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# Religion's transformative role in African education: A Zambian perspective

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*Although religion forms part of the educational curriculum in much of sub-Saharan Africa, its nature and role tend to be greatly restricted. By way of taking the situation at the University of Zambia (UNZA) as a case study, it will be argued that the teaching of religion as more truly conceptualized, as well as a person-centred pedagogy, can make a distinctive contribution and realize some of its transformative potential. This may provide a more appropriate paradigm for much needed transformative education in the region.*

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**Key Words:** Africa, religion, transformation, education, religious studies, theology, Zambia

## Introduction

In recent studies of education in sub-Saharan Africa, one finds evidence of increased access to schooling (Wohuter, 2014; Harber, 2013; Takyi-Amoaka, 2015). This is undoubtedly a positive outcome of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) initiatives. It forms part of a long-standing paradigm for independent African countries of seeing the school as the road to upward social mobility and escape from poverty. What the studies also call to mind is how this form of schooling, despite attestations to the contrary, continues to be highly teacher-centred and narrowly academic, leaving little space for personal development and flourishing. In turn, this has negative consequences for the enhancement of democracy, peace, and social security, which are so much needed on the continent (Carmody, 2013, 245-263).

This is not to say that, for instance, humanities including religious education is generally excluded from the curriculum (*Guide to Higher Education*, 2013). The inclusion of religion, however, does not necessarily enhance personal development as one might expect. It often assumes a role which tends to be greatly restricted insofar as it is, mistakenly, treated somewhat academically like other subjects on the curriculum. As a result, it does not have a major impact on the overall orientation of the schooling systems and is rarely mentioned (Marshall

2010, 237-287). This may appear surprising since many of today's African schooling systems have relatively recent roots in faith-based institutions. What we find is that the preponderant educational paradigm with its modernization agenda has marginalized its study (McCowan & Unterhalter, 2015, 34-38; McGrath, 2010, 237-253; Walters, 1981, 94-106). For many Christian educators, where religion's conversion rate is phenomenal (Gifford, 2016, 85), this may not seem to be of major concern. Yet, in view of a widespread tendency of the educational systems to alienate from local roots and fail to address issues of personal well-being, it would seem to merit attention.

In the light of this ever growing tendency to concentrate upon preparing people for jobs, what follows is a study on how religion's educational role at the University of Zambia, though restricted by its location within such a paradigm, can become transformative thereby making a distinctive contribution. It will be argued that if religious education were to be more person-centred, it would provide a more satisfactory model not only for religious education but also for education more generally in sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Context**

The University of Zambia opened in 1966, largely as a state university. Unlike other universities in Africa, it had no special arrangement with universities elsewhere but, as a new institution at this level, it clearly needed recognition within the academic world (Altbach & Kelly, 1978; Carmody, 2004, 171). This did not mean exclusion of religion. Various churches provided services on campus which eventually led to the formation of an inter-church chaplaincy centre in 1987. Moreover, from 1976, it offered courses for primary teacher college lecturers who, among other things, were intending to specialize in religion. Progressively, a need for religious education teachers in secondary school emerged and so, as a response to this situation, the university explored the possibility of including religion in its curriculum. It eventually concluded that a Religious Studies department could be set up, whose main role would be to educate senior level secondary teachers in religion. This was also seen to contribute a distinctive dimension to university education (Carmody, 2008, 25).

Subsequently, in 1985, courses on religion were offered which led, in 1990, to the formation of a programme to provide the study of religion as a minor part of a B.Ed. degree programme. What was offered was identified as Religious Studies, not Theology. This meant that the study of religion would be primarily academic and non-denominational, in part to avoid religious sectarianism as well as to make it educationally acceptable. It presumed methodological neutralism so that the study of religion would not unduly favour any group of students by

endorsing their particular position. Such detachment would not explicitly affirm that any particular religious claim was truer than any other. It could, perhaps, be seen to be a form of methodological agnosticism or secularism, which fails to develop a critical distance insofar as it is non-personal to evaluate the framework that pervades all subjects and so, in a negative sense, could be said to imprison humanity within the walls of rationalist dogmatism (Giddy 2011, 528).

