

CHAPTER 3

VARIOUS APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ZIMBABWE

1. INTRODUCTION

According to scholars such as Thompson (1977:43), many critics prior to independence tend to argue that the educational systems of developing countries including Zimbabwe, were patterned on imported (the colonial) models and therefore bound to be irrelevant. With the advent of independence from Britain in 1980, the quest for relevance in education also with regard to Religious Education, therefore became of great concern (see Chapter 1, pp. 2-3). The government of Zimbabwe immediately questioned the relevance of the imported British curriculum. Concern was also raised on the methods or approaches used in teaching learners the various subject curricula (see Chapter 1, pp. 3-4).

This chapter seeks to explore two vital approaches used in Religious Education teaching: the life experience approach and the multi-faith approach. These approaches respectively were introduced and are in the process of being introduced as part of government effort to make Religious Education relevant to the Zimbabwean society (see Chapter 1, pp. 1-6).

An essential part of the strategy of the government in making Religious Education relevant to the Zimbabwean learner involved the introduction soon after independence of

the life experience approach. The government, educational administrators and curriculum developers were convinced that education must relate to the life situation of the Zimbabwean learner and thus become more relevant (see Chapter 1, pp. 1-6). For example, Thompson (1977:44) argues in this respect:

One of the more important criticisms which educationists have faced and is a criticism which has been loudly voiced over half a century is that education which should be fitting the child for life in his society tends instead to divorce the child from his culture and to render him unwilling to return to the life of the community from which he sprung.

Kenyatta (1965:124) comprehensively dealt with the issue, many years ago, and concluded that the African “finds that socially and religiously he has been torn away from his family and tribal organisation”. Imported patterns of formal education including Religious Education teaching are thus viewed by many scholars (Machokoto 1983; Maravanyika 1981) as promoting the breakdown of traditional societies.

The introduction of the life experience approach since independence was among others an attempt by the government of Zimbabwe to re-unite the Zimbabwean learner with his/her cultural and traditional heritage. The government, however, from 1997 onwards advocated for a multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching as it realised and acknowledged the presence of members of other religions besides Christianity in Zimbabwe society, and, consequently schools (Curriculum Development Unit 1999:1). A multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching was seen as a way to address the diversity of religious beliefs and practices of the peoples of Zimbabwe (see Chapter 1, p. 20).

The introduction of new teaching approaches in Religious Education in Zimbabwe after independence was also seen as leading to a paradigm shift in the pedagogy of Zimbabwean secondary schools. This pedagogy was, according to Dzvimbo (1995:1) “reflective, liberatory and emancipatory so as to address the way teachers teach and students learn”. As noted previously (see Chapter 1, pp. 2-3), the Rhodesian educational system was a carbon copy of the British system. The emphasis was on rote learning and content only. The new pedagogy aimed not only to increase the general knowledge of the learners, but also to develop their understanding, critical thinking, skills, values and attitudes. It focused not only on what the learner learnt, but how the learner learnt. In other words, the process of learning became just as important as what the learner learnt. More importance was now attached to what learners did with the knowledge they acquired than to whether they knew all the facts off by heart. Content was still important, but was only of value if it could be used to develop the skills and values of learners. The approach aimed at equipping all learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for success after they have completed the subject. Its guiding vision was a thinking, competent future citizen of Zimbabwe (Schoeman 2001:4-5).

Against the above introductory remarks, the various approaches to Religious Education teaching implemented in Zimbabwe since independence will be discussed. Firstly, this chapter seeks to examine the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching, with special reference to its origins, rationale, characteristics and advantages and disadvantages. Secondly, the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching will

be examined, also with special reference to the latter aspects. Special reference will also be made to the implementation of these two approaches in Zimbabwe secondary schools. However, attention should be drawn to the fact that many approaches can be used in Religious Education teaching, such as the biblical theme approach, big question approach, Bible words approach, systems approach, life experience approach, multi-faith approach, etc. As this dissertation deals with Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe, only those approaches implemented since independence in 1980 are discussed.

2. LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHING

2.1 ORIGINS OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

The last 30 years have seen Religious Education educators trying to accommodate at least two different sets of educational concerns and techniques: the first set of concerns is an attempt to relate Religious Education to the daily experiences of mankind, and thus enabling learners to interpret and understand such experiences from a theological and a sociological perspective. As Grimmit (1982:136) puts it:

The first set of concerns arose from insights taken from developmental psychology and child centred theories of education. These concerns were accommodated in the 1960s by defining religion in terms of a natural theology of experience with strongly Christian affinities and seeing RE as promoting among pupils an activity of theological reflection which would lead them to a Christian interpretation of human experience.

The second set of concerns cited by Grimmit (1982:136) arose from insights that were gained from the use of conceptual analysis and educational philosophy and from

techniques deriving from the history of religions. These concerns were accommodated in the 1970s by defining religion in terms of a form of knowledge relating to a significant aspect of human experience, and seeing Religious Education as promoting among pupils understanding of that discipline and how it is expressed in and through social phenomena (Schools Council Religious Education Committee Bulletin 1977:2).

This has thus involved redefining or reformulating their views of Religious Education and its relevance and contribution to the personal development of pupils. Scholars on the subject of Religious Education have thus reformulated their views of religion, personal development and its relationship to education (Grimmit 1982:136).

Various names have been given to the life experience approach developed as a result of the above-stated redefining and reformulating endeavours. The most common name being the existential approach, the alternative name given to the existential approach in the 1970s being the experiential approach. The common denominator in these approaches is their recognition of the crucial role played by the learner's life experience.

Grimmit (1973:52) defines the existential approach to Religious Education teaching in this manner:

When we speak of the existential approach to RE we are referring to an approach which focuses attention on the whole of the child's experiences, or, more precisely, which focuses the child's attention on the whole of his experiences, and uses these as the basis for forming religious concepts.

Educators should thus help the learners analyse their life experiences and this then becomes a reflection process on the part of the learner. Grimmit (1973:54) warns however:

It is only by first helping him to deepen his understanding of his own experiences of love, forgiveness, justice, care, sonship and so on, that he is able to give meaning and significance to the traditional religious concepts of God.

The life experience or existential approach which dominated much of educational thinking (the debate on the relevance of Religious Education to the learner) regarding Religious Education in the 1960s, and eventually inspired the developments of other versions of it, such as the experiential approach that was proposed by R. Goldman (1965). According to Goldman (1965:59), the experiential or life experience approach is based on the following principles which continue to have according to the Herald (Herald (The) 2001:6) value and application to present-day Religious Education teaching, namely:

- that education is concerned with the whole person (religious, economic, social, national, cultural, etc. aspects of man) and with encouraging the personal development of each learner.
- that religious and theological concerns of various kinds contribute to and influence views of education in general and views of Religious Education in particular, especially in defining the meaning and end of personal development.
- that a coherence should exist between the aims of education and the aims of Religious Education and that attention should be given to identifying the distinctive contribution of Religious Education to education.

- that for man as religious person, religion fulfils an integrating role in the interpretation of all experience and knowledge and that Religious Education should seek to make this explicit.
- that the needs of the learner are of central importance in education and that Religious Education should be directed towards the fulfilment of the child's personal needs, including religious and spiritual ones, as they are felt at the various stages of his/her development.
- that Religious Education should be developmental in so far as its purpose, content and methods (should) (i) relate to the learner's needs, experiences and stage of conceptual development, and, (ii) assist him/her towards succeeding stages in his/her personal development.
- that the approach to the content of Religious Education should be experience-based and thematic as this allows for a greater possibility of learning being related to the learner's needs, interests, experiences, questions and conceptual abilities.

Goldman (1965:61), consistent with other child-centred theorists such as Loukes (1965) thus sees education, including Religious Education as a process geared towards the encouragement of personal development and growth. His concern is primarily the development of the whole person. Goldman's views were a major forerunner to the development and implementation of the so-called life experience approach to the teaching of Religious Education in Zimbabwe (Machokoto 1983:29).

In 1980, after independence, the government of Zimbabwe was primarily concerned with replacement of the various subjects' colonial content with more local, regional and national content. This was a difficult task particularly with regard to Religious Education. A significant proportion of policy-makers, curriculum developers, educational administrators and educators were committed Christians, and for this reason were against the so-called "radical" view that Religious Education should be either banned from the Zimbabwean school curriculum or replaced by Moral Education or Social Studies that included African traditional religion and other religions (Curriculum Development Unit 1999:3). At the end the government and stakeholders proposed a curriculum that retained the christocentric, confessional and biblical element in Religious Education, yet allowing for the teaching of African traditional religion and other religions by allowing teachers to use examples or illustrations from the various religions and life experiences of the learner.

A proposal was put forward to introduce the so-called life experience approach based on the experiential version of it. This proposal was adopted in 1986 with reference to the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate Level. Upon localisation of the Ordinary Level Certificate this was also applied to the Ordinary Level since 1990. Curriculum developers and educators believed that the life experience approach would allow the learner to relate content or subject matter to their own life situation or context. The introduction of the life experience approach was thus a compromise of the views of the radical policy-makers, curriculum developers, educational administrators and educators and the views of the conservative policy-makers, curriculum developers, educational administrators,

and educators. Ultimately, curriculum developers and Religious Education educators were of the opinion that it is indeed possible to relate biblical content to the Zimbabwean context (see Chapter 1, p. 3; Curriculum Development Unit 1999:3).

2.2 RATIONALE BEHIND THE LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

The basic principle behind what has become known as the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is that learners best learn when they start from that which is within their own experiences. Many biblical concepts, for example, are difficult for young learners because they are so often developed from experiences far removed from that of a child. The life experience approach is designed to use the learner's own experience as a jumping-off point for inquiry into the deeper and fuller implications of a particular concept. The life experience approach is also a means of ensuring that religious ideas are not separated from other ideas in the mind of the learner. It is not difficult to imagine where this approach could lead when the enthusiasm of educator and learner is fully released on it. As a way of leading learners to look at appropriately chosen biblical or other material and relating what they find to the business of everyday life the life experience approach is an extremely valuable teaching approach (Walton *et al* 1976:51-52).

