Jessica Olausson Jarhall

A Look at Changes in Primary Religious Education in Malawi from a Swedish Perspective

with a preface by Edgar Almén

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CONTENTS

A Preface to the Malawian Reader ................................................................................ 3

1 Introduction ............................................................................................................. 9
   1.1 Problems of Study ............................................................................................... 10
   1.2 Methodology and Sources ................................................................................... 12

2 Background to Malawi ......................................................................................... 17
   2.1 Political Background ........................................................................................... 17
   2.2 Religious Background ......................................................................................... 19
   2.3 Educational Background ..................................................................................... 23
   2.4 Previous Studies .................................................................................................. 28

3 The New Syllabus in Religious Education .......................................................... 32
   3.1 Objectives of the New Syllabus in Religious Education .................................... 32
   3.2 Thoughts Concerning the Revised Curriculum for Primary School ................... 37
   3.3 Thoughts Concerning the New Syllabus in Religious Education ....................... 41
   3.4 Pedagogical Aspects and Practical Problems ...................................................... 46

4 Dealing with Three Religions ............................................................................... 49
   4.1 Religion in Focus in the New Syllabus and Teachers' Guides ............................ 49
   4.2 Similarities and Differences ................................................................................ 52
   4.3 Choices and Religion .......................................................................................... 61
   4.4 Religion - a Natural Part of Life ......................................................................... 62

5 Religion and Culture ............................................................................................ 64
   5.1 General and Social Studies ................................................................................. 64
   5.2 Cultural and Religious Traditions in Malawi ...................................................... 65
   5.3 Christian Faith and Malawian Traditions ........................................................... 72
   5.4 Christianity, Islam, MTR and the Malawian Culture ......................................... 77

6 Final Discussion ..................................................................................................... 80
   6.1 The New Syllabus in Religious Education ......................................................... 80
   6.2 Dealing with Three Religions .............................................................................. 82
   6.3 Religion and Culture ........................................................................................... 82
   6.4 Final Comments .................................................................................................. 85

References ...................................................................................................................... 86

Appendix ........................................................................................................................ 89

Interviews .................................................................................................................... 89
A Preface to the Malawian Reader
by Edgar Almén

The context of this text

The circumstances behind this book are rather special. Jessica Olausson - now as married Jessica Jarhall - as a student at Linköping University with a first degree as a secondary school teacher in social subjects (history, social studies, geography and religious studies) working for her master’s degree wanted to collect material to her thesis from somewhere in the Third World, applied for and got a minor field study grant from the Swedish International Development Agency and arranged for a seven week visit to Malawi.

The original plan was to prepare the journey by studying and writing an essay about African theology and especially about African feminist theology or efforts to interpret the Christian faith in such a way that it stands out as understandable and relevant from an African point of view and especially from a point of view of African women. With this background the time in Malawi should be used mainly for collecting materials and interviewing both teachers in schools and pastors and members of different congregations about their reactions on and thoughts about such descriptions of the Christian faith.

The first part of the plan worked out well. Jessica Olausson in January 1996 finished an essay on Contextual Theology as Liberation: A Study of a Third World Woman's Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa. She discussed the arrangements with Dr Joe Chakanza who visited Linköping in April 1996 preparing what later has become a formal link between the University of Malawi and Linköpings universitet and especially between their departments of theology and religious studies. Jessica Olausson also prepared the interviews and went to Malawi in May 1996.

But when she came there, she found that it would be difficult to realise the original plan. The school year had suddenly been changed because of drought, and all teachers were on vacation. She met people at the university and used the university library, trying to do the best out of the situation and asking me for advice on e-mail. When I heard about her contacts with Dr David Mphande at Institute of Education in Domasi and about the possibilities to read a lot of material from the Malawian curriculum project in general and especially about Religious Education, I advised her to use this very special opportunity and to focus her thesis on the considerations behind the new Malawian curriculum for Religious Education. This would be
especially interesting to us in the Linköping department, since we at the same time in a PRE-J(oint)E(uropean)P(roject) together with our colleagues in the University of Wales and in Alexander I Herzen University at St. Petersburg compared our different traditions on Religious Education and reflected on how a non-confessional Religious Education in Russia could be carried out. (Further information about this project is to be found in Religious Education in Great Britain, Sweden and Russia: Presentations, Problem Inventories and Commentaries, edited by Edgar Almén and Hans Christian Øster, Linköping /1997/ 2000.) Jessica Olausson was also encouraged and in a most friendly and generous way helped by Dr Chakanza, Dr Klaus Fiedler and the other lecturers at Chancellor's College and by Dr Mphande, who gave her a lot of source material and help with explanations which have helped her (and us at Linköpings universitet) to begin to comprehend a material and a situation we had never heard of and not thought we ever should be able to benefit from.

