outlive the test of time and are still prevalent, covertly though, in the Religious Education curriculum. As noted by Bourdillon (:46) “the further the culture was from European cultural norms the more hotly it was condemned.” Thus, the Religious Education curriculum as designed by Christian missionaries and Government of the day was intended to wipe out every trace of Zimbabwe’s indigenous cultural heritage, including her religious traditions. These intensions still shadow the current Religious Education pedagogy which continues to privilege Christianity by treating other religions as tolerated extras hence my call to exorcise the curriculum.

Fieldwork observations by social anthropologists and the coming on board of African scholars yielded a fairly positive presentation of African people, their culture and religion. The studies which seem to have been guided by the phenomenological principles of, epoché (bracketing the preconceived notions), empathy (putting oneself in the shoes of the believer) and naming (use of accurate and not pejorative, biased and inaccurate words) have somehow managed to change non-Africans' and even some Africans' attitude towards the African culture and religion. This development was embraced by some educationists and curriculum designers who then responded by advocating the adoption of inclusive pedagogy.

Inclusivism, whose chief exponent is Karl Rahner, emerged in relation to the growing pluralism and Roman Catholic reforms since the Second Vatican council, hence Knitter, quoted in Ataman (2008:14), calls it the 'Catholic model.' Inclusivists, according to Ataman (:14), uphold that the saving and self-revealing God of Christians "who desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth" (Timothy 2:4) is present and at work in and through the world's religions. Thus, although God's saving power and grace is operative in other religions, whatever truth and saving power to be found in other religious traditions is fully included in Christianity. Because Christianity is used as a yardstick for measuring the worthiness of other religions, the approach is not free from cultural prejudice hence inadequate in handling the subject. Thus, whilst inclusivism acknowledges the multicultural and multi-religious nature of the world communities it fails to do justice to the acknowledgement. This attitude has culminated in the marginalization of other faiths in the curriculum on the ground that they are flawed human attempts at salvation and therefore to truth. Dialoguing with adherents of other religious traditions or atheists is not for mutual benefit but an occasion to save the 'lost soul.' This notion, that can be referred to as disguised or diffused ethnocentrism, still dominates the Zimbabwe's Secondary School curriculum.

## **Methodology**

The study relied on classroom observations, interviews and analysis of instructional documents, especially the syllabi and the examination question papers hence it is qualitative in nature. Observation method was used with regard to student teachers who were on teaching practice in 2010 studying for the Graduate Diploma in Education and Diploma in Education (for Secondary School teachers) with the University of Zimbabwe and Mutare Teachers' College respectively. Because of easy accessibility to the three university of Zimbabwe students, I managed to visit and observe each of them teaching on five different occasions. Two of the student teachers (at Mount Pleasant High School) had both the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate and Ordinary level classes, whilst the third one (at Ellis Robbins High School) had an Advanced level Divinity class.

In order to enhance the reliability of results, I did not inform the student teachers that whilst I was assessing them, I was also carrying out a research on the implementation of multi-faith approach. As such, they delivered their lessons as they ‘usually’ do. An opportunity to observe college students was availed to me when I was invited to externally assess Mutare Teachers’ College students on teaching practice. Six of these student teachers were observed teaching Ordinary level Religious Studies and the other two were observed teaching Junior level Religious and Moral Education at different Schools. Although the method was quite helpful in collecting valuable information, I must hasten to acknowledge that student teachers observed under the given circumstances (internal and external assessment) tend to be affected by fear and anxiety to the extent that they could have failed to perform or exaggerated their day to day classroom practices. I also informally interviewed the same university students and their mentors as I conversed with them soon after classroom interactions. The techniques enabled me to collect data concerning factors that aid and militate against the implementation of multi-faith pedagogy.