Curriculum developers and Religious Education educators have argued that the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is not only ideal, but it also contributes to the personal development and growth of the pupil. This notion of the

contribution of Religious Education to the personal development and growth of pupils is expressed by Grimmit (1982:138) as follows:

RE is not, therefore, to be seen only as an opportunity for pupils to learn about religion but rather as an opportunity for them to engage in a personal quest.

On the other hand, there is need to recognise the crucial importance of the pupil's own life experience as the starting point of Religious Education. As Loukes (1965:85) remarks:

Religious education, in brief, is about the life our children learn about, the depth of the life they learn about on the surface, the whole of the life they learn about in fragments. At root religious education is a conversation between older and younger on the simple question, what is life like? ... Life ... can be encountered only in dialogue, between persons who have had some experience in living it and persons who are beginning to engage in it, and the dialogue will run on what he and they have found or can find together.

Loukes (1965:85) thus acknowledges the need to recognise the importance of the pupil's own life experience as the starting point for Religious Education.

The life experience approach to Religious Education teaching implies a planned educational process which seeks to use the pupil's needs, interests, and life experiences as a basis for the achievement of certain distinct educational aims. These are to provide the pupil with an opportunity to:

- Practice the skill of reflecting on his/her own experiences at depth.
- Develop insight into himself/herself and his/her feelings.
- Develop insight into other people and their feelings.

- Develop insight into what constitutes a distinctly human relationship between the self and others (Grimmit 1973:54).

Grimmit (1973:58) explains the rationale for educators to adopt a child-centred and life experience approach to Religious Education as follows:

In the past we have persistently tried to talk about these Christian concepts without even attempting to arouse in our pupils an awareness of the deep experiences underlying them. It is little wonder that for the vast majority of pupils such talk has been meaningless. Now we must be prepared to reverse the process. We must begin by getting children to look more closely at their own familiar experiences and then encourage them to talk about what they discover in their own words.

As indicated earlier (see p. 119 of this chapter), many curriculum developers and Religious Education educators saw the life experience approach as ideal and appropriate for Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe secondary schools after independence (also see Chapter 1, p. 3). In this regard Machokoto (1983:29) maintains that:

The approach to teaching Religious Education should be child-centred, having something to do with the child's experience. The teacher should try to sensitise the child's attitudes and values so that he becomes an acceptable and useful member of society.

In teaching Religious Education there is therefore a need to relate biblical content to traditional patterns of behaviour as according to Thompson (1977:45):

Traditional patterns of child rearing and socialisation were highly efficient means of teaching the child values, skills and customs of his community, and of enabling him to become a useful member of that community, thus reinforcing its integrity and security.

Curriculum developers and Religious Education educators thus advocated the rationale for the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching in post-independent Zimbabwe as follows: It is important for Religious Education not to negate traditional patterns of behaviour, but to support them. The implementation of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching should be viewed as an attempt to make Religious Education relevant and useful to the African learner. This approach would enable learners to benefit from traditional teaching practices, socialisation and values (Zimbabwe School Examination Council 1997: Personal Experience).

It is also important to note, that the absence of African traditional religion and other religions in the British Religious Education curricula at independence caused a lot of concern among some policy-makers and educational administrators in Zimbabwe (see Chapter 1, p. 5). With the advent of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching it was thus also possible to teach and develop African customs, ethics and values. An example of one such important African philosophy or value system is that of *unhu/ubuntu*. According to Makuva (1996:255) the latter can be summarised as follows:

The idea of unhu/ubuntu (Shona and Ndebele respectively) is derived from the majority of ideas reflecting the African art of living found in the “ntu” philosophy. Thus, by unhu/ubuntu is meant personhood which is derived from one’s historicity and rootedness in an ongoing human community. Thus, according to the African perspective it is the community, which defines the individual as a person and not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory. In other words, an individual acquires his/her personhood as he/she lives in accordance with the expectations of the community or in accordance with the moral and behavioural expectations (“tsika/umthetho”) of the community.

Western education, including Religious Education promoted the breakdown of traditional societies, and, consequently traditional customs, ethics and values (Thompson 1977:44; Pearce 1990:2). According to Makuvaza (1996:255), the incidence of crime among the so-called educated increased in Zimbabwe since independence. Makuvaza (1996:225) argues that this can among others be attributed to social and economic pressures on the professionals, but that it also has something to do with the nature of the education the professionals received prior to independence and that this resulted in the type of educated professionals Zimbabwe have after independence. Makuvaza (1996:255) described these educated professionals as *vasina unhu/abangela buntu* (without *unhu/ubuntu*) since they indulge in behaviour which lacks *unhu/ubuntu*. For this reason, there was according to curriculum developers and Religious Education educators a need to reflect on the type of education, including Religious Education, offered in post-independent Zimbabwe in order to produce educated people who have *unhu/ubuntu* (Makuvaza 1996:255; Zindi 1994:68).

Curriculum developers and Religious Education educators felt that there was a need for learners to understand traditional moral values as seen in the *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy or value system. Education, especially Religious Education, should thus produce individuals who fit in the Zimbabwe society and understand its values. As Makuvaza (1996:256) puts it:

By philosophy of education for unhuism/ubuntuism, I mean a philosophy of and system of education whose aim is the development and production of a professional who has unhu/ubuntuism. The idea is to ensure that our educational

system and institutions of education as a whole can produce wholesomely educated professionals who do not only have acquired skills and knowledge from these institutions but, in addition, and very important to their professions and to society, have *unhu/ubuntu*.

The life experience approach to the teaching of Religious Education may among others therefore allow the learner to acquire the *unhu/ubuntu* philosophy or value system.

The introduction of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching, it was felt, would produce learners who are 'wholesome', understand Zimbabwean culture and tradition, and have *unhu/ubuntu*. This was an attempt to produce learners who not only understand their own cultural heritage but are also proud of their history, values and traditions. The advent of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching thus allayed fears that Religious Education was aimed at christianising and proselytising the learners.

In this regard, Atkinson (1979:3) goes on to say that:

A sense of commitment to our distinctive African identity should permeate every aspect of the curriculum, calling for a comprehensive review of syllabuses and teaching approaches, as well as the production of a new generation of learning materials.

Still on the same vein Ndlovu (1979:58) observes that education should relate the individual to society:

The challenge to education here is to strike the balance between the individual and society, which creates a healthy outlook on both, and draws the maximum out of the individual for his own good as well as that of the society and

out of society for the good of its members collectively and individually.

According to curriculum developers and Religious Education educators of those days, unless education was relevant to the life experience of the learner it is viewed as irrelevant. The implementation of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching after independence thus seek to relate education to the life experiences and values of the learner within the society.

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

The life experience approach to Religious Education teaching as implemented in Zimbabwe since independence displays among others the following characteristics:

2.3.1 Explores the life situation and culture of the learners

The life experience approach explores the life situation and culture of the learners. Griffiths (1990:40) defines the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching as implemented in Zimbabwe as follows:

a basic pedagogical principle to start with the here and now and proceed to the there and then. The curriculum starts where the pupils are, in their own experiences and the experiences of other people who matter to them. The materials are designed to enable pupils to talk of these experiences and to take the culture and wisdom of other people seriously.

What is noted from this definition is, that in order for Religious Education to be viable, relevant, and effective, it should start with the learners themselves and explore their life situation and culture. The content should be embedded in learners' experiences as well

as explorations of where their lives might lead (Gates 1977:10, Gates 1982:125). Grimmit (1982:141) had the following to say regarding the value of the exploration of the life situation of the learners in Religious Education as school subject:

The value of the school experience is most likely to be found in the way in which it can set children on the paths towards being receptive to the lessons to be learned from life as a whole.

2.3.2 Learner-centred, neo-confessional and neo-dogmatic approach

The life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is a learner-centred approach which is focused on the personal development and growth of the learner. The work of Goldman (1965:61; see p. 118 of this chapter) led to a greater appreciation of among others the difficulties that learners may have in understanding religious concepts, and the life experience approach is aimed at addressing this problem.

With the introduction of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe, the Bible-centred and teacher-centred approach were replaced by the learner-centred approach and this marked an important advance in re-appraising Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe secondary schools. The aim of the Bible-centred and teacher-centred approach was to lead the learner towards a confessional commitment to the Christian faith. The Schools Council Working Paper on Religious Education in secondary schools (1971:2) therefore refers to the learner-centred approach to Religious Education teaching introduced by Goldman in 1965 as a neo-confessional or neo-dogmatic approach.

However, Goldman (1965:197) makes the following remarks about the life experience approach as a learner-centred approach:

It leads children to integrate all they are learning and doing in all subjects within a world view of God as a creator and as the person who cares about his people.

Hence, this so-called learner-centred approach remained confessional or dogmatic in both outlook and approach, and like the earlier Bible-based syllabuses, the aim of Religious Education teaching was still to lead the learner towards a confessional commitment to Christianity. According to Goldman (1965:59), Christianity should still be taught in the so-called learner-centred approach because it is “true” and answers the deepest needs of human nature; and without a knowledge of the love of God and a relationship with Him, humankind will live impoverished. Learners should therefore be taught Christian-oriented Religious Education because it primarily centres on the needs of human nature (Goldman 1965:59).

The Kent Council of Religious Education Handbook of Thematic Material (1967:1) discusses the aims of the learner-centred life experience approach to Religious Education teaching in this manner:

It is the prime object of the life experience approach to awaken children to the spiritual dimensions to show that religion belongs to life, to show that the life Jesus lived, His death and resurrection, and the stories which He told are of present importance because they are eternal; ... to open a path to a freely chosen commitment to the way of life that millions have trod through so many centuries; to make the Bible live again as the word of God to his people.