This turned out to be very fruitful for Jessica Olausson herself. It has also given the discussions about the co-operation between the departments a first, very tangible topic. And it has become an important case in our Linköping reflection on and teaching about Religious Education - and, through us, in the reflection and teaching also at some other Swedish universities. So Jessica Olausson's thesis is already used in Sweden in mimeographed copies, and we hope that it will be used even more in this printed version. We think it is fair that also you in Malawi get the opportunity to read, reflect and react on it. Then you can correct what we have neglected or misunderstood, thus helping us to learn even more from you. And so, we hope, also you will get an opportunity to benefit from what Jessica Olausson has written.

Why are we, in Sweden, interested in how Religious Education is carried out in Malawi?

Sweden as a country has a tradition of special interest in the development of Third World countries and special relations to some African countries, but not to Malawi.

Theology in Sweden has traditionally a perspective very much concentrated Northern Europe and its Lutheran tradition but has tried to widen its perspective to the Anglo-Saxon cultural and scientific traditions and, mainly through missionary activities and through the ecumenical movement, also to the rest of the world. The study of History of Religions and Comparative Religion became important parts of the faculties of theology in Sweden around 1900 much due to the later archbishop and ecumenical
pioneer Nathan Söderblom who became professor of the History of Religions at Uppsala 1901. The Swedish research in History of Religions has traditionally to a large extent been philological and the interest in contemporary religion has been more concentrated on Asia than on Africa, but some work on African religions has been carried out by e.g. Olof Pettersson (the Bantu), Tord Olsson (the Masai), David Westerlund (Tanzania) and Hans Christian Øster (the Mende in Sierra Leone). More peculiar is perhaps that there has in Sweden been a closer relation between theology and religious studies than in most other countries, and some Swedish theologians like Bengt Sundkler and Carl Fredrik Hallencreutz have had a special interest for (special parts of) Africa.

Religious Education in Swedish school, however, has got its shape in a rather closed context with few influences from abroad and without much knowledge of experiences from and discussions in other countries than our immediate neighbouring countries. In recent years some of us have recognised the risk of becoming unable to see what is special in our own situation by looking exclusively on it and knowing too little about what others do. So we try to look around comparing approaches and trying to benefit also from other experiences than those made in Sweden. That is a general reason to look abroad, also to Malawi. But are there any reasons to think that there can be any Malawian experiences of special interest for Religious Education in Sweden? I think there are two such reasons:

a) Religious Education in the Malawian schools has an heritage from the missionary schools with their expressed confessional Christian perspectives but has to cope also with the reactions and the educational needs of the large Muslim minority with a long tradition within the nation (even longer than that of the Christian missions). Religious Education in Sweden has a heritage from a society that was uniformly Lutheran up to the late 19th Century and has since then tried to cope with a growing pluralism that consisted mainly of different Christian congregations and different views of life that questioned Christian faith and religion as such. With the new immigration from the 1970s also we in Sweden have got non-Christian religious minorities, but we have few experiences from trying to integrate such minorities into our Religious Education. If our Swedish society thus in important respects becomes more similar to the Malawian society, we should be able to benefit from the Malawian experiences.

b) As Jessica Olausson describes the new Malawian curriculum for Religious Education it is inspired from British models of Religious Education in a multicultural and multifaith society, British models which in many re-
pects resemble Swedish models. If you get into troubles when you try to adapt such models into the Malawian situation, it is likely that we will get into troubles using similar models when our society becomes more similar to the Malawian society.