In order to obtain a broader picture about the teaching and learning of Religious Education, I went on to interview teachers who have been teaching the subject for at least five years. The sample comprised thirteen Bachelor of Education and eight Master of Education students specialising in Religious Education at the University of Zimbabwe. Information from these participants gave a valid picture about the teachers’ attitude towards multi-faith pedagogy and the way they are handling the subject. Some of the participants hold senior position ranging from heads of department, deputy heads to heads of Schools. As such, I managed to collect data from policy implementers and classroom practitioners from different parts of the country. The choice of the sample was further influenced by easy access to the participants.

I also interviewed an official from the Curriculum Development Unit (C.D.U) responsible for Religious Education, four church (Christian) officials; two Roman Catholic and two Anglican, because these churches are key stakeholders in the country’s education system as they own numerous Schools commonly referred to as Mission/Church-run Schools and two representatives from the Traditional Religion.

## **Findings**

From the analysis of instructional documents, observations and interviews, the study established that Religious Education pedagogy is perpetuating Euro-centric and Christian values at the expense of other values, including the indigenous ones. Bachelors and Masters Students who participated in this study talked about the strange paradox that exist between the aims and content of the syllabi documents. Whilst the aims, especially at the Junior and Ordinary levels, are multi-faith, the content used to pursue the given themes is very much Christian. Consequently, it is the teacher’s initiative to incorporate other religions. This is not an easy task for most teachers as confirmed by the same participants and my observations with university and college student teachers.

Shortage of resources on other religions was cited as a serious inhibitor towards multi-faith pedagogy by most participants. Students on teaching practice noted that they are always working under pressure and could not find time to search for content which relates to other religions. This compels them to zero down on Christianity whose books are readily available. It was also disheartening to note that all students I observed teaching were either exclusivistic or inclusivistic in approach and not multi-faith. In few instances where Traditional religion was referred to, it was to support a particular Christian doctrine or thinking.

Some participants noted that teaching from a multi-faith perspective is taxing as it requires a lot of research. One ought to be extra resourceful in order to master traditions, doctrines and values expressed in various religions. Some felt that multi-faith pedagogy is not rewarding because the examinations set by the Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) are Christian oriented. Thus, if one dares to employ this pedagogy he or she is likely to produce poor results and the school authorities, as well as the community, will judge him or her harshly. All the participants concurred that they ‘teach for exams and nothing else.’ An official from the C.D.U interviewed in connection with the aforementioned dilemma expressed his awareness of this challenge and attributed it to the failure by his organisation to effectively discharge its duties due to acute shortage of resources, particularly, funding to carry out research and produce teaching and learning materials. He also cited lack of political will and the economic challenges the country has been facing ever since the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (E.S.A.P) in the early 1990s. For him all the practical initiatives to make the Religious Education curriculum multi-faith ended just before the introduction of E.S.A.P, thereafter all the efforts became mere talk-shows. Thus, as long as the country is in the economic doldrums, multi-faith pedagogy is likely to remain a dream.

Three of the Church officials vehemently opposed the implementation of a multi-faith pedagogy. For them, Religious Education is synonymous to Christian Education. They categorically registered their reservations about a curriculum that dilutes their children’s faith. One of them actually said *Chii chaipa nekufundisa chikristu? Munoda kuti vana vedu vahedhuke? Vashaye pavamire*; loosely translated as, ( what is wrong with the teaching of Christian faith? You want our children to become atheists/freethinkers or pagans who do not subscribe to any religious tradition). These sentiments represent the attitudes and views of many Christians who sincerely believe that their own faith is uniquely true and wish to have this invaluable truth transmitted from generation to generation without being ‘confused’ with ‘false’ beliefs of other religions. The other Church official sees nothing wrong with a multi-faith pedagogy but was quick to point out that only ‘good elements’, especially from the Traditional Religion, should be infused to enhance Christian teachings. He emphasised that the curriculum should at all cost avoid Islamic teachings because they promotes ‘terrorism.’ From a phenomenological perspective, this study contend that these views and sentiments carry cultural biases and should not be condoned particularly in pluralistic settings like Zimbabwe and her educational institutions.