The life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is thus seen as an approach providing learners themselves with an opportunity to examine the “religious interpretation of life” and engage in a personal quest for meaning, purpose and value. The life experience approach thus also aims to enable a learner to have a proper understanding of what is meant by a religious approach to life (Social Morality Council 1970:13).

The Church of England Commission on Religious Education in schools (1970:3) points out that the aim of learner-centred Religious Education teaching using the life experience approach should among others also be to explore the place and significance of religion in human life and so to make a distinctive contribution to each learner’s search for a faith by which to live. The life experience approach thus aims at giving the learners a religious view of life and allows them to freely make up their minds how that view shall express itself in belief and practice.

To conclude, Gates (1982:133) summarizes the relevance of a learner-centred life experience approach to Religious Education teaching as follows:

Any concession to child-centeredness in the classroom provides an incentive to make more careful provision for RE in schools. For it is evident that religion is variously part of the ‘life world’ of children and young people. Any sensitivity to religious traditions provides a range of resources with which to delight and enrich our common humanity irrespective of age.

2.3.3 Skills as well as values and attitudes

The life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is a skills-based approach. It teaches learners skills as well as values and attitudes to cope more effectively with changing circumstances and new experiences. In a multi-faith society such as Zimbabwe, reference may be made to religion itself as manifested in various belief systems, such as the Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, African traditional religion and so on. Each religion or belief system prescribes not only a model view of man, but also the means by which it can be realised in the life of an individual (Smith 1969:127). The learners will interrogate the various model views of man and come up with their own theology of the model nature of man. This understanding then contributes to the personal development of the learner and the inculcating of values and attitudes. The life experience approach contributes to meeting the learner's religious, spiritual and personal needs without falling into traps of confessionalism or intellectualism (Smith 1969:127-128).

The life experience approach thus helps learners to master the skill of understanding the nature of the present secular, pluralistic Zimbabwe society, and think rationally about the state and place of religion in it in order to enable them to choose objectively and unbiased between the many conflicting religious statements that are made in such a secular pluralistic society, and to work out for themselves, and to be able cogently to defend, their own religious position or their rejection of the possibility of having one (Cox 1970:6).

Smith (1969:141) states that schools using the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching help learners to acquire the skills and values and attitudes which will enable them to grapple more effectively with ever changing circumstances and new experiences. Providing learners with a large amount of knowledge only is unlikely to assist them in this because it can so easily become inert or just forgotten. What Religious education educators give to learners must be readily transferred and effectively applied in personal terms.

The purpose of educating learners in secondary schools is among others to humanise them and to contribute towards their personal development, i.e. acquiring knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. By adopting the life experience approach in teaching Religious Education, educators thus address some of these humanising educational objectives, such as developing personal values and attitudes and skills, namely, as understanding, rationality, objectiveness, and unbiasedness in the learners (Weightman 1982:155).

2.3.4 Tenets of African traditional religion

Upon attainment of independence in Zimbabwe, curriculum developers and Religious Education educators immediately recognised and accepted the need to incorporate African traditional religion in the school curriculum, also with regard to Religious Studies (see Chapter 1, pp. 3-4). The introduction of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching has enabled Religious Education educators to include some

tenets of African traditional religious beliefs and values in their Religious Education teaching.

A major characteristic of the life experience approach to Religious Education is thus that it allows or enables the teaching of some tenets of African traditional beliefs and values that correspond to examples found in the Bible (for example the teaching of the phenomenon of exorcism). After teaching the theme of exorcism using Luke 8:26-39, the teacher may look at how demons are exorcised in African traditional religion. Learners may, for example, discuss various ways in which demons are exorcised (Ndlovu 2001:Personal experience). Another example is found in the healing theme in the synoptic gospels. Learners will explore how Jesus healed the blind man in Mark 8:22-26. After a detailed discussion of the story, learners then look at how the blind are cured in African traditional religion (use of herbs and various concoctions administered to the patient including casting evil spells). Learners may also identify the similarities and differences with regard to the above, for example, in Mark 8:22-26 Jesus used saliva to aid the process of healing and in the African traditional religion healing process the traditional healers use herbs and various concoctions, etc (Ndlovu 2002: Personal visit to the United Kingdom).

Ter Haar, Moyo & Nondo (1992:53) commenting on the inclusion and value of African traditional religion in the teaching of the life experience approach in Zimbabwe secondary schools admit:

The recognition of African traditional religions as possessing a body of knowledge worthy of study in schools, colleges and

universities, pre-dates Zimbabwe independence in 1980. The post independence period has seen an accelerated recognition of the value of African traditional religions in Religious Education.

Therefore, when policy-makers, educational administrators and curriculum developers drafted the new Religious Studies syllabus for Ordinary Level in 1990, the new syllabus envisaged “a broader scope to the study of religion than was previously offered” (Ter Haar *et al* 1992:54). Consequently, teachers were required to approach the Religious Education content with this in mind and whatever options pupils’ study they should be exposed where possible to all the significant religions practiced in Zimbabwe, including African traditional religion. The syllabus explicitly stated that the aim was to help pupils develop:

An insight into religious and spiritual areas of experience, particularly the African and Christian traditions which have profoundly affected their culture (Religious Studies Syllabus 1991:2).

The life experience approach to Religious Education teaching was introduced in the Zimbabwean secondary schools with maiden examination in 1990. The content remained mainly biblical but teachers were expected to relate biblical stories to African traditional religious beliefs and practices the Zimbabwean learners were familiar with (see Chapter 1, pp. 4-5; Curriculum Development Unit 1999:2). This is an illustration of an important characteristic and underlying principle behind the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching: always start by exploring the life experience of the learner – in this case tenets of African traditional religion.

To illustrate the above characteristic: in 1995 the researcher was involved in teaching Lower Sixth (Form Five) Advanced Level Divinity learners in Thekwane High School at Plumtree, Zimbabwe. Before they started their class work, a research project was given to the learners in preparation for their study of Paper One – Prophets of the Old Testament. The aim of the research project was among others to study the figure of the prophet in their own locality. The research project was viewed as important particularly as an introduction to the prophets in the Ancient Israelite context. It was believed that it was essential for learners to understand the figure of the prophet in the local context before studying prophets in the Ancient Israelite context.

The following were some of the aspects that were included in the research project on the figure of the prophet:

- Call of the prophet
- Place and function of the prophet
- Features of prophecy, i.e. divination, ecstasy, magic, etc.
- Prophetic authority
- How prophets communicate their messages
- True and false prophets

The first part of the research project involved learners visiting the Zionist prophets (The Zion Christian Church is one of the independent churches in Zimbabwe) and the traditional *isangoma/inyanganga*. The *isangoma/inyanganga* was also viewed as a prophet in the Plumtree area as the latter could foretell the future too. The learners managed to

compile a lot of information on the figure of the prophet (character and function) in their local context. The research report comprised 15 to 20 pages.

The specific outcomes of the research project were to enable learners not only to start with the known concepts (the traditional teaching principle), but that they also understand the figure of the prophet in their own locality. This would obviously assist them in interrogating and exploring the same phenomenon in other religious traditions, such as the Ancient Israelite context. Religious Education thus became a “living” subject for the learners as it was closely linked with the life experience of the learners in the Plumtree community where the Zionist prophets and *isangoma/inyanga* play an influential role. The majority of the learners involved in the research project were familiar with the *isangoma/inyanga* as well as the Zionist prophet as many of the learners were members of the Zionist Church. As a result the learners gathered a lot of interest in the subject.

This research project was in line with the role of the *isangoma/inyanga* as a major resource person in African society and the view of curriculum developers and Religious Education educators that it was essential that learners understand and appreciate the importance of this functionary within their community and perhaps allay fears that the *isangoma/inyanga* is a “witch” threatening members of society with harm or death.

After they have studied the origins of the prophetic phenomenon in their local contexts, learners realised that prophecy was not only confined to Ancient Israel but is also found

in various other religions and cultures. Learners thus acknowledged and appreciated the fact that Africans were also religious in a similar manner as other nations were portrayed.

Learners were finally also required to indicate similarities and differences between the Ancient Israelite prophet and the Zimbabwean prophet. During their visit to the Zionist Church, learners managed to see a Zionist prophet in trance or ecstasy. This was similar to the practice by the ecstatic prophets in the Bible (1 Kings 18: 20-46). Field research as a learner-centred methodology is a vital part of the teaching-learning process in Religious Education teaching while employing the life experience approach (also see pp. 134-135 of this chapter). The above research project is illustrative of how the tenets of African traditional religion can be employed in Religious Education teaching using the life experience approach (Ndlovu 1995: Personal experience).

2.3.5 Depth themes as lesson organisers

The use of the so-called depth themes as lesson organisers is another characteristic of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching. The study of various depth themes forms the basis of the life experience approach. According to Fawcett (1970:58), these themes take as their subject matter or topic the learner's immediate situation and experiences and seek to provide him/her with an opportunity to examine them more closely and discern new dimensions within them. In using the so-called depth themes as lesson organisers, Religious Education educators are teaching to the learner according to Fawcett (1970:58) to: "Look more deeply into this familiar thing; do you see anything about it which you haven't seen before?"

Depth themes as lesson organisers have several similarities with the well-known life themes usually associated with the name of R. Goldman (1965:150). Grimmit (1973:54) cites the following depth themes, which are similar to the so-called life themes, established by Goldman (1965:150):

- Homes and families
- People who help us
- Friends and neighbours
- Living in groups
- Things we like to do

These life themes as lesson organisers have been criticised mainly because they lead towards a confessional or neo-confessional outlook, i.e. towards a confessional commitment to Christianity (see pp. 118 - 120 of this chapter).