### **Religion in Zambian Education**

This mode of presenting religion in the curriculum is distinguished from theological study. A theological approach would mean that a neutral 'outsider' acceptance of different religious positions is complemented by an 'insider' critical assessment of different religious claims to truth (Lonergan, 1973, 267; Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, 5).

Over the years, the Religious Studies programme evolved within this framework of not evaluating truth claims of different forms of religion, largely because it was feared that this would be unwise in a country where there had been much religious rivalry, as well as a major religious breakaway movement (Van Binsbergen, 1981, 266-316). Clearly, opting for Religious Studies proved to be a way forward, but it will be contended that it is severely restricted in terms of properly appreciating the nature of religion and its role, both in making a distinctive contribution to university education and to the life of the national community. It might also be highly suspect, educationally, if appreciative criticism is one of the major aims of education (Noddings, 1997, 250; Nord, 1995, 235-237).

Having religion as part of the curriculum is nonetheless a major achievement and has undoubtedly been valuable in the context of preparing many teachers of religion for secondary school. Moreover, it contributed towards the provision of a more comprehensive curriculum at the higher level, in the sense that it includes some form of religion, which helps avoid the accusation of malpractice, as education without religion is sometimes seen to be, for instance, in the United States and France (Noddings, 2005, 250; Reiss & White, 2013, 18). If education fails to deal with some of the basic questions that human beings ask, one wonders what education means.

In discussing religion as an area of study in the curriculum, it is noted that the nature of religion presented in Religious Studies at UNZA resembles what has been termed 'learning about' religion. For instance, courses at undergraduate and graduate levels speak in terms of 'knowledge of', 'understanding about', 'description of', with almost no reference to personal development. (Grimmitt, 1987, 141,166; Courses offered at UNZA). By this is meant achieving basic

religious literacy which provides information on the beliefs and practices of some of the major religions of the world. It is true that this may be more than factual, insofar as it has included some elements of phenomenology (Carmody, 2008, 28; Jackson, 1997, 7-29). Yet, the programme is primarily descriptive with few attempts to be evaluative (Carmody, 2008, 29-30). As a subject like any other, it shares the larger horizon of Zambian education with what might be called its third person stance (Riordan, 2013, 24; Hyde, 2013, 36-45; Taylor, 1989, 162).

In this respect, it has been alleged that much of Zambia's educational system has become textbook centred and oriented toward passing examinations (*Empowerment through education* 2004, para 41-42; *Education: A Catholic Perspective* 2009, para 4; Mudalitsa, 2016, 67). In acknowledging this, the Ministry of Education's policy document *Educating Our Future* (1996) set out to change schooling by making it more educational. Like its earlier document, *Focus on Learning* (1992), it called for pupils to become more critical, assertive, creative, and responsible (*Focus on Learning* 1992, 1; *Educating our Future* 1996, 29, 91). This double focus upon examinations on the one hand and personal formation on the other remains ambiguous (*The Zambia Education Curriculum Framework* 2012, x, 15, 17).

In speaking of the nature of Zambia's schooling today, it may be of value to look at the present situation in light of its historical evolution. In the aftermath of Independence in 1964, with a tiny literate population and a severely limited number of trained personnel, the new government pursued a policy of what has been termed modernization as the way to national development. This meant that education came to be seen primarily as an investment in human capital and adopted a heavily science-based curriculum (Carmody, 2016b, 63; Goma, 1999, 130-131). It led to the emergence of a fundamental disjunction between natural science and humanistic study. Although this way of proceeding educationally within a modernization framework of development was later questioned, it continues to provide what might be called the main paradigm of learning in Zambia, as elsewhere in Africa (Samoff, 2013, 55-87; Piper, 2007, 106-107; *Rethinking Education* 2015, 37).