These views however, do not represent the official position of the Churches concerned as evidenced by a pastoral statement on education issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference in 1987 to the effect that the Church fully support Zimbabwe's search for its genuine culture (Nondo, 1991).

The Traditionalists condemned the current Secondary School Religious Education syllabi as discriminating against the African beliefs. They attributed problems such as individualism, moral decadence and intolerance, to the absence of traditional beliefs, practices and values in the curriculum. They also bemoaned identity crisis that has gripped the young generation which they think is due to the education system's negation of the African culture. Their desire is to see a Religious Education curriculum that recognises and accommodate African beliefs and practices because it is culture that gives citizens their identity. They were, however, not averse to the teaching and learning of diverse cultural elements from other religions as this may promote unity, tolerance and harmonious co-existence.

From analysing the instructional documents, particularly, the syllabi as well as interaction with participants, I realized that the current Religious Education pedagogy is faulty, biased and not in tandem with the multicultural environment. Whilst the Junior level syllabus is inclusive, the Ordinary level syllabus is quasi-inclusive and the Advanced level syllabus is exclusive. Syllabi documents in the quasi-inclusive to inclusive mode regard Christianity as a normative religion but also seem to acknowledge that because Christianity may not provide the absolute truth there is need for students to learn from other religions. As such, the documents maintain the Christian thrust and seek to develop new perspectives on Christianity by drawing insights from other religions. The syllabi do not seek to promote the acceptance of other religions but rather to develop some respect for people who hold different beliefs.

By contrast, the exclusivist model which characterises 'A' level Divinity syllabus has a clear link with the confessional approach. For Edwards and Hobson (1999), the major problem with exclusivism is the presupposition that only one out of a possible range of religious truth is valid without adequate exploration of the alternatives. No opportunity is provided for open and genuine educational engagement with other religious systems. The approach would best suit a mono-faith society which hardly exists anywhere in the world today. This syllabus, therefore, requires exorcism. The Zimbabwe School Examinations Council (ZIMSEC) seem to have realised the awkwardness of this syllabus and have quickly responded by asking questions that goes beyond the requirements of the syllabus, that is, contextualising and indigenising the 'A' Level Divinity examination questions. The curriculum seems to be pointing towards dual-faith rather than multi-faith approach. The move by ZIMSEC, of putting the cut before the horse, has caused unnecessary confusion and anxiety among teachers and students.

Although dual-faithism and inclusivism have managed to initiate a move towards a more objective curriculum where various religions are given equal respect, Christian tradition still enjoys a higher status in Zimbabwe's Schools curriculum. Other religions, African Traditional Religion included, still find themselves in a process of emancipation.

## Towards a Multi-faith Pedagogy

Many scholars like Goldman, Loukes, Smart and Ayer have influenced curriculum reforms in Religious Education in many countries and the 11-13 December 1989 conference entitled "Multi-faith Issues and Approaches in Religious Education with Special Reference to Zimbabwe" (Nondo 1991), held at the University of Zimbabwe could have been a by-product of their influence. These scholars have noted the ambivalence of learners toward Religious Education because the content is too distant from their own experience and the mode of teaching boring (Gates in Jackson, 1982). The observation is true of Zimbabwe where most families, 50%, according to <http://www.indexmundi.com/zimbabwe/religions.html>, are dual faith bearers, in that African traditional and Christian belief and practices melt and naturalise upon them. Thus, a pedagogy that focuses on Christianity at the expense of other faiths, particularly, traditional religion, fails to meet the desires and aspirations of the learners and the society. Globalisation has provided fertile grounds for the blossoming of other faiths such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Baha'i Faith, Judaism, and atheistic individuals and groups as well as quasi-religious movement. Thus, teaching one religious tradition, in such a milieu, is tantamount to cultural segregation.

In such multicultural environments Loukes, cited in Jackson (2004), recommends a Religious Education that concentrates on human experiences. For him the key role of Religious Education is to explore pupils' questions and concerns in the context of a liberal and secularised Christianity. For us in Zimbabwe and perhaps Africa, the context is not that of liberal and secularised Christianity but pluralism. In a pluralistic environment, good teaching is not synonymous with giving more focus and emphasis on a particular religious tradition or interpreting other religious systems in relation to the one perceived to be uniquely true but an occasion to dialogue about experiences. In the same vein, Smart, quoted in Jackson (2008), argues for the secularisation of Religious Education and shifting of its focus to the analysis of religion seen in a global context, yet still attempting to relate it to pupils' personal and epistemological questions. In a pluralistic society like Zimbabwe, Religious Education can no longer find its rationale in promoting a Judeo-Christian national religious and moral identity. There is need to draw back from making assumptions about beliefs and values of learners, some of who cannot publicly express them due to the colonial hangover that regard religions other than Christianity as heathen, barbaric, devilish, demonic, uncivilized and archaic.

Multi-faith approach emerged as a reaction against the discriminatory and reductionist tendencies of exclusivism and inclusivism. The approach, if used properly, can redress the pedagogical concerns of Religious Education in a pluralistic environment, in that, it rejects the claim that there is a religion which is uniquely true and superior to others. Its conviction is summarized in Hick's observation that all religions are culturally conditioned ways of responding to similar basic questions confronting all humans, hence all religions are equally valid and equally salvific (Ataman, 2008).

Following this, Hick, cited in Hobson and Edwards (1999:53), avers that Religious Education pedagogy should emphasize the notion that because of various geographic, historical and cultural factors, different groups "perceive the transcendent through the lens of a particular religious culture with its distinctive set of concepts, myths, historical exemplars and devotional or meditational techniques." This means all religions promote in their distinctive ways the soteriological goal of transformation from egocentricity to reality centeredness.

This pluralistic view is opposed to the pedagogy that fails to account for the particularity and uniqueness of the individual religion by treating them all as having a common essence. The current Zimbabwe's Secondary School Religious Education syllabi can hardly be exonerated from this accusation because the indigenous and other faiths and customs contained therein are Christian tinted. Multi-faith approach, advocated herein, allows for an impartial engagement with a variety of religions and permits each religion to be presented and dissected in its own distinctive terms and as worthwhile in itself. In this regard, Woodward, cited in Jackson (1982:41), avers that "to describe a selection of faiths is essential, to derive insights from them is natural, to reflect within oneself on these insights is the sine qua non of Religious Education."

The approach, according to Smart (1995), helps learners to view every religion as an aspect of life and tries to understand it historically and cross-culturally. Multi-faith seeks to find out what the world looks like from another person's or society's point of view and is dispassionate. Wright, in Hobson and Edwards (1999:59), concurs that the primary aim of multi-faith pedagogy should be "allowing pupils to become literate religiously, to be able to think, act and communicate intelligently about the ultimate questions that religion asks" and to be able to do so irrespective of whether the pupils are believers, agnostics or atheists.

Multi-faith pedagogy places the learner at the centre, rather the subject matter of religion. It relates content to the pupils' experience, insulates against the risk of indoctrination and produces an ideal blend of description, insight and reflection. World societies have numerous equal, independent and alternative cultures existing side by side and Religious Education should expose and prepare pupils for the encounter with these cultures. This is saliently captured in Jackson's (1982) observation that the exploration of world's religions is imperatively important since it is necessary for people of different religio-cultural persuasions and customs to interact and live together in their immediate environment and the world at large.

As such, Religious Education which is not multi-faith is therefore not educational, especially if Starkings' definition that education is "culture perpetuating itself" is upheld (Jackson, 1982:68). Thus, Religious Education's contribution to education constitutes the processes of learning about and learning from other religions. Despite the fundamental pedagogical benefits that multi-faith approach offers, its implementation remains farfetched.