According to Grimmit (1973:55) using depth themes as lesson organisers is an attempt to overcome some of the above problems:

Depth themes are not designed to lead the child towards a particular religious position or to provide him with knowledge of traditional religious ideas or teaching. Rather they are designed to provide him with an opportunity to practise a particular skill, that of reflecting at depth on his own experiences. Accordingly, depth themes are purely 'secular'; they do not make use of religious language nor do they necessarily incorporate distinctly a religious subject matter.

A Religious Education lesson using depth themes as organiser is not characterised, then, by its concern with the distinctive body of knowledge called religion but rather by its intention to explore and examine life through the learner's own feelings, acts, and experiences. To this end, the Religious Education curriculum draws any subject matter that can serve to illuminate and inform the learner's experiences at depth (Grimmit 1973:55).

According to Grimmit (1973:75), the task of verifying ethical, aesthetic and religious statements is complicated by the fact that it involves a value judgement – a judgement that is grounded in a personal experience. It is essential that in order to gain insight into religious concepts learners need to reflect at depth on their own life experiences and those of others. Depth themes will allow them to reflect on their own life experiences and this leads to self-disclosure. Grimmit (1973:65) illustrates the issue as follows: self-disclosure is said to have occurred when learners working on depth themes begin to translate third person assertions (“Jesus cares about his family” - Mark 3:31-34) into first person assertions (“I care about my family”). Talking about Jesus and his family has the effect of disclosing a truth for the learner and a truth about the learner regarding care of his/her family. A lesson on spirit possession (to be controlled or possessed by a spirit or demon, such as the Legion in Luke 8:26-39) in the Bible leads to self-disclosure when learners start to reflect on spirit possession in their community and distinguish between the good spirits (i.e. those that provide care to the family) and the evil spirits (i.e. those that torment the family). In order to understand religious concepts or statements, learners need to reflect at depth on the phenomenon (Ndlovu 1994:Personal experience).

Depth themes as lesson organisers go some way towards providing learners with insight into the type of thinking that leads to religious understanding and also help to promote the development of concepts that underpin religious thinking (Jeffner 1972:112).

2.3.6 Symbol and language themes as lesson organisers

Another characteristic of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is the utilising of symbol and language themes as lesson organisers. The aim of symbol and language themes as lesson organisers is to encourage learners to use – initially at a very elementary level – religious language and symbolism for the expression of their own ideas and experiences. This has the effect of familiarising them with religious vocabulary in a practical way and also making it possible for them to see their own experiences reflected in religious ideas (Jeffner 1972:54).

Jeffner (1972:55) summarises the objectives of symbol and language themes as lesson organisers as follows:

To initiate learners into religion as a unique mode of thought and awareness by providing them with an opportunity to:

- express their own ideas, thoughts and feelings in appropriate symbols and language.
- recognise the special characteristics of religious symbolism and language by acquainting them with the language which is evocative, poetic, metaphoric, and dramatic (firstly, however, within the secular domain).

Religious symbols are also important as they point to something beyond themselves. In other words, they evoke a disclosure of truth by acting as signposts to levels of reality that cannot be reached in any way. Without such symbols, certain kinds of truth (especially religious truths) cannot be disclosed or even talked about. In a Religious Education lesson learners may look at the meaning of various symbols in the Bible, for example the Cross. In African traditional religion, learners may look at the sacred black bull that represents the ancestors (Ndlovu 1993b:17).

2.3.7 Situational themes as lesson organisers

Situational themes as lesson organisers provide learners with an opportunity to explore, examine, and discuss situations that call for some sort of moral choice or judgement to be made, either about the situation itself or about the actions of people involved in the situation. The situations which are chosen should preferably be ones which learners are likely to encounter in real life, or ones which are potentially analogous to them. By encouraging them to analyse such situations carefully, especially in terms of the likely consequences of certain actions and decisions, and to use the understanding to formulate their own points of view, learners can be assisted to become more perceptive of situations in which moral choices are required and more sensitive to the complex dimensions which they involve (Grimmit 1973:79).

A further aspect is to encourage learners to see the need for their specific observations and views to be generalised into principles that might provide useful guidelines for decision-making in these and other contexts. This also raises the question of what sort of

criteria they should use when determining principles – a question which cannot be answered without reference to attitudes and values (Grimmit 1973:79-80).

An example of the practical implementation of situational themes as lesson organiser is the following: In teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:27-37), learners may for example, discuss various situations in the parable that call for some moral judgement. The teacher may ask, “Imagine you were the first to find the man who fell into the hands of robbers, what action would you take, and why?” By asking this question, the learners would analyse the given situation and come up with their own moral decision. Furthermore, learners analyse the behaviour of other characters in the parable, the Priest and the Levite. Reasons are provided why these characters behaved in this manner including discussing the hostile relationship between Jews and Samaritans (The Priest representing the Jews and the injured man representing the Gentiles). This further raises moral and ethical questions, what is wrong and what is good, for example, is it good to offer help to the needy? Learners explore how the needy people are helped in the community by passers-by or neighbours in times of trouble (Ndlovu 1993b:17).

2.4 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

2.4.1 ADVANTAGES OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

The life experience approach is one of the most important recent attempts to bridge the gap between biblical teaching and contemporary life. The following are some of the reasons put forward by scholars such as Evening (1992:66-88), Grimmit (1982:142) and

Walton *et al* (1976:55-56) why the life experience approach is and was widely used in Religious Education teaching past and present; and was also implemented in Zimbabwe secondary schools since 1986:

- It provides learners with an opportunity to become aware of the fundamental questions and dilemmas posed by the human condition, especially those which prompt the formulation of normative views of what it means to be human.
- It helps learners acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to enable them to participate consciously and critically in the process by which they and their lives are shaped.
- It gives learners an opportunity to explore and reflect on those civilising or humanising beliefs, values and attitudes which provide the basis for a society's sense of cultural continuity and its recognisable identity.
- It assists learners in the task of clarifying their own beliefs, values, and attitudes as a necessary preliminary to taking responsibility for their own life styles.
- It contributes to learners' self-knowledge and the development of capacities for personal, social, moral and religious decision-making.
- It enriches learners' stocks of models of humankind, expanding their visions of the self, the others, the world, and life; and, extending their repertoires of responses beyond those inculcated by family, peer group, subculture, culture, etc.

Furthering each of the above six advantages, the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching also provides the learner with an opportunity to:

- learn about the nature and demands of those inescapable questions which being human poses, and to investigate what it means to make a 'faith response' to such questions.
- investigate and evaluate those areas of human thought, experience and action which reflect or prompt a religious interpretation of life and/or the adoption of moral perspectives and principles.
- gain insight into a religious interpretation of life as a distinctive way of responding to ultimate questions and interpreting human experiences, beliefs and values.
- consider the relationship between what one believes and what one becomes.
- understand that the ways in which one responds to life's fundamental questions (by faith) and how one defines one's ultimate concern (by making a commitment to particular beliefs, values and attitudes) play a significant part in shaping one as a human being.
- recognise and be able to describe the different ways in which one has been, and continues to be, shaped as a human being, especially those which involve the transmission of beliefs, values and attitudes.
- consider the relationship between human values and religious values.
- understand the contribution that religion makes to human culture.
- discover that in learning about religion one can also learn from religion about oneself and how one defines one's own concerns and priorities.
- evaluate the claims of religion and a religious interpretation of life by engaging in an open and critical exploration of the interplay between what one perceives to be the

central teachings of religion and one's own questions, feelings, experiences and ideas about life.

- discover that learning about other people's beliefs and commitments can contribute to one's own self-knowledge and the development of capacities for personal decision-making.
- learn many discoveries about the Bible.

To summarise, the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching enables learners to learn from religion and this means helping them to transfer insights gained from their study of religion to their own life situations where they can be used to stimulate and assist them in coming to terms with questions about their identity; their own values and life-styles; their own priorities and commitments; and, finally, their own frames of reference for viewing life and giving it meaning (Grimmit 1982:143).

Ndlovu & Gundani (2000:111) provide the following advantages of using the life experience approach in Religious Education teaching:

- It makes Religious Education relevant to the socio-cultural context of the learner.
- It enhances the learner's understanding of religious concepts as the teacher starts by what is known and then proceeds to the unknown.
- It allows the learner to explore his/her own religious heritage and thus identifies with his/her own culture.
- It contributes to Religious Education becoming more interesting and a living "subject" to the learner in exploring his/her own familiar religious heritage

2.4.2 DISADVANTAGES OF THE LIFE EXPERIENCE APPROACH

According to Grimmit (1973:55):

... the life theme, or rather, the way in which it is often used, is open to a number of serious criticisms. Those who have pioneered its use in RE have tended towards a confessional or neo-confessional outlook. Consequently they have felt that distinctly 'religious' subject matter, especially traditional Christian teaching, must be introduced into the theme at some point of its development - usually towards the end. Not only has this made the life theme educationally suspect in terms of its intention but it has proved to be extremely difficult to link traditional religious subject-matter with the child's secular experiences within the context of a life theme without the theme appearing to be artificial and contrived.

Although the life experience approach is one of the attempts to bridge the gap between among others biblical teaching and contemporary life, it has, however, several disadvantages.

One of the major disadvantages of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is that it may allow the teacher to indoctrinate the learners, and thus lose objectivity in presenting his/her lessons - particularly if the teacher subscribes to the religion of the majority of the learners. For this reason, there is a problem of commitment and indoctrination. Once a teacher is committed to a particular religion, reference will only be made to that religion. In teaching, for example, the theme of exorcism, the teacher may portray the demons as the work of the devil and overlook the usefulness of spirit mediums in the African society (i.e. as a link between the living and the living-dead). Africans communicate with their ancestors through the spirit mediums. The concept of demon or spirit possession (i.e. a spirit medium (victim), which is

controlled (possessed) and manipulated by spiritual (or supernatural) forces in various states punctuated by ecstasy and trance) may be influenced by the teacher's theological background, and this may lead to indoctrination. This is more pronounced in Christian or Muslim countries where there is only one dominant religion (Ndlovu 1993b:18-20).