According to Jessica Olausson it is very difficult to do full justice to specific Malawian Islamic traditions within those British models for Religious Education. The result can be that Islam is described in such a way that what implicitly is said to Malawian Muslims is that they are untypical or bad Muslims.

According to Jessica Olausson it is also very difficult to do full justice to the efforts of inculturation among Malawian Christians within those British models for Religious Education. If, in the textbooks for Religious Education, Malawian Traditional Religion is described as a religion of its own, different to and distinct from Christianity, and if, in the textbooks for Social Studies most of the same rites are described as elements in the Malawian culture, it becomes theoretically unclear how what is not compatible with Christianity can be shared by all Malawians. And it becomes didactically unproductive when the questions of inculturation, which according to the interviews made by Jessica Olausson are the most urgent questions to most Christian students, cannot be adequately described as something, which has to do with Christianity. It will become difficult to avoid the implicit effect that Religious Education by the students is experienced as denying those questions they experience as the most important and urgent ones.

These observations by Jessica Olausson are perhaps more interesting for us in Sweden than for you in Malawi. Perhaps you have solved these problems in Malawi, but Jessica Olausson has (with help of Malawian material) convinced me that we in Sweden have to pay much more attention to these problems, if we shall be able to cope with our future situation - which to a large extent is already our current situation. And if you have found ways to cope with these problems constructively, we should probably be able to benefit even more from further reflection on your experiences and from a continued study of your thinking.

To what extent is it possible to understand the Malawian educational situation from Sweden - and to understand the Swedish educational situation from Malawi?

Ultimately the human predicament is perhaps very similar all over the world. But that we can discern, only if we take the different contexts seri-
ously. Understanding is always possible only if you really try hard to check all relevant circumstances. The more remote the situation is, the more difficult it is to discern which all the relevant circumstances are and to get all information you want.

Have we - Jessica Olausson and we who have discussed the thesis with her - exerted enough of our strength on trying to understand how religion(s) and culture interplay nationally, regionally and within a tribe in Malawi? Have we got enough specific Malawian information about how religion and religions can not only build bridges and unite across borders and frontiers but also create new borders and frontiers between groups and perhaps even strengthen and deepen conflicts of power and hierarchies of status and prestige? Have we been able to hear the nuances in the information about the interrelation between different (European and Malawian) religious traditions and different educational traditions and different individual and collective expectations on education and evaluations of different forms of education? Have we paid enough attention to the practical restrictions which forces you in Malawi to discuss not only what you would like to do but also what is possible with the economy and the teachers at your disposal? Certainly not. But we have tried. And we would like to learn more. Then we perhaps shall have to reconsider much of what we now think and write about Malawi - and from that we shall get new opportunities to understand more also about ourselves and about Swedish Religious Education.

**The future of this text**

Consequently we hope that this text can be used in Sweden (and perhaps in some other European countries) in the reflection on and in the teaching about Religious Education and its problems. We hope that it will stimulate Swedish students to try to learn more about and from the efforts in Religious Education in different countries and in different religious and cultural situations, and we hope that they will learn especially about and from Malawian Religious Education.

Furthermore we hope that this text will be of interest also for Malawians. By reading about how the Malawian curriculum project can be described from a Swedish point of view they can perhaps become interested in knowing more about the Swedish point of view and how it can make you interpret the Malawian efforts in a way so different from and perhaps odd in relation to the ordinary Malawian way of looking at these efforts. Perhaps they will also find that this perspective nevertheless shows something important about the Malawian situation and that (aspects of) the Swedish
approach can be adapted to and used also in Malawian Religious Education. In all cases we invite the Malawian readers to share their thoughts with us. Please write to us through the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor's College in Zomba or directly to

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Edgar Almén
1 Introduction

This study is based on material collected in Malawi during two months of field study at Chancellor College, Zomba. The results have been presented as a Minor Field Study (MFS) for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida, and as a dissertation in Theology and Religious Studies at the level of Masters for Linköping University, Sweden.

Education is the life-blood of a nation. It is a prerequisite for both individual and national development. It prepares children to play their future roles effectively in an attempt to promote and sustain a country's socio-economic development. Nothing is more difficult in the field of education than to plan and develop a suitable curriculum. 1

The primary school curriculum in Malawi has been revised according to the 1985-1995 Education Development Plan. In all subjects, the syllabuses have been reviewed in line with this new curriculum. The new syllabus for religious education was introduced in 1991 but the effects of it are still to be seen. Teachers' guides up to standard 6 have been completed, but due to lack of funds there are not any Pupils' books ready. This year (1996), Teachers' guides for standard 5 will be distributed to the primary schools throughout Malawi.

The old syllabus was Bible-centred and focused solely at Christianity. The new syllabus includes what is stated as the three major religions in Malawi: Christianity, Islam and Malawian Traditional Religion (MTR) 2. The approach used also differs from the previous in that themes form the basis for the teaching in religious education. Of interest in this study is to examine how the three religions are dealt with in the newly produced syllabus and teaching material, and what implications these presentations might have in the Malawian context. The manner in which religious education is

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1 Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), Malawi Primary Teacher Education Syllabus: Religious Education, One Year Programme (Domasi: Malawi Institute of Education, MIE, 1993), Foreword.

2 Malawian Traditional Religion is the term most often used in the material on religious education for primary school in Malawi. Sometimes the term African Traditional Religion is used to describe the same religion. There is also an inconsistent use in the describing of the traditional religion. Some use religion while others use religions. To avoid confusion over the terms, I will use Malawian Traditional Religion whenever I refer to the traditional religion found in Malawi. However, it should be noted that MTR includes different aspects from different tribes.
dealt with in the new syllabus for primary school in Malawi is perhaps of value also from a Swedish angle of approach.

1.1 Problems of Study

To describe and discuss a syllabus for religious education in a country completely different from one's own, only visiting that country for no more than two months, naturally has its limitations. Therefore, it is important to stress that the results of this study can only be hypothetical.

1.1.1 The New Syllabus in Religious Education

The aim of the first part of the main study is to present pedagogical aspects concerning the objectives and the philosophy of the new primary school syllabus in religious education in Malawi. In order to place this new syllabus into a wider context, the thoughts behind the revised curriculum for primary school, which are of relevance for religious education, are also dealt with.

Questions related to this part concern:

- What intentions and motives lie behind the revision of the curriculum and syllabus?
- What happens (hypothetically) with the teaching of religion when the new approach of including three religions is used?

_Hypothesis 1_

The pedagogical aspects that lie behind the new syllabus in religious education might not correspond to the educational reality in Malawi. A "philosophy" of education can consist in convincing concepts that do not match the educational reality.

1.1.2 Dealing With Three Religions

The purpose of the second part is to examine how Christianity, Islam and MTR are dealt with in the new syllabus in religious education and in the material produced according to the syllabus, i.e. Teachers' guides and handbooks.

Questions that follow are:
- Are the religions presented as something that you already belong to or as something you choose to belong to?
- Are the religions described with regard to their similarities or according to their differences and what implications might these approaches have?

Hypothesis 2

If the religions are described as something you already belong to, it can denote that the three religions are presented according to their similarities, so as to highlight what the religions have in common. This could result in the effacement of the distinctive characteristics of each religion.

If the religions are presented to the pupils as three different alternatives among which they are supposed to choose, the religions are perhaps presented according to their differences, in order to make the divergences clear.

1.1.3 Religion and Culture

The third part deals with the description of Malawian culture, as it is presented in the teaching material in social studies for primary school, and the description of Malawian Traditional Religion (MTR) as it is depicted in the teaching material for religious education. The description of Christianity and Islam in the teaching material in religious education will serve as comparison material. Furthermore, the purpose is to compare the theoretical problems regarding religion and culture with practical problems facing Malawian Christian students.

Several questions follow:
- What are the possible consequences of the description in the teaching material of MTR and the Malawian culture?
- What effects can this picture of MTR and the Malawian culture supposedly have for the understanding and description of Christianity and Islam?
- To what extent does the set of concepts provided in the teaching material help the children to deal with their problems concerning religion and tradition?
Hypothesis 3

According to African Christian Theology, Christianity is supposed to work in the context of African culture. In most situations there is a difficulty in distinguishing between culture and religion, which suggests that this is a problem for Malawi as well.

In the case of Malawi the approach of including MTR in the syllabus suggests that MTR is a religion. At the same time, there is a culture that is based on traditions and customs. When MTR is described as the traditional religion it might be difficult to discern what the traditions and customs that compose the culture consist in. This makes it difficult to describe an interpretation of Christianity or Islam that is interpreted in African terms.

If you are a Christian and MTR is a religion it is supposedly more difficult to pick some things from MTR and incorporate it into Christianity. If MTR is not a religion but consists of traditional customs and traditions as part of the culture, it is supposedly easier to integrate these with the practising of Christianity. Perhaps, what is said about Christianity is valid for Islam as well.

1.2 Methodology and Sources

The method used in writing this dissertation is a combination of studies of literature and interviews. The basis for the analysis was collected during a field study at Chancellor College, University of Malawi in Zomba, although the work up of the material and the analysis was made in Sweden.

One part of the method could also be said to be participant observation. By participating in concrete events in a context different from one’s own, a fuller understanding of the context might be obtained. I have been able to be a participant in several ways, both as a guest in Malawi and also as an observer in courses given in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College, as well as at an annual Post Graduate Colloquium arranged by the same department.

1.2.1 A Change of Topic and Method

The problem of study that I first accepted changed during my research in Malawi. It was not until the end of my stay in Malawi that I received enough information to consider a change of focus. Thus, the interviews directed towards the university students were constructed with a different
problem in mind, concerning African identity and Christian faith. I was interested to find out more about how "the African" was dealt with in the teaching of religious studies, in particular in relation to Christianity. My first intention was to hand out questionnaires and to make interviews with students and teachers at Chancellor College and to do the same thing with pupils and teachers in primary schools. However, all primary schools were out of session during the greatest part of my stay in Malawi, and hence it turned out to be impossible to carry out the intended comparison between the thoughts of university students and primary school pupils.

After being introduced to Reverend Mphande who was, and still is, actively engaged in the revision of the religious education in primary schools it appeared to me that there was a great change going on concerning this subject. Therefore I found it very interesting to examine this in greater detail. The newly produced material provided exciting reading. This unique material and the help I received from some of the persons who had been working on the revision (Rev. Mphande, Mr. Chonzi and Dr. Felix Chingota, a lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College) made it possible to change the topic of my study.

The interviews with the students turned out to reveal some issues that could be used as comparison material to the material produced along the lines of the new syllabus in religious education. In the appendix the interviews will be summarised in view of this fact. Consequently, only the questions and answers of relevance for this study will be provided.

1.2.2 Getting Hold of Literature

I find it important to stress that mainly due to financial circumstances, basically all sorts of literature and every kind of material are difficult to get hold of in Malawi. In order to conduct this study it was necessary for me to bring the material to Sweden. This means that there are limitations on what is possible to find information about within a reasonable amount of time. The material I have been able to use is nevertheless unique; therefore I find it justified to let the material play a great part in constructing this study - in spite of the deficiencies.

I received the printed material concerning religious education and social studies through the help of Reverend David Mphande, working at the Malawi Institute of Education. Mr. Robert Chonzi, working as a lecturer in religious education methodology at Chancellor College, provided me with the background information on the revision of the primary school curricu-
lum. The books in the Kachere Series, used in the background section of this study, were possible to buy through the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. For the background information on Malawi, the library at Chancellor College with its special collection of literature concerning Malawi was also used. Part of the literature was obtained at libraries in Sweden.

1.2.3 Literature

The major sources I have used are the materials produced by the Malawi Institute of Education. This material is unique in several ways. The curriculum and syllabuses have not been fully implemented in the primary schools in Malawi. In religious education there are not any Pupils' books, nor are all the Teachers' guides introduced in the schools, etc. This implies that the material in many cases is untested and not yet evaluated. Due to these facts, I find it relevant to briefly present this material.

*The Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education Standard 1-8* includes all the teaching syllabuses for each standard with themes, topics, objectives, content, suggested teaching and learning experiences, teaching and learning materials and pupil assessment.

*The Primary Teacher Education Syllabus: Religious Education One-Year Programme* has the same headings as the Teaching syllabus, although different content. This syllabus is directed towards students who are studying to become primary school teachers.

*The Religious Education Teachers' Guides* consist of fairly detailed descriptions of and suggestions on how to teach the topics and units that are supposed to be covered in each standard. I have been able to use the Teachers' guides for standard 3 and 4.

*A Religious Education Manual for In-Sets Trainers* is designed for in-sets trainers and people who are going to implement the revised primary school curriculum. The handbook suggests guidelines to interpret the structure and organisation of the Teaching syllabus and Teachers' guides for religious education.

*Themes in Religious Education: A Handbook for Teacher Trainers* is designed to show teacher trainers how certain ideas about children's behav-

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3 For information on the Kachere Series write to *The Kachere Series, P.O. Box 1037, Zomba, Malawi.*
your influence methods and how the content of religious education can be structured.

To be able to discuss the problem of culture and religion, the material produced for social studies was helpful.

*Teaching General and Social Studies: A Handbook for Teachers and Teacher Trainers* provides a description of the structure of the syllabus for social studies, important concepts and principles in the subject, ideas on testing and assessment of pupils, and suggestions on how to help a child with special needs.

*The Social Studies Teachers’ Guide for Standard 6* includes the unit dealing with aspects of culture in Malawi. Background information and suggestions on how to teach the units are described.

*The Social Studies Pupils' Book 6* addresses the pupils and includes introductions and assignments for the lessons in each unit.

Papers written by persons working on the revision of the curriculum have been used. These papers, presented at MIE, give a background to the revision. *The Educational Service Review: Final Report* reports the findings of the Ministry of Education and Culture concerning the old curriculum.

For the background of this study other literature, apart from the primary sources, has been used. This literature is made up of books and periodicals mainly produced in Malawi. The material can be bought through Kachere Series, initiated by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Chancellor College.

### 1.2.4 Interviews

The interviews were held with students and lecturers in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College, and also with persons working on the revision of the primary school curriculum and syllabus in religious education. If the interviewee agreed, the interview was recorded. I also took notes during the interviews. One of the lecturers answered in writing as well as in informal interviews.

In order to increase the comparability of responses I chose to use structured or standardised interviews. The questions to these interviews were constructed in advance and were mainly open-ended. However, to be able to conduct fairly conversational and situational interviews I also chose to use a method that could be called the interview guide approach. After
posing the standardised questions, I turned to topics and issues that I wished should be covered. These were specified in advance, but the sequence and exact wording of questions were decided in the course of the interview.

Informal conversational interviews were held with several persons living in Malawi and that resulted in information valuable for the overall understanding of the specific characteristics that constitute the Malawian context. These informal interviews also contributed to a fuller understanding of the issues discussed in the interviews.

The interviews were summarised in writing directly after each occasion. The analyses of the interviews were done in Sweden, through the use of the written information and through listening to the tape recordings. The interviews were also compared to the primary sources and literature that I was able to bring to Sweden.
2 Background to Malawi

2.1 Political Background

2.1.1 History

The Chewa, Tumbuka, Yao and Ngoni are Malawi's basic ethnic groups. However, the boundaries of contemporary Malawi are as much a result of the establishment of, especially Scottish, missions as of the influence of ancient ethnic loyalties. Christian missionaries who followed Dr. David Livingstone were highly active in the latter half of the 19th century.

The formation of the British protectorate of Nyasaland in 1891 was followed by a strong sense of national identity. Malawian opposition to the 1953-63 Central African Federation of Nyasaland and Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) finally paved the way for independence in 1964. The Malawi Congress Party (MCP) under the leadership of Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, who made himself Life President in 1970, was in power until the first democratic elections were held in 1994. During the Banda regime Malawi was a one-party state with limitations on the people on what to say and do. The decision-making of importance lay solely in the hands of Dr. Banda who dominated both the MCP and the state machinery. The Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), who functioned as party storm troopers, and the special security service exerted party control over the society. During Banda's last years in power the army began to play an important political role. One direct consequence of this was the disarming and thereby destroying of the MYP. 4

2.1.2 Political Changes

Until the early 1990s open criticism of the Banda regime came exclusively from exiled opposition groups. Worsening economic hardship, the success of the Zambian opposition at the elections in 1991 and the support of the

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churches inside Malawi incited the opposition to the Banda regime. In 1992 Catholic Bishops broke their silence on social issues and issued a letter. The letter is known as the "Lenten Pastoral Letter" and it caused a heavy reaction. "Rarely in modern times can any church document have had such an immediately explosive effect in the life of the nation." The letter revealed issues that had not been discussed publicly before. The gap between the rich and the poor was mentioned, as were the poor education and health. However, the section that caused most reactions was "Participation of all in public life", arguing for free press, free association for political and social purposes, independent courts of justice, and so forth. The Pastoral Letter gave voice to what everyone already knew but had not dared to say.

The greatest push for change came from the urban centres, where unprecedented strikes, student demonstrations and political riot swept through during the first half of 1992. The police brutally suppressed the uprising, killing at least 38 people and arresting several thousands. The revolt was supported by Western donors who suspended non-humanitarian aid to Malawi in May 1992. Later that year Dr. Banda announced a referendum to decide whether the one party system should be replaced by a multiparty system. The latter alternative was favoured by 63 % and this caused rapid changes in the country. In May 1994, the first multiparty and parliamentary elections since independence were held. Bakili Muluzi, the leader of the United Democratic Front (UDF), became president. Regional loyalties and Malawi's demography influenced the voting. The UDF and Mr. Muluzi had the support of the densely populated Southern Region, the MCP and Dr. Banda that of the Central Region and Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and Mr. Chakufwa Chihana that of the sparsely populated Northern Region. What consequences the change in government will result in are yet to be seen.

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5 EIU: Country Profile Malawi, pp. 4, 7.
7 Ross, Gospel Ferment in Malawi, p. 14.
8 Ross, Gospel Ferment in Malawi, p. 16.
9 EIU: Country Profile Malawi, pp. 4-5.
2.2 Religious Background

The African is 'profoundly, incurably a believer, a religious person'. To him, religion is just not a set of beliefs but a way of life, the basis of culture, identity and moral values. Religion is an essential part of the tradition that helps to promote both social stability and creative innovation.\(^{10}\)

In Malawi freedom of worship is constitutionally guaranteed and there is no restriction on building churches, mosques or madrassas (Islamic schools). Since 1931, there has been no census inquiring about the religious affiliation of Malawi's population. This makes it difficult to estimate what the proportions between the religions are.\(^{11}\) The majority of Malawians are Christians, although there are about 15 percent Muslims and the adherents to Malawian Traditional Religion (MTR) count to around 10 percent.\(^{12}\)

2.2.1 Christianity

Beginning in the latter half of the 19th century, Christian missionaries, particularly from Scotland, established mission stations along the Shire River and the shores of Lake Malawi.\(^{13}\) The missionaries belonged to different denominations; Roman Catholics, Presbyterians and Anglicans forming the major churches - even in present day Malawi. Despite doctrinal differences the major aim of the early Christian missionaries was to evangelise the Malawian people.\(^{14}\) Like elsewhere in Africa, in Malawi missionaries established schools and promoted Western education. With the establishment of clinics and hospitals they also played a pioneering role in the field of health care. Unlike Islam and traditional religion, Christianity grew up in close association with colonialism.\(^{15}\)

The restrictions on the Malawian people during the Banda regime also effected the churches in the country. They were free of state control over

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\(^{12}\) Caution with exact numbers must be taken. Different sources tell different numbers. (I do not have a written source for these numbers!)

\(^{13}\) *EIU: Country Profile Malawi 1994-95*, p. 3.


their internal affairs, but their witness should be restricted to personal spirituality and morality, and they should also legitimate whatever the state was doing. With the Lenten Pastoral Letter the Catholic bishops took a stand against what they saw as wrongdoings under the one party system. This showed that the churches are an important force in the Malawian society. You could perhaps argue that the more open climate following the multiparty elections might strengthen the position of the churches even in the political life of the nation.

Today there are mainly two categories of churches in Malawi. The "old" missionary churches, the so-called mainstream or mainline churches, have most adherents. The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Central African Presbyterian (CCAP) each claim to have the adherence of around a quarter of the population. Then there are African Independent (Indigenous) Churches, which are churches that have broken away from their mother churches. These types of churches are to be found throughout Africa with a significant number found in Malawi. There is an active debate within mainstream Christianity on how to understand and relate to these independent churches, and the attitudes to them vary. Some Christians seem to regard independent churches as more true to the African context, thus helping people to get answers to their day-to-day problems. Others regard these churches with suspicion, arguing that they are not truly Christian.

2.2.2 African Christian Theology

African Theology has been described as the totality of theology done in and for Africa by Africans. Most African theologians assume that God reveals himself to some degree in all cultures and all religions. African Christian theology is as old as Christianity in Africa, although it is only documented literally since the late 1960s. There are different branches

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17 Ross, *Gospel Ferment in Malawi*, p. 11. The numbers provided by the denominations themselves are difficult to combine with the numbers suggested in other sources. See footnote 2.
within African Christian theology but all have the search for models of indigenisation of the Christian church in Africa in common.  

One of the three major forms of African Christian Theology is African Liberation Theology. It has been brought out in organisations as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). African Liberation Theology can be said to be constituted by five formative factors, stated by EATWOT at a conference in Accra in 1977.

1. The Bible as the basic source of African theology should be reread in the context of the African people's struggle for humanity.
2. The Christian heritage is a major source since Christianity is regarded as universal.
3. African community-oriented anthropology is important because to be human is to be part of a community.
4. African Traditional Religions, as seen as a kind of revelation, are able to enrich Christian theology and spirituality.
5. African Independent Churches have a special role to play since they have developed a type of worship, organisation and community-life that is rooted in the African culture. African realities, such as the arts and struggles against economic, cultural and social oppressions, are also important formative factors.

2.2.3 Islam

Islam was initially brought to the area now known as Malawi by traders from the Swahili coast of East Africa about 150 years ago. The Yao, one of Malawi’s main tribal groups, has in great numbers adopted Islam. Muslims are found everywhere in the country, although in certain areas around the southeastern end of Lake Malawi they form a majority. Mosques are usually found in every town in Malawi. Two thirds of the (in 1987, 6000)

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Asians living in the country are Muslims. Until 1994 all the Asians were confined to the three main urban areas. All Muslims in Malawi are Sunni, the Malawian Muslims belonging to the Shafiite School, the Asian Muslims to the Hanifite. Among many Malawians, Islam is to some extent influenced by traditional customs and belief. From the mid 1970s Malawi's contacts with the mainstream Islamic world have increased. Significant numbers of young Malawians go abroad for advanced Islamic studies and richer Muslim countries have supported the building of mosques and educational institutions within Malawi. Regional Islamic conferences have been held and many Muslim scholars and speakers have visited Malawi.

2.2.4 Malawian Traditional Religion (MTR)

African Traditional Religion is sometimes described as the oldest religion in Africa. ATR was "a vehicle for exploring the forces of nature and for systematising new knowledge both of the human and the physical environment". In the coping with the different aspects of nature, the African established cults and recognised several divinities. The traditional religion was open-ended and non-proselytising. Religious innovation was encouraged with the hope of interpreting and internalising new knowledge within the traditional cosmology.

The missionary activities in the nineteenth century in the wake of colonialism complicated the religious situation in Africa. The loss of autonomy under colonialism made many Africans identify traditional African religion with an Africa that had failed and had been subjugated. As representing new developments, Christianity and Islam gained new adherents who did not necessarily abandon their old religious beliefs.

Islam has been said to adopt more accommodating and integrative approaches than Christianity to African Traditional Religion. Certain cultural practices were admired and even allowed. In Malawi the Yao adapted itself

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22 Bone, Religion in Malawi No.1, 1987, p. 28.
24 Bone, Religion in Malawi No.1, 1987, p. 28.
25 Since this section is derived from a text on Africa rather than just Malawi, I use the term African Traditional Religion instead of Malawian Traditional Religion. ATR also refers to several tribes with their different traditions.
to the local African culture. Traditional law and customs are used in matters concerning marriage, divorce and inheritance, although the Sharia Law remains important to the Yao as Muslims. 27

Traditional religion still has relevance among the African people, regardless of religious affiliation. Respect for ancestors is existