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SUMMARY

The relationship between religion (Church) and education (State) through religious education (RE) in Zambia has passed through different stages of development. During the missionary period (1883/1890-1924), RE was, naturally, offered in the form of Religious Instruction (RI) and was thus fully denominational and confessional. Despite some general improvements in the provision of education, the subject remained largely confessional at the end of the colonial period (1925 – 1964). After Independence, the confessional model of the subject was inherited and continued throughout the First Republic (1964 – 72) and part of the Second Republic (1973 – 90). However, as a result of educational reforms started in the mid 1970s, RE became more educational by adopting an approach that was partly confessional and partly phenomenological from the mid 1980s. Despite new educational reforms in 1991/92 and after 1996, progressive development of RE as a curriculum subject seems to have been negatively affected by the state’s self-contradictory declaration of Zambia as a Christian Nation in 1991. Thus the subject continued to be partly confessional and partly phenomenological during the Third Republic (1991 to date).

While the state or Ministry of Education sees RE as a curriculum subject with educational aims like any other, research results show that many Zambians, especially members of different religious traditions, still see the subject as having confessional aims as well. However, since the country is pluralistic and democratic, RE in Zambia should continue developing in line with the constitutional values of religious and cultural freedom and the liberal national education policy provisions for spiritual and moral education. Thus the subject should go beyond its current unclear state of being largely confessional and partially phenomenological and become more educational; it should take the religious literacy and critical understanding model which takes both religious truth-claims and educational skills and understanding of religion seriously. To ensure this, a specific national policy which broadly outlines the nature and form of RE in schools needs to be put in place as a guide to all interest groups.

Key Terms

Religion Education; Religious Education; School Religious Education; Zambian Religious Education; Teaching Religion in Zambia; History of RE in Zambia; RE Syllabuses in Zambia; School RE in Zambia; Education in Zambia; Religion in Zambia.