Hull (1982:9) also discussed the problem of commitment and indoctrination in the teaching of Religious Education using the life experience approach. The life experience approach at times gives the teacher an opportunity to indoctrinate pupils, he notes. Hull (1982:9) argues that some teachers of Religious Education simply teach what they believe. Such teachers, if they believe that the Christian Bible is the Word of God they only teach this belief and views to the learners and expect the latter to form and subscribe to the same views.

Role distance can manifest in learners when the teaching of Religious Education is influenced to a lesser or greater degree by the views of the religion to which the teacher belongs. If it should happen that most of the learners belong to the same religion as the teacher, the role distance of those who belong to other religions will intensify. The individual Religious Education learner who does not belong to the same religion as the teacher (and most of the Religious Education class) will increasingly be distanced from opinions expressed in the class. This form of role distance must be avoided at all cost (Borst 1994:33).

Another disadvantage of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching is that it may therefore also fail to develop within the learner an inquiring, critical and empathetic mind. It may thus be used to encourage both the learners and the Religious Education teacher to be confessional and dogmatic. The contribution of Religious Education to the personal development and growth of learners is in terms of creating certain capacities to understand and think about religion (Grimmit 1982:137-138). As Grimmit (1982:139) puts it, a capacity to understand religion is according to this view, dependent upon learners being able to distance themselves from their own presuppositions and beliefs and represent the subject consciousness of the religious believer. The application of this skill is seen as essential if a religion is to be understood by learners as those who practice it feel it. The life experience approach fails to develop this skill within the learners, as it tends to develop a neo-dogmatic or neo-confessional outlook (Goldman 1965:197; Schools Council Working Paper 1971:2).

Furthermore, another disadvantage of the life experience approach is that it may not encourage learners to tolerate or respect people whose beliefs differ from their own, especially if it is not properly taught. For this reason, it may not encourage learners to explore, tolerate or respect other people's beliefs in countries where there is only one dominant religion (Schools Council Working Paper 1971:3). In the cited example on exorcism, it is noted that a teacher using the confessional approach or dogmatic approach (i.e. a christocentric approach) will tend to ignore the importance of spirit mediums in the African society. In this regard, demons or spirits will be seen as manifestations of evil and excluded from the teaching of the concept of exorcism. In African society, there is a

distinction between the evil spirits (influenced by witches) and good spirits (influenced by God or ancestors) (Ndlovu 1993a:48). Such a distinction will be ignored once the teacher has adopted a confessional approach or dogmatic approach. For this reason, a confessional approach or dogmatic approach will not enable learners to explore other religious beliefs and practices with sensitivity, respect and tolerance.

Zimbabwe is a country with a variety of belief systems. Zimbabwe learners should appreciate the difference in beliefs. To condemn the beliefs of others is wrong. Learners should be taught to be tolerant and just toward other people whose convictions differ from theirs. Religious Education teachers should never ridicule the beliefs of other people even if they are of the opinion that they are not holding “true” beliefs. They should also never harm learners or try to force them to believe in their belief system (Schoeman 2001:59).

Another disadvantage of the life experience approach is that it is difficult for teachers to spot where the specifically religious aspect comes in. There is a reason for teachers to be cautious and to ensure in planning a theme that a true balance is kept and that learners are led to think religiously as well as scientifically or historically. But there is an equal danger in separating the religious work and giving learners the impression that religion is not a part of real life (Walton *et al* 1976:51).

The heritage of Christian or other beliefs should not be undervalued because of the difficulty in establishing its relevance. Dialogue in the classroom can degenerate easily

into idle chatter, and will be really fruitful only on two conditions: First, the deeper, genuine concerns of learners must come to the surface. This demands skilled and perceptive guidance and the use of appropriate techniques. Second, deepening insight into central Christian or other teachings must inform classroom discussions. It is not enough to seek biblical or other parallels or to rely on biblical or other allusions. The relevance of biblical or other truths requires knowledge of the Bible and other writings. It requires a clear grasp of basic Christian or other beliefs. The teacher should try to show Christian and other beliefs affecting life situations and to provide opportunities for discussion and action arising from such concrete studies. Such practical approaches should be informed and enriched by systematic biblical and other studies at appropriate levels (Walton *et al* 1976:55).

3. MULTI-FAITH APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHING

3.1 ORIGINS OF THE MULTI-FAITH APPROACH

The multi-faith concept to Religious Education teaching originated in the United Kingdom in the early 1970s and developed mainly in the multi-ethnic comprehensive schools (these are schools which admitted pupils of all racial groups and abilities living in the surrounding neighbourhood). The reasons for the introduction of this approach are many, but first there is a need to acknowledge the role played by the multi-ethnic composition of the comprehensive schools and the local population. The presence of members of other world faiths in these neighbourhoods and schools was significant, and according to Thomas (1982:27), this was an important factor in inducing the British

government to redesign the Religious Education syllabus. Thomas (1982:27) gives the following reasons why the multi-faith approach was introduced in Britain in the 1970s:

... secondly, we felt that since religion is a universal phenomenon, reflecting a search for truth, we should not impose strict limits on our exploration. Thirdly, we held the view that RE should help our pupils to understand the world in which they live. Without some knowledge of religion, how are pupils to understand history, politics, social pressures, art ... ? Fourthly, we agreed that RE should aim to give an understanding of the relationships between people who are part of different cultures and societies. Finally, we all felt that RE should relate to the experience of our pupils. Our summary aims were stated as follows: to create a religious awareness; to relate to the experience of the pupils; to give pupils a body of knowledge.

At the outset it is, however, pertinent in this dissertation to look at the developments in the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in the United Kingdom and examine how the approach evolved over there, as these developments had a major influence on the endeavour of the Zimbabwe government to implement and develop the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe.

The 1944 Education Act made Religious Education for the first time compulsory in British Schools. In England and Wales, this stipulation was significant as constitutional background to what was to happen later (Religious Education Council of England and Wales 1989:68). According to Kuiper (1991:10), it was since then required by law that Religious Education should be taught in accordance with a syllabus to which, not only the local education authority (LEA) and a committee representing teachers' organisations, but also all important religious organisations and churches had to agree. Consequently, the Church of England had a substantial influence on the syllabus. At that

stage, it was apparent that Religious Education teaching implied primarily Christian-oriented Religious Education (Schools Council Working Paper 1971:1). Consequently, in 1965 at a conference held at the Institute of Education of the University of London, the position and stipulations of the 1944 Education Act was critically examined and, as a result, recommendations were made to improve and renew the agreed syllabus. Recommendations such as changing both the scope and content of Religious Education were put forward. It was felt that Religious Education was too restrictive as its aim was to proselytise learners. The conference also recommended that Religious Education should open up and engage learners in an open and academic exploration of religion. These recommendations are summarized by the following comment by one of the members of the conference:

The aim is surely to give children a core of knowledge and experience so that they don't leave school ignorant of what Christianity stands for, but it is not the teacher's business to proselytise, but to present Christianity attractively so they can choose (Wedderspon 1966:192).

Owing to the findings of scholars such as Goldman (1965:150) and Loukes (1965:74, 1966:85) there were also some clear signs of dissatisfaction within the field of Religious Education itself. Goldman (1965:153) and Loukes (1965:75) sought to devise a form of Religious Education which would not only prepare learners for the succeeding stages of their development, and growth but also would answer the spiritual needs of the moment. They argued that Religious Education is therefore not only to be seen as an opportunity for pupils to learn about religion, but rather as an opportunity for them to engage in a personal religious quest.

However, scholars and educators continued to debate whether tenets of other religions should be included in the Religious Education school syllabus. The first and up to then only meaningful change in this regard took place in 1974 when the West Riding of Yorkshire Education Committee published a supplement to its agreed syllabus, called “Religious Education in the Multi-faith Community” (Kuiper 1991:11). The Supplement criticised the christocentric syllabus in a country that was fast becoming a multi-faith community. Hull (1975:113) states the following regarding the meaning and value of the supplement:

This was the first recognition through an agreed syllabus that in a religiously mixed society, Religious Education in the country schools cannot commend one faith and simply refer, in passing, to others.

The next step in the quest for a multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in Britain is what Gates (1977:88) calls a “dramatic change”; and this was the approval of the Birmingham syllabus in 1975 that also proposed an acquaintance with religions other than Christianity. Between 1965 and 1975 a new situation presented itself in Britain when a great number of children of immigrants, with a different religious background compared to the British learners, entered the classrooms. This posed a serious challenge to Religious Education curriculum developers and teachers (Syllabus Conferences, Sacre’s and Schools 1989:1). Cole (as cited in Kuiper 1991:12) makes the following remarks while addressing a meeting in 1972:

The new settlers from Asia and the Caribbean have made us aware of the bad housing conditions in many of our large cities ... and they remind us that our school curriculum is geared to the production of a white Anglo-Saxon protestant ... cultural

pluralism existed in Britain before they came and Asians made us aware of it, and they are not responsible for the movement from Christian education to Religious Studies, which is our concern in this conference.

Consequently, according to Pain (1982:18), as early as 1974 some schools in the United Kingdom started teaching tenets of the major world religions in Religious Education as school subject using the multi-faith concept and approach.

Smart (1975:105) contributed significantly to the development of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in Britain and clearly sums up the aims of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in the following manner:

First, religious studies must transcend the information. Second it should do so not in the direction of evangelising, but in the direction of initiation into understanding the meaning of, and into questions about the truth and worth of religion. Third, religious studies should not exclude a committed approach, provided that it is open, and so does not artificially restrict understanding and choice. Fourth, religious studies should provide a service in helping people to understand history and culture other than our own. It can thus play a vital role in breaking up the limits of European cultural tribalism. Fifth, religious studies should emphasise the descriptive, historical side of religion and thereby enter into dialogue with para-historical claims of religion and anti-religious outlooks. The best interests of both Christians and non-Christians are served by these aims.

The multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe arose amid continuous calls surfacing since independence in 1980 for a comparative study of religions taking into account the diversity of beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe. In a paper presented to the Religious Education Panel Workshop in 1999 the following statement was made:

As teachers, officers, and academics, we have noted a trend in the manner in which Religious Education is perceived. One such change all over the world is the fact that Religious Education is fast becoming what I may call an academic and open enterprise (Ndlovu 1999:1).

This statement to the Religious Education Panel Workshop acknowledges the fact that Religious Education in Zimbabwe is among others no longer perceived as a dogmatic or confessional subject. It is viewed as an academic and open enterprise. For this reason, there is growing interest in the study and teaching of the subject, both in the public and private sectors in Zimbabwe. A Religious Education teacher in Zimbabwe is, consequently, also no longer viewed as an evangelist or a preacher but as an academic (Ndlovu 1999:1). The quest for the implementation of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe secondary schools since independence but especially in the last few years must be viewed against the above backdrop.

Zimbabwe, being a former British colony, is obviously still interested to take note of educational developments in the United Kingdom. As noted in other sections of this dissertation (see p. 2 of Chapter 1), the Zimbabwe school curriculum is heavily indebted on the British school system. The United Kingdom is one of the courageous exponents of implementing multi-faith Religious Education teaching in public schools. These developments in the United Kingdom have also influenced views on Religious Education curricula changes in Zimbabwe and the way in which Religious Education has to be taught in Zimbabwe secondary schools. Most present-day subject curricula are still partly “imported” from the United Kingdom as Zimbabwe continues to use expertise or

consultancy from Britain (Ndlovu 2002: Personal visit to the United Kingdom). The implementation of multi-faith Religious Education in the United Kingdom was thus also seen as ideal and relevant to the Zimbabwe school situation (Ndlovu 2001: Personal experience).

Hence, Zimbabweans have continued since the implementation of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching to call for the inclusion of different religious traditions in the school curriculum. J S Mushawatu, for example, argues:

I am hereby making an open appeal to the Ministry of Education to include in its curriculum a study of independent churches in Africa (Chronicle (The) 1 September 2000a:5).

Mushawatu, being a member of the African Apostles Church of Johane Marange, feels that independent African churches (indigenous churches that have incorporated both African traditional and Christian ideas) are more relevant to the African context compared to mainline churches. Such sentiments point to the need for an academic and open study of religion in Religious Education. Supporting this view, he (Chronicle (The) 1 September 2000a:5) states: “The pluralistic character of Zimbabwean society consequently calls for a new approach in the teaching of religious beliefs and practices”.

According to Kuiper (1991:19), the aim of implementing multi-faith Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe will therefore be to help learners understand what the essentials of among others African traditional religion are and how people who embrace these should be understood and valued. This can be done in a broad thematic context, such as for example healing, spirit possession, and ancestor calls.

Teaching practitioners in Zimbabwe believe as Kuiper (1990:19) that the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching is the ideal product for Zimbabwe, as it will enable the inclusion of African traditional religion and other religions in the school curriculum. Such a development is desirable and welcome to most educators as this will lead to an academic and open study of religion in secondary schools. Despite the public and official approval of the adoption and implementation of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching, it is yet to be fully implemented by the relevant arm of the Ministry of Education, the so-called Curriculum Development Unit (Curriculum Development Unit 2002:3).

3.2 RATIONALE BEHIND A MULTI-FAITH APPROACH

The multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching is seen by scholars such as Pain (1982), Smart (1982) and Woodward (1982) as most appropriate and relevant for the teaching of Religious Education. As Woodward (1982:40) puts it:

Multi-faith RE is the ideal contemporary approach for the modern teacher because (a) it relates to the world community in which we all live; (b) it avoids the risk of indoctrination; and (c) it produces an ideal blend of description, insight and reflection. It is neither too close to, nor too far removed from its subject matter, and so avoids the twin perils of mistaking a single narrow viewpoint for the whole truth, and of developing a cold clinical objectivity that follows from the wrong type of detachment.

Kuiper (1991:15) points out that the multi-faith approach provides the learners with more than just one or two opportunities to relate the information with which they are confronted to what they know through their own experiences or to what they can imagine

as important to other people. This thus also makes it easy for the Religious Education teacher to make the information relevant to the learners.

The multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching, hence, helps learners to discover the true nature of Religious Education. The learner develops an insight into religion or religious truths that will not lead to a particular faith position, but an experience of understanding the nature of the subject (Woodward 1982:41).

With the afore-mentioned rationale in mind, the presence of different cultures and religious groups in Zimbabwe has prompted the government since the late 1990s to recognise the multi-faith character of the Zimbabwean society. This has also influenced the government to eventually adopt and approve the introduction of the multi-faith approach to the teaching of Religious Education (Curriculum Development Unit 2002:3).

Nondo *et al* (1992:4) respond to the above innovation by stating:

Needless to say, the demise of the British occupation of Zimbabwe and the rebirth of an independent Zimbabwe in 1980 has resulted in the serious efforts to transform the colonial system of education and substitute it by a system which recognises the value of African traditional religions and culture.

For many years Zimbabwean secondary school learners were only taught tenets of Christianity in the Religious Education classroom, and this meant decades of cultural alienation and indoctrination. According to Nondo *et al* (1992:4):

The attainment of political independence implies the gaining of religious independence as well. In this endeavour, African traditional religions and their forms of expression

such as music, poetry, drama, etc. can help to instil traditional and cultural values and consciousness in students.

The introduction of the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching soon after independence resulted in changes in the way the subject was taught. In the so-called new curriculum, teachers used examples from the African life context to illustrate biblical teachings and beliefs. This enabled learners to understand their own life context. Religious Education thus became more relevant to the life experience of the learner. Notwithstanding the above innovation, appeals to introduce the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching became much stronger since the late 1990s. The rationale put forward for the introduction of the multi-faith approach was among others the following:

- A comparative study of religions will take the diversity of beliefs and practices in Zimbabwe society into account.
- Religious Education as secondary school subject will no longer be a dogmatic or confessional subject but an academic and open enterprise.
- The Religious Education teacher will no longer be viewed as an evangelist or preacher, but as an academic.
- Cultural alienation and missionary and Christian propaganda and indoctrination will be removed.
- Religious Education will be a way of liberating Zimbabwe secondary school learners from ignorance, and promoting tolerance, empathy and understanding (Curriculum Development Unit 1999:3).

The multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching is thus seen as the answer to Zimbabwe's past problems regarding the subject Religious Education in secondary schools. An elaboration of the above follows. The subject will shift from a dogmatic, confessional and christocentric approach to an academic and open approach. The introduction of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education would therefore rid the secondary school Religious Education curriculum of the heavy missionary "propaganda" and Christian influence. Maravanyika (1981:17) reiterated in this regard that:

The Religious Education curricula owes its existence to various missionary groups whose aim was to proselytise the African and hence were concerned essentially in teaching the African to read so that he could read the Bible for himself.

The implementation of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe would thus also liberate the African learner from such "harmful" effects and inculcate within the learner an academic and open insight into the subject Religious Education.

Policy-makers, curriculum developers, educational administrators and Religious Education educators agree and acknowledge increasingly that Religious Education is a sensitive aspect of inter-faith dialogue and it is an area where there is a need to show more tolerance and understanding (Olupona 1992:2). Religious Education is a way of liberating learners from ignorance of the tenets of other religions. According to Olupona (1992:7), writing about the Nigerian situation:

Our ignorance of the beliefs and practices of other people's religions is at the root of the religious crisis I have come to realise over the years that the nature and focus of religious studies programmes in our colleges and universities, which

encourage narrow-mindedness and proselytisation of our personal religious traditions have increased our ignorance of the tenets and worldviews of other religions outside our own.

Implementing a multi-faith Religious Education secondary school curriculum would thus liberate secondary school learners from ignorance and lead to tolerance of other peoples' religious views. Olupona (1992:8) points out that:

There is, therefore, the need for ... scholars, Christians, traditionalists, Muslims to take very seriously the phenomenological approach to religious scholarship in which they would describe as faithfully as possible and with an emphatic feeling whatever the beliefs, the faith and religious practices under study.

Olupona (1992:8) writing in connection with the Nigerian religious crisis in the 1990s, suggests that a long-term solution to the crisis of religious intolerance is to develop and strengthen the comparative studies of all religions. The youths in the secondary schools should be taught all the essential components of the nation's religions. The old adage in comparative religion is still relevant today: "He who knows one religion knows nothing" (Olupona 1992:8).

Hackett (1988:37) supporting the above view argues that a comparative rather than a theological or dogmatic, confessional perspective would be more appropriate particularly in situations like Nigeria and Zimbabwe with its tripartite religious heritage – Islam, Christianity and African traditional religion. Zimbabwe, being a multi-cultural and multi-faith nation, would obviously also benefit from a shift to multi-faith Religious Education.

3.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MULTI-FAITH APPROACH

Below are some of the characteristics of a multi-faith approach as presented by scholars such as Kruger (1982), Olupona (1992), Smart (1988) and Woodward (1982).

3.3.1 Multi-faith Religious Education is phenomenological in nature

The multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching as perceived by this study heavily relies on the phenomenological method to the study of religion. According to Olupona (1992:7), to proceed phenomenologically in the multi-faith approach learners “describe as faithfully as possible and with an emphatic feeling whatever the beliefs, the faith and the religious practices under study”. Below are some of the characteristics of the phenomenological method as presented by Kruger (1982):

3.3.1.1 Return to the things themselves

According to Kruger (1982:17):

The urge of phenomenology is to re-establish contact with the raw materials of life itself. It is the effort to rediscover and re-experience life itself directly underneath the layer of secondary scientific constructions. It wants to learn again how to see clearly and how to describe accurately what we see, before we start explaining scientifically. It is the attitude of disciplined wonder. It wants to return ‘to the things themselves’ as the phenomenological battle cry runs.

Using phenomenology in the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching religious phenomena are described as accurately as possible and this leads to objectivity perhaps within the heart of subjectivity. Kruger (1982:36) explicitly points out in this regard that:

We would say that the researcher of religion is striving after the truth; after valid, reliable or adequate knowledge; after realism, rationality or fidelity in regard to his or her knowledge of religion.

In teaching prophecy, as lesson theme, at the Thekwane High School in Plumtree in 1995 the researcher took his class firstly, to a Zion Christian Church (see p. 134 of this chapter); and, secondly, to a Ndebele traditional healing shrine to enable the learners to observe prophets in session. The learners observed prophets going through a series of episodes, including song, dance, trance, prophecy and healing. This approach enabled the learners to describe the phenomenon of prophecy as accurately and objectively as possible. Textbook material used by the learners at school represented secondary constructions by individual writers (be they confessional or academic). In order to strive for the truth and valid, reliable and adequate knowledge the learners sought to observe the phenomenon of prophecy as the prophets practiced it (Ndlovu 1995:Personal experience; Ndlovu 1993b:11).

3.3.1.2 Intentionality

The concept described as “intentionality” in phenomenological terms, refers to what the researcher wants to see clearly and describe adequately. This is how people themselves experience their own world. Kruger (1982:17), in this vein, emphasises the need to penetrate to the core of the peoples’ own experience in order to effectively understand any religious phenomenon. According to Woodward (1982:37), the concept of intentionality entails a sympathetic and accurate description. In the multi-faith approach

to Religious Education teaching the aim is therefore to see and describe religious phenomena as accurate as possible.

With reference to the visit of the Thekwane High School learners to the Zion Christian Church and a Ndebele traditional healing shrine in Plumtree, as described in the previous section, before the learners went to observe the phenomenon of prophecy, the researcher instructed and assisted them to develop the right attitude towards the religious functionaries. Some of the learners had the feeling and attitude that the prophets in the Zion Christian Church were not genuine, while others thought that an *isangoma* is a magician. The researcher developed within the learners a sense of objectivity, sympathy, and accuracy. This was achieved through participatory observation. The need to observe and describe religious phenomenon as clearly, adequately, and accurately as possible was thus emphasised (Ndlovu 1995:Personal experience; Ndlovu 1993b:11).

3.3.1.3 Epoche

The phenomenology always insists on penetrating to the core of things. For this reason, it refuses to take anything for granted. According to Kruger (1982:18), the observer therefore suspends all his/her previous assumptions concerning the phenomenon in question. In phenomenological language this is called *epoche*. Kruger (1982:18) elucidates the following in support of this:

In order to concentrate better on the human consciousness of something, he even suspends his belief that something itself is real The phenomenologists look at the world of madness and the world of normality with equal attention because to the people living in them, both are equally real. As he describes a religion he neither doubts nor endorses its truth value; the

question itself is put on ice, the better to see, with untrammelled vision, the modes of certainty or doubt of the adherents themselves. In order to achieve as direct an exploration and description of a religious phenomenon as possible, he has to approach it as free as possible from unexamined presuppositions in the form of pre-conceived ideas or prejudgements.

Teaching Religious Education using the multi-faith approach enables learners to study religious phenomena as free as possible from unexamined presuppositions in the form of pre-conceived ideas or prejudgements.

In the given example on the visit to the Zion Christian Church and the visit to the Ndebele traditional healing shrine, this researcher taught the learners to bracket their preconceived ideas. Some obviously believed that the Zionists prophet and *isangoma* were witchdoctors because of their link with traditional medicine. Learners were specifically instructed to bracket or forget about their own beliefs, prejudgements, preconceived ideas and values. Role-play was used to encourage learners to bracket their own preconceived ideas and values; for example, learners were asked to act the role of a Zionist Christian Church believer and that of an African traditional believer. Participatory observation was also an effective aid in changing the mindset of the learners. This enabled them to be objective and sincere in their description of the phenomenon of prophecy (Ndlovu 1995: Personal experience).

3.3.1.4 Essences

Another way of saying that phenomenology is driving at the heart of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching, is its insistence that learners look for the

“essences” of things (Kruger 1982:19). The “essences” of things refers to their inner distinctive nature or the qualities that make an object or phenomenon what it is. In teaching the phenomenon of trance or spirit possession to the learners, for example, the phenomenologist and Religious Education teachers are looking for the essential characteristics of trance, that without which the phenomenon trance would no longer be trance. Goodman (as quoted in Ndlovu 1993a:27) states that trance behaviour comprises characteristics such as speaking in tongues, an accelerated heartbeat, exaggerated perspiration, salivation, tear flow, flushing, and various patterns of motion. Ndlovu (1993a:27) on the other hand, notes that speaking in tongues is a significant aspect of trance behaviour. It is thus an act of vocalization in trance. Learners studying the phenomenon of trance behaviour (examples include the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:28, the Zionist prophets walking on fire and *isangoma* in an ecstatic frenzy just before delivering a prophetic message or interpretation) or spirit possession (examples include the Legion in Luke 8:26-38 and the spirit mediums in African traditional religion) both in the Bible and African traditional religion should thus look for the “essences” or essential characteristics of trance or spirit possession and be able to describe the phenomena clearly and accurately.

Smart (1988:3) describes the value of this characteristic (the phenomenological nature) of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching as follows:

In multi-faith Religious Education there is a tendency to stress a phenomenological approach which leaves students free to pursue issues without secret or overt evangelistic pressure (which in any case is counter productive a lot of time).

The above-described characteristic forms the core of a multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching. The most important aspects of the above, however, being “return to the things themselves” and *epoche*.

3.3.2 Multi-faith Religious Education is plural

A multi-faith approach to Religious Education is plural; in other words, it deals with many religious traditions, and no-one religious tradition has priority beyond the fact that it may have been very influential in the culture out of which one will be working in (Smart 1988:5). It is essential that in teaching Religious Education from a multi-faith perspective, the Religious educator adopts an inclusive perspective, and presents a broad picture of religious phenomena. All religious traditions and belief systems are given the same and equal treatment. The subject thus becomes plural as opposed to a christocentric (or exclusivist) approach that deals with one religious tradition or belief system only.

An example to illustrate the plural character of multi-faith Religious Education is the following: Learners can be given a group work activity with as lesson theme: Meet the different religions. The facilitator divides the learners into individual groups of 5 learners each. Each group should then list the different religions in the school. The facilitator have learners discuss the most important religions of each group, and assess the contribution that the most important beliefs of each group can make to the Zimbabwe society. In conclusion, learners can bring symbols that represent the different religious groups to class and explain to the class what it symbolises (Club 2005 2000:50).

3.3.3 Multi-faith Religious Education is aspectual

Religious Education is like Economics, Social Studies, and Business Economics, etc., it “abstracts” an aspect of human life (such as religious institutions, experience, behaviour, etc.) and explores that particular aspect across the different religions (Smart 1988:5). Hence, multi-faith Religious Education involves the identification of central concepts and issues across various religious traditions or beliefs that have application and importance across the range of religious experience. One such common concept maybe healing. This concept can be explored across various religious traditions or beliefs, for example, in Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religion. At Ordinary Level, learners start by looking at the Christian tradition, how Jesus conducted healing (some healing miracles include the healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26 and the healing of Jairus’ daughter in Luke 8:53-56), for example, the various methods of healing and the effect of the healing miracles on the bystanders. Learners will then move further and look at African traditional methods (use of herbs and concoctions) of healing. Learners can also, for example, look at the causes of illness. In the Christian tradition, illness was sometimes perceived as a punishment for sins committed (John 9:1-7), whereas in African traditional religion illness is among others caused by an external malicious force such as witches (Ndlovu 1993a:48). With regard to Islam, learners can interrogate the same phenomena also focusing on the methods of healing and the causes of illness in the Islamic belief system.

Another example to illustrate this characteristic is the following: Learners can be given a group work activity with friendship as lesson theme. The facilitator lets learners in their

individual groups write down as many characteristics of good friends according to the various religions represented in the groups. Then have learners discuss why these characteristics are important in their religions. Each group then compiles a list of the characteristics of a good friend. Learners make a poster using the characteristics from the list: friendliness, caring, helpfulness, love, religiousness, trustworthiness, and reliability (Club 2005 2000:53).

3.3.4 Multi-faith Religious Education is multi-disciplinary or polymethodic

The above characteristic entails that in multi-faith Religious Education teaching many disciplines and their methods can be used: in respect to the biblical tradition, from theology, literary criticism, form criticism, and redaction criticism. Literary criticism has traditionally concerned itself with such matters as the authorship of the various New Testament books, the possible composite nature of a given work, and the identity and extent of sources that may lie behind a certain document. Form criticism is to get behind sources which literary criticism might identify and to describe what was happening as the tradition about Jesus was handed orally from person to person and from community to community. The main pieces of evidence considered by the form critic are the small units of tradition that now appear embedded within larger wholes.

One of the basic presuppositions in the work of form criticism is that these units originally existed separately. In the study of the synoptic gospels, the “units” concerned are the individual stories and/or sayings which can very often easily be isolated from their context. However, form criticism can also be applied, and indeed has been applied very

fruitful to other writings of the New Testament (Tuckett 1987:95). According to Tuckett (1987:95), the fundamental axiom of form criticism is that there is a correlation between the way in which a unit of tradition is told, its form, and the type of situation where it is used. The technical term for the latter is the German phrase *sitz im leben*, loosely translated as “setting in life”.

Redaction criticism grew out of form criticism. It investigates how smaller units from the oral tradition or written sources were put together to form large complexes. Interest is especially taken in the formation of the gospels as finished products (Perrin 1969:v-vi). According to Tuckett (1987:95), redaction criticism has greatly enriched the study of the New Testament. In the case of the synoptic gospels it has enabled scholars to see more clearly the contribution of the evangelists themselves to their texts and deepened awareness of the influence that the early Christians had on their literary output. The above method is primarily used to study the Bible.