## **Implementation Hindrances**

Factors militating against the implementation of multi-faith approach vary from theological to pedagogical ones. Many stakeholders who include ministry officials, C.D.U officials, church-run Schools and teachers who sincerely believe that their own religion is uniquely true advocate the teaching of this important truth to their children without confusing them with the 'false beliefs' of other religions. Such pious stakeholders would do everything in their capacity to insulate learners from religious diversity. This probably explains why we have Christian, Islamic and Hindu Schools in Zimbabwe. Three of the Church officials interviewed concurred that they are diametrically opposed to the multi-faith Religious Education pedagogy because for them it dilutes, confuses and reverses the gains of evangelism, indoctrination and nurturing done by the clergy.

They alluded to the idea that most Christian families would withdraw their children from multi-faith religious classes if such pedagogy is introduced. The situation is aggravated by the fact that the Zimbabwean society still suffers from the colonial jinx that downgrade and disregards non-Christian belief systems. The past experience in which the study of religion was seen largely within the context of commitment to Christianity still haunts the education system. Thus, half of the Masters students confessed that because of their experiences as pupils and Christian upbringing, they find it difficult to teach with 'open minds and empty hearts.'

Pedagogically, reservations are that multi-faith Religious Education overburden learners with information some of which is irrelevant to their experiences. This criticism, however, does not hold water because multi-faith pedagogy prepares pupils to encounter the wider world where they interact and interface with people from diverse religio-cultural backgrounds. Moreover, if properly implemented, thematically or otherwise, multi-faith broadens pupils' knowledge; help them to learn about and from as well as appreciating other people's culture thereby cultivating tolerance. Some critics argue that multi-faith approach is intellectually demanding for young children (Hobson and Edwards, 1999). To this end, this article contends that the content ought to be adapted to the children's developmental level and the more intellectually demanding aspects be reserved for higher forms. Other sceptics think that the approach is too rationalistic to the extent of neglecting the essential affective elements present in all religions (Hobson and Edwards, 1999). This is not convincing because multi-faith does not prohibit the treatment of the experiential side of religion.

The essential teaching documents, particularly the syllabi, compound the problem. As noted earlier, the syllabi, especially the Ordinary level one, is self-contradicting in that the aims are multi-faith but the content to pursue the aims is Christ-centric. Thus, including content which is multi-faith is the teacher's initiative. Teachers also find themselves in a dilemma in that whilst the syllabi aim for a multi-faith pedagogy, the national/public examinations from the ZIMSEC are largely bible oriented. Following this, teachers resort to exclusivist or inclusivist approach in order to enhance their students' chances of passing, after all their worthiness depends on pupils' pass rate.

Most interviewees also noted that multi-faith pedagogy is taxing in that it requires thorough and wide reading on the part of the teacher in order to have a grasp of the belief systems and practices fundamental to different believers. Thus, multi-faith teaching requires well trained, motivated, dedicated and disciplined teacher. Such teachers are hard to come by in today's Zimbabwe, where because of poor remuneration; most people have joined the teaching profession due to desperation. Furthermore, material resources to inform and guide teachers and learners are hardly available.

## **Conclusion**

The world has shrunk due to technological developments and movements of people have created the phenomenon of religious pluralism. Contrasting beliefs and practices now face each other and have become a strong sense of self-identity. Different traditions interface and cross-pollinate to the extent that it is no longer possible for a Traditionalist, Muslim, Hindu, or Christian to isolate him or herself from other faiths. Even remote areas which seem to be isolated are not insulated from pluralism. It is against this background that this article argues for a multi-faith Religious Education pedagogy. The Religious Education curriculum and the society at large must embrace this diversity and benefit from its riches. It is my conviction that if properly and fully implemented multi-faith pedagogy can remedy some of the societal problems that relate to African identity, cultural, ethnic and religious difference. Exclusivist and inclusivist approaches that still haunt the Religious Education curriculum at different levels with varying intensity are not consistent with the subject's educational goals and the pluralistic nature of the Zimbabwean society. The pedagogy should unapologetically take into cognisance the cultural diversity of this nation in order to dismantle the colonial jinx and heresy associated with it.

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