Undoubtedly, this mode of educating over the past fifty or so years has greatly contributed to national development, seen largely in economic terms. Yet, its limitations in becoming ever more focused on 'academic' outcomes, has progressively distanced itself from local need including that of enhancing democracy (Mwalimu, 2014, 1091-1108; Goma, 1999, 130-131; Kasanda & Chinsebu, 2009, 263-292; Survey 2013). This has been described as a process of decontextualization where, in a sense, the learner is extracted from everyday life finding him/herself in a detached mode of reflection leaving him/her

somewhat isolated and unmoored (Serpell, 2007, 23-51; Bryk, 1988, 256). Such education has little connection with the concerns of learners' lives. Most learners, as Serpell puts it, originate from families where literacy in English is restricted so that ownership of the literate culture of school may be greatly limited, and so mastery of the technical forms of socialization may not equip them with a sense of being an insider to this world (Serpell, 2007, 28). An outcome of such desiccation is reflected thus:

*Understanding little about their past, many Zambians have an uneasy sense of homelessness and rootlessness. Several seem unable to reconcile traditional values and approaches with the imperatives of urban living, though to a great extent their mode of responding to social, cultural and economic situations is dominated by a traditional outlook. Rapid urbanization has also hastened the demise of many customs and traditions. This is a loss which schools have done little to prevent.*(Focus on Learning 1992, 32).

By identifying what seems to be a significant blemish in the educational system, namely, an absence of a personal dimension, one might ask what, if any, role the study of religion could assume in developing the kind of learning that would promote a sense of being rooted?

Presenting religion in a preponderantly academic and non-denominational generic way in the tradition of the European Enlightenment, as Religious Studies has tended to do, is of restricted value because of its impersonal nature. In part, this results from the limited educational framework linked to modernization theory in which it was introduced. Instead, religious education should engage learners, touch their lives, and encourage them to think for themselves about religious traditions and the role of religion in their own lives (Wright, 2007, 200).

Despite the university's original desire that religion should make a truly distinctive contribution, it did not seem to have this kind of humanitarian perspective clearly articulated. It was not explicitly concerned about enabling learners to make sense of their lives, which more recently has been seen as something which the study of religion might provide in terms of spirituality (Carmody, 2008, 30-31; Nash, 2005, 93-95, 98). At the outset, it did not envisage the study of religion's distinctiveness in such a way. Insofar as the study of religion at the university was envisaged to be a subject like any other, it was seen primarily to be a specific form of knowledge enveloped within the modernization framework (Smart, 1968, 90-106; Wright, 2004, 165-174). It failed to recognize that the study of religion has potential for a fundamentally distinct kind of learning that humanises lives and contributes to the common good where, among other things, religion is seen to be intrinsically personal, entailing an inevitable subjectivity informing a way of life (Lonergan, 1973, 115-124; Bellah, 1965, 73-87; Wright, 2005, 25-28).

## **What is Religion?**

By considering the nature of religion and religious literacy more widely, in terms of a way of life rather than within the secularisation context in preparing for examinations, we need to keep in view that there are different kinds of literacy (*Education for All* 2004, 126-133; Jackson, 2016:14). We have functional literacy, where we learn the basics of a subject, which is often taken as paradigmatic in development programmes. It is largely informational and constitutes a crucial aspect of formal education. There is also critical literacy, which is often associated with impersonal critique. Moreover, we have the kind of literacy that is self-critical, leading to self-knowledge (Freire, 2012; Bailin & Siegel, 2003, 181-193; Noddings, 2016, 83-102).

In the study of religion at the University of Zambia, the form of religious literacy fits into that of basic information about religion edging towards impersonal critique but, for reasons already indicated, it avoids evaluation of personal truth claims (Mujdrlica, 2004, 102-103; Carmody, 2008, 29-30). Such abstract learning appears to characterise education not only at UNZA and in Zambia but more generally (Bryk, 1988, 278; Noddings, 2005, 49). Self-knowledge no longer features prominently because the literacy which science-based learning promotes in terms of scientific theory and critique of it, tends to marginalize, if not ignore, personal knowledge which becomes narrow and confessional to the point where the two forms of knowledge become almost incommensurable (Noddings, 2016, 137; McGrath, 2011, 44). Education supports the views of people such as Dawkins, Hawkins and Dennett who view science, as if reality can only be reduced to their limited speciality. Such an approach has serious consequences, among which is the fact that the study of religion, in the way in which we are proposing, is off the map (Buckley, 1987, 359; Gallagher, 2010, 65; Giddy, 2011, 528).

Yet, if religion is to be understood as a way of life rather than as a form of knowledge, self-critical literacy is required. In this regard, Michael Grimmitt speaks of 'learning from religion':

*...when I speak of pupils learning from religion I am referring to what pupils learn from their studies of religion about themselves—about discerning ultimate questions and 'signals of transcendence' in their own experience and considering how they respond to them, about discerning core values and learning to interpret them, about recognizing the shaping influence of their own beliefs and values and making faith responses, about the possibility of their being able to discern a spiritual dimension in their own experience, about the need for them to take responsibility for their own decision-making, especially in matters of personal belief and conduct (Grimmitt, 1987, 225).*

Thus, for instance, when learning about the Muslim call to prayer five times a day, a Catholic student can be challenged to be more mindful of God throughout his/her day, or of the value of duty from the Bhagavad-Gita when studying Hinduism (Warnick, 2012, 422). While religious education needs a 'learning about' framework, it also needs more. The learner needs to go deeper and, as it were, go behind the words so that, as Grimmitt notes, when learners read about ultimate questions:

*...their taken for granted meaning can be problematized so that their attention is turned to what they know and what they don't know, on what they believe and what they don't believe, what they value and don't value. In that way such ultimate questions can be consciousness expanding causing them to reflect on why they see things as they do and encourage them to see their understanding against other ways of understanding* (Grimmitt, 1987, 140).

The learner is thus encouraged to examine the conceptualization of his/her worldview, focusing upon the underlying reality of his/her self from which is it is framed, that is to say, its source, namely the wonder he/she shares with humanity (Lonergan, 1973, 101; Carmody, 1988, 57-72). It forms part of the realm where we are alone with our mortality, seeking reason to believe that there truly is more to life than we ever imagined (Nash, 2005, 99). When "learning from religion" is operative, the emphasis is less upon absorbing the religious tradition passively, as perhaps characterised religious education in the past (Groome, 2014, 119). As then conceptualised theologically, the religious expression was largely normative, embedded in what Bernard Lonergan called classical culture where a historically conditioned moment was taken to be normative (Giddy, 2011, 530-531; Lonergan, 1973, 103; Gelpi, 1997, 58). This clearly had major implications for how forms of religion were seen to be valid or not (Hastings, 1994, 590; Hinfelaar, 2004, 80; McGrath, 2011, 44). Recent history of religious education in England and elsewhere illustrates how such cultural envelopment of religion remains a problem, making it difficult to move beyond confessionalism, or beyond what James Fowler would identify as the implicit, tacit, conventional awareness which characterises his stage three (Fowler, 1981, 151-173). Breaking away, becoming disembedded, entails risk and the loss of support that provided security. This also has serious implications for the teacher (Groome, 1981, 484-485; Jackson, 2016:14).

Epistemologically, "learning from religion" should enable the learner not simply to assimilate the tradition, but to interpret it and make it his/her own. In so doing, there is need to include both the authenticity of the learner, as well as the integrity of the tradition (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003, 326-340; Barnes, 2014, 201). Achieving such understanding of religion, where the subject and



his/her tradition are properly acknowledged, demands the kind of approach which the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, advocated when he spoke of moving from education as “banking”, to when it is “problem-posing” (Freire, 2012, 71-86; Groome, 1981, 490). For him, the “problem-posing” approach focused heavily not only on the content of a tradition to be mastered but on how the learner related to his/her tradition. However, by over-emphasising the learner’s perspective he was aware of the danger of missing reality. As a result, he rightly acknowledged that true learning entails what he termed a historical aspect where the concerns of people’s lives are included (Freire, 1985, 298-306).

From the perspective of religious education, North American educator, Thomas Groome, translated Freire’s approach, stressing the need not only to make the student ready to interpret a religious tradition but at the same time to ensure that he/she should address that tradition objectively (Groome, 2006, 763-777). This entails moving beyond the objectivity of the “banking” tradition which, as we indicated, is strongly embedded in education historically. At the same time, it has to beware of being overly subjective. Rather, it entails something like what Hella and Wright, as well as Groome, had in mind when they noted the need to bring ‘learning about’ and ‘learning from’ together (Hella & Wright, 2009, 53-64; Grimmitt, 2010, 286). In brief, proper encounter with a religious tradition demands the kind of self-knowledge where subject and object are properly distinguished as well as a method which enables this to emerge.