Another method, such as the phenomenological method taken from philosophy (see p. 161 of this chapter) can also be used in studying religious phenomena taken from the other major religions.

However, there are many other methods that can also be taken from sociology (the sociological method), history (the historical-critical method), philosophy (the phenomenological method), and so on (Smart 1988:5). The historical-critical method, for example, is the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of

ancient texts. It seeks to shed light upon the historical processes which gave rise to religious texts, scriptures, etc.; diachronic processes that were often complex and involved a long period of time. At the different stages of their production, the ancient religious texts, such as the Bible or the Quran were addressed to various categories of hearers or readers living in different places and times (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1994:1).

3.3.5 Multi-faith Religious Education is non-finite

This characteristic of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching indicates that there is no clear boundary to the concept of religion, and in principle, it covers world views other than strictly or narrowly religious ones. Multi-faith Religious Education inculcates open and diverse viewpoints (Woodward 1982:15). Pain (1982:16) argues that an open approach to Religious Education assists the learner in formulating a philosophy or theology of life. This may entail a wide variety of worldviews. Woodward (1982:16) points out that multi-faith Religious Education takes various forms depending on the country or area:

Religious Studies will in fact take one form in a multi-cultural city centre, and a very different form in an urban school outside the city centre; a third style again will appear in an outer suburb, a fourth in a rural town, and a fifth in a country village.

Religious Education may therefore be confessional, pastoral or multi-faith depending on government policy regarding the subject. In Zimbabwe, for example, the government may insist on Religious and Moral Education as it focuses on developing the behaviour and morals of the learners in producing a wholesome individual. The churches also

support this view because Religious and Moral Education promote the personal and spiritual development of the learners. Religious Education is thus non-finite; it changes form, and covers a wide range of viewpoints (Herald (The) 2002b:6).

3.4 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE MULTI-FAITH APPROACH

3.4.1 Advantages of the multi-faith approach

The following are some of the advantages cited by scholars such as Hackett (1988), Ndlovu & Gundani (2000), Olupona (1992) and Schoeman (2001) of a multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching:

- It develops learners' interest in the subject of religion as such. Multi-faith Religious Education thus helps the learners to understand the world in which they live. Young learners are also keen to study other learners' cultures or beliefs, as adolescent learners are habitually critical about the religion of their parents.
- It develops within the learners the conviction that an exploratory, non-dogmatic study of religions is educationally desirable. Multi-faith Religious Education enables learners to avoid the risk of indoctrination. As they study various religions and cultures they also learn to approach other people's (or learners') religions with respect, sensitivity and openness.
- It gives learners some understanding of religion as phenomenon using an inquiring, critical and sympathetic approach. Multi-faith Religious Education thus enables learners to be objective and critical when studying religious phenomena. In studying tenets of African traditional religion, for example, learners belonging to the Christian

and Islamic faiths would approach the activities with great tolerance, respect, sensitivity and accuracy so that they do not offend the African traditional believers in their groups.

- It develops within learners a critical appreciation of religion as phenomenon and perhaps formulating their own philosophy or theology of life.
- It enables the teaching of Religious Education to be open. Hence, it neither aims to undermine beliefs held by pupils or to foster them, as it rather develops knowledge, understanding and the ability to assess religious facts and ideas objectively.
- It prevents teachers from becoming evangelists or preachers. Instead he/she becomes an honest guide, co-explorer and a catalyst of religious issues.
- It contributes to the teacher withholding his/her own pre-conceived ideas or values, and allows for an open exploration of religion as phenomenon.
- It contributes to the learners adopting a historical and world perspective of religion, rather than a local, myopic and dogmatic perspective.
- It influences learners to approach other people's (or learners') beliefs with knowledge and understanding of the issue of learners differing from one another in many respects, but that they are also similar in many respects; and that their similarities bind them together, that is, they are united in their diversity (Hackett 1988:37; Ndlovu & Gundani 2000:13; Olupona 1992:8; Schoeman 2001:27).

3.4.2 Disadvantages of the multi-faith approach

The introduction of a multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching presents, however, also a number of disadvantages to the teaching of Religious Education. The

first disadvantage relates to the curriculum. It is difficult to include all world religions in the secondary school Religious Education curriculum. The problem of selection of the most suitable religions and appropriate learning content is a serious concern among curriculum developers and Religious Education educators (Curriculum Development Unit 1999:10).

Once the world religions and content to be studied have been selected, the second obvious disadvantage is that of obtaining resources. Pain (1982:25) and Ndlovu & Gundani (2000:15) point out that most resources about Christianity available for use in Zimbabwe secondary schools, for example, are the least satisfactory. Many books are visually very uninteresting and often deal with topics, which are more suitable for church-owned secondary schools than for public schools. African traditional religion, on the other hand, does not have any literature suitable for use in Zimbabwe secondary schools. A lot was published about belief systems, but these publications are not suitable to use as Religious Education textbooks in Religious Education teaching in Zimbabwe secondary schools.

Religious Education teachers have to be familiar with the methodology of multi-faith Religious Education. They must know how to plan and structure learning opportunities, design lesson plans to meet the desired outcomes and use effective assessment strategies. Currently, there is, however, a serious shortage of literature on the Subject Didactics of multi-faith Religious Education teaching in the Zimbabwe secondary school. Under

these circumstances it will be difficult to implement the multi-faith approach in Zimbabwe secondary schools (Ndlovu 1993b:21-22).

A third disadvantage of the multi-faith approach is that most Religious Education teachers are normally Christian believers, and this presents a problem in using the multi-faith approach. There is thus a need to retrain Religious Education teachers in this regard, to “stand back” and present the beliefs and practices of the other major religions in an objective unbiased manner. Religious Education teachers holding Christian beliefs must thus be retrained in order to approach the subject with greater sensitivity and objectivity. Most Religious Education teachers were trained before colleges and universities would start teaching the Subject Didactics of multi-faith Religious Education. This means that most of the Religious Education teachers are not competent and do not have the skills to handle the demands of a multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching in the classrooms (Ndlovu 1994:Personal Experience).

A fourth disadvantage of the multi-faith approach is that it may present learners with distortions or conflicting statements, which may be difficult to reconcile. In teaching the New Testament as part of Christianity, learners will be taught that spirit possession is bad and is caused by demons which are exorcised in order to heal the victim. On the other hand, in teaching spirit possession as part of African traditional religion, learners will be taught that spirit possession is good as it enables the living to communicate with the living dead. This leads to peace and serenity in the community. In understanding the phenomenon of spirit possession, learners will find it difficult to internalise the different

interpretations and reconcile the differences. This is one of the major weaknesses of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching (Ndlovu 1995:Personal experience).

A fifth disadvantage of the multi-faith approach is that it fails to address the personal development of the learners. With the growing interest in multi-faith Religious Education and world religions, there is a tendency to return to an over-emphasis on content (rote learning) at the expense of the personal development of the learner (Ndlovu 1994:Personal experience).

A sixth disadvantage of the multi-faith approach is the question of relevancy with regard to teaching religions not found in ones country. Why should learners in Zimbabwe study Mahayana Buddhism? The issue of relevancy is thus central in this debate. Educationists such as Gates (1985:35) favour an approach that places learners at the centre of Religious Education which draws on their own insights and questions as well as on material from world religions. The multi-faith approach has been criticized for ignoring the insights and beliefs of the learners, as it tends to dwell more on content. The emphasis should centre on education; the experiences of the learners, particularly in developing their intellectual capacity in handling religious concepts (Weightman 1982:34-35).

The seventh disadvantage of the multi-faith approach to Religious Education is that it is practically impossible for Religious Education teachers and learners to use the multi-faith approach without being “confessional”, particularly regarding their own religions.

Teachers will always fall into the risk of indoctrination when it comes to their personal religion. Dogmatic insights based on his/her religious affiliation have to be guarded against. Under such circumstances there is a possibility of a preference for only one particular religion and prejudice and bias towards the other religions (Borst 1994:136). It is also impossible for learners to understand what it is like to be an adherent of another religion because few books about world religions take this approach. Although Holm (1982:14) argues that learners need more than books if they are to get the feel of a religion. This can be achieved by using teaching methodologies that encourage learners to approach various religions with respect and sensitivity (i.e. participatory observation). The multi-faith approach is thus difficult to apply without the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the disadvantages of the multi-faith approach largely relate to its implementation, as it is always difficult to implement new and innovative teaching methodologies.

4. CONCLUSION

This chapter sought to examine two vital approaches to Religious Education teaching. Firstly, the chapter examined the life experience approach to Religious Education teaching, with special reference to origins, rationale, characteristics and advantages and disadvantages. Secondly, the multi-faith approach to Religious Education teaching was examined, also with special reference to the latter aspects.

Upon attainment of independence by Zimbabwe in 1980 there was an urgent need to relate Religious Education content to traditional beliefs and practices to ensure that Religious Education is relevant to the Zimbabwean society and that the Zimbabwean secondary school learner becomes an acceptable and useful member of society. The life experience approach that gives the learner an opportunity to explore his/her own life situation thus served this purpose in re-uniting the learner with his/her own religious and cultural heritage.

The official approval of the implementation of the multi-faith approach and its actual implementation since 1999 was a response to the need to relate Religious Education to the religions and cultural diversity of the peoples of Zimbabwe. It was important that a comparative study of religion was adopted taking into account the latter aspect.

This discussion leads to the next chapter. In the next chapter an analysis and evaluation of Religious Education curricula developments since independence will be done. The emphasis in this chapter will, firstly, be on sampling by means of questionnaires of the views of heads of Religious Education departments, Religious Education teachers and learners, Religious Education university and college lecturers and Religious Education curriculum developers regarding the Religious Education curricula developments since independence; and, secondly, on an empirical analysis of their views.