### **Method for the study of religion**

This subject-object relationship needs to be seen in our present-day context which is significantly influenced by different worldviews on knowledge. One emanates from natural science and, as already noted, tends to be paradigmatic in much contemporary education. This can lead to internal conflict, even apparent incommensurability, when insufficient attention is given to how this form of knowing relates to personal knowledge. What emerges is the kind of abstract, alien, decontextualised, uprootedness which the Zambian school is deemed not to address (*Focus on Learning* 1992, 32). Such learning could be said to fail to enhance the welfare of the person which ought to be pivotal to education (*Rethinking Education*, 36, 38).

This clash of horizon is partly evident in *Focus on Learning* and *Educating Our Future* and subsequent documents where on the one hand there is emphasis upon preparing for the world of work, while also noting the need for education to prepare people for life (*Focus on Learning* 1992, 1, 32; *Educating Our Future* 1996, 1-2). We find that the latest document speaks of education being guided by democratic principles and its concern to develop well-rounded complete persons,

while in the same breath it emphasises technical competence and enhancement of entrepreneurial skills (*Zambia Education Curriculum Framework* 2012, 1-3, 14, 17-19). With recognition of this duality in knowledge, there is an attempt to bring them together. We thus see different career paths being envisaged under one school roof. What is not clear is how the proposed integration is to take shape particularly if, for example, religion and local languages are assigned marginal locations especially at the senior level (*Zambia Education Curriculum Framework*, 40). It seems as if we are still within the modernisation horizon and its paradigmatic curriculum which, as we have noted, tends to exclude, or at least marginalise, what should be pivotal, such as in this instance traditional values and worldview to holistic education (Noddings, 2003, 87). As such, the rootlessness about which we spoke earlier appears destined to remain.

On a more general level, psychologically, this internal tension between knowledge as transmitted and as discovered is mapped by William Perry as he traces the intellectual development of college students (Perry, 1970). For Perry, the movement from feeling sure about one's knowledge to where the learner finds him/herself in a relativist position represents a kind of "in between" period, which engenders what he identifies as a shift from belief to faith. This entails a movement from the apparent security of external authority to questioning it and coming to assume personal responsibility for one's commitments and lifestyle (Perry, 1970, 86ff). It might be said that we are concerned with the solitariness of disconnection from one's immediate surroundings for a moment in order to reconnect more widely. It is where the person discovers for him/herself that it is up him/her to decide what to make of him/herself (Lonergan, 1988a, 223, 1988b, 243-244). This clearly is no easy task especially in a world where, faced with a huge range of choices, individuals can be overwhelmed, thus needing a framework to help them to critically assess options (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, 2012, 140). Sooner or later, as Wright sees it, our understanding of reality needs an ontological foundation when exploration ceases and we simply say this is how things are and this is the way we must live (Wright, 2004, 168; Groome, 2011, 9). Otherwise, we have the learner standing beside Sisyphus (Camus's embodiment of the human predicament in the myth of Sisyphus), gazing in dismay at the rock of reason. Turned on itself and rolled once more to the foot of the mountain, in wonder and terror, he sees Sisyphus' wry smile bespeaking his awareness that he must resume the quest for certainty of meaning, a labour that forever ends in the same defeat (Perry, 1984, 90).

Such repositioning of knowledge from "out there" to within oneself entails what Giddy calls dialectic, and resembles what Fowler terms dialogue (Giddy, 2011, 532; Fowler, 1981, 185). For Giddy, this means confronting in oneself the question of what constitutes true knowledge. Is knowledge of the real world arrived at through the senses alone, as in the case of natural science, or does

it also have a deeper basis in consciousness? Is it legitimate to withhold belief in anything that goes beyond the actual and observable? It might, for instance, be asked whether the cause of my friend's death is a virus or witchcraft, when the distinction between the phenomenon and metaphysics is confused? (Yamba, 1997, 200-223; Gifford, 2016, 105, 107-124, 153). Where knowledge is perceived to include such ambivalence, how does the learner know what is true? What mode of verification is needed?

In the case of natural science, it is a question of reflecting on the data of sense, moving through understanding of them with images and hypotheses, and eventually making a judgement on the hypothesis that most accords with reason (Giddy, 2011, 534-535). When it comes to data of consciousness, one cannot look at one's feelings, thoughts, or judgements as one would observe an object in the laboratory. There is need for another means of verifying knowledge of this kind. How is this to be done? Using the method of natural science as philosophers such as David Hume did seems, as intimated, mistaken insofar as data of sense and data of consciousness are fundamentally different, while the approach of rationalists such as Immanuel Kant similarly fails to recognize the nature of knowing (Lonergan, 1974a, 69-86). Recognizing the nature of knowledge, including the radical difference between its forms, entails thematising the contents of consciousness or, in Bellah's terms, second order thinking (Bellah, 2011, 275). The question, however, remains: how is this to be done?

For Giddy (2011, 531) speaking from a critical realist perspective, this is not so difficult. He claims that it means nothing more than starting with our self-awareness and moving towards self-knowledge, arriving at such through the process of:

*(1) Experiencing one's experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, (2) understanding the unity and relations of one's experienced experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding, (3) affirming the reality of one's experienced and understood experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding, and (4) deciding to operate in accord with the norms immanent in the spontaneous relatedness of one's experienced, understood, affirmed, experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding* (Lonergan, 1973, 14-15).

Put somewhat differently, it is not unlike what takes place in psychotherapy when a feeling is identified and understood in different ways, and then judged in terms of which understanding makes greatest sense (Lonergan, 1974a, 269).

Although this process may not appear to be difficult, insofar as we are not dealing with some distant planet of which we have no direct experience, this is not the whole story. It demands that the subject focuses on his/her presence to self in thematising it. We are not concerned here with extra reading or listening

to lectures. It is somewhat like learning to drive a car—the emphasis is upon practice, not theory. We have to be highly conscious of the trap, as it were, of reading music criticism without having heard the music, or looking at a stained glass window from outside. In becoming aware of our experiences, we come to realize that they vary significantly. Looking at a tree is quite different from trying to find the answer to a crossword puzzle, which entails racking one's brains and suddenly discovering the solution. In the process of self-discovery, we are engaged in understanding these and other diverse experiences. The concern is with what is going on within our consciousness when we do such. Though this may appear straightforward, such self-reflection is difficult, even described as “high daring” (Jaspers, 1953, 132). Making explicit what is already operative in one's consciousness is not an easy matter.

As we attain some measure of self-knowledge in this way, which of course is pivotal to education (Noddings, 2006, 10), how does the learner know its truth or falsity? We all know how easy it is to be deluded. Determining truth or falsity follows a similar procedure to that used in natural science, insofar as both forms of knowledge rely on judgement on the basis of the most convincing reasons. Like knowledge of natural science, personal knowledge, too, is fallible. Despite this, we can lay claim to relatively secure knowledge of what is real (Wright, 2007, 8). This happens when the learner recognizes that, though whatever knowledge he/she holds is provisional, the process of arriving at such operative, implicit knowledge is not open to revision. By focusing on the process, one arrives at a normative position where he/she has a rooted epistemological foundation; this is because contradiction arises when one uses the process to deny it (Lonergan, 1957, ch.11: Lonergan, 1973, 19; Gelpi, 1994, 111-117). Method shifts from being something “out there” to being within one's self. The locus of truth is within (Carmody, 2010, 46; Taylor, 1989, 130-132).

Such realization and its attendant capacity of self-affirmation emerges from acknowledging that one is undoubtedly a knower. This is of the highest significance when the learner approaches a decision about what worldview (religious or other) to adopt, which is of major import if one is educating for life (Reiss & White, 2013, 6,14). In teaching religion, options should be clearly identified as good education should do (White, 2009, 430). Though selection of such can give rise to the accusation of arbitrary restriction and indoctrination, presenting all options would almost surely be impossible (Reiss & White, 2013, 15). Choice of worldview, however, is located more deeply. It entails one's fundamental option resembling a vertical rather than a horizontal exercise of freedom (Lonergan, 1973, 237, 267-269; Warnick, 2012, 411-426). Sen spoke of

it as substantive freedom, enhancing the person's capacity to live life in terms of what he/she has reason to value (Sen, 1999, 14-15, 36, 292-297).

Option at this more basic level, though fallible, does not exclude being presented with the kind of alternatives we have noted but presupposes a more fundamental choice of horizon (Allen, 2016, 451-460). With such rootedness, the learner should be enabled to discern rationally a religious or non-religious perspective, keeping in view the need to be temperamentally attuned (White, 2009, 431; Gallagher, 2010,21). What is pivotal is not the conceptualisation of religion, but the underlying process from which such articulation has been made. This is the task of theology, or its equivalent, which starts not from scripture or doctrines, but from the religious experience that is the source of such (Lonergan, 1973, 105-107; Grimmitt, 1987, 180-182; Cush, 1999, 144).

How does what has been described relate to Religious Studies as currently presented at UNZA? Insofar as Religious Studies assumes a phenomenological approach to religious experience, there is some concord but what is being proposed goes further. It entails not only accurate description of fundamental options, but evaluation of what is described in the light of the learner's own religious or non-religious perspective. In that sense it moves towards theology, or its equivalent, thereby creating a more dynamic and interactive relationship between Religious Studies and Religious Education.

Pedagogically, this means helping the learner to identify his/her religious or spiritual experience (Carmody, 2015, 506-513). It would, for instance, entail not only juxtaposing traditional African experience with other forms of religious expression, as is currently the case, but should also enable the learner to take a personally evaluative stance toward such experiences and so be able to choose his/her own religious or non-religious framework responsibly and freely. In doing this the teacher points the way towards, but refrains from, dictating a choice; he/she does not tell the student what to think, but to think (Brighouse, 2000, xx,1; Noddings, 2003, 88). The learner's choice ideally emerges not solely from a rationality of academic logic, which may be much too superficial, but also from the reasons of the heart (Lonergan, 1973, 115, 268).

We have been concerned to argue that in order to educate religiously, the Religious Studies department of UNZA needs to engage its students more existentially, so that the themes of their lives and what they already know from them are included. Doing this will require the development of a higher degree of religious literacy, normally the domain of theology, or its equivalent. It entails an extended focus upon method in the initial stage of any programme - perhaps a

course unto itself - but it should colour each religion course that is offered. This will demand special skill from the teacher who would have to be familiar with the kind of self-reflection which we have sketched.

The value of what is being proposed is that the student ought to gain the capacity to approach different forms of religion intelligently and responsibly. Moreover, at the institutional level, it would enable the Religious Studies department to evaluate not only Religious Studies programmes but those engaged with theology, or its equivalent.

### **Education for life**

Extending this discussion, it could be argued that UNZA education more generally would be greatly enhanced by becoming more personal in the case of understanding education in religion. It has been noted how education in Zambia, of which UNZA is an integral part, tends to leave learners psychologically and culturally rootless, but gives little assistance on how to assume responsibility for the integration of their lives. This could be described as education from the neck up. Even though it has been indicated that this is not peculiar to Zambia, or to Africa, it is especially unsatisfactory here because it poorly equips learners to contribute to democracy, justice, and peace on a continent which has been so troubled by violation of rights, injustice, and war over the past fifty years (Waghid, 2014, 55, 66; Hyden, 2006, 18-19; Meredith, 2014, 596-624).

### **Conclusion**

What has been argued here is that Religious Studies as currently delivered at the University of Zambia was introduced and has remained a subject like any other. This has had the advantages of acquiring a respectable academic status in the overall university curriculum, but it greatly limits its capacity to understand religion properly, or to make a distinctive educational contribution. It has been proposed that its study of religion needs to become more personally engaging, along the lines of theology. This calls for a new, reflexive pedagogical approach, focusing on the learner, whereby he/she becomes better aware of his/her interiority.

Moreover, it has also been indicated that such an approach to religious education could provide a model for other subjects to adopt and so move beyond their limited 'academic' perspective, opening the way to the greater possibility of personal integration by the student of what is learned. This should in turn lead

to the formation of a community - rather than an association - of students and scholars who are better enabled to communicate with each other and society (Carmody, 2015, 509). This would offer the kind of education that is holistic and help the institution to claim its character as a university. More generally, this should give greater promise for what we took to be a major reason for reviewing the role of religion in education, namely, the formation and maintenance of more meaningful democracy, resulting in peace which, in any context is valuable, but even more precious in contexts where such political stability and social justice remain fragile (Gifford, 2016, 154).

We have been concerned to point out by way of taking the example of the teaching of Religious Studies at the University of Zambia that, while having religion in the curriculum is indeed valuable, there is need to explore the nature of such religion along the lines outlined in this study if it is to be a source of self-transformation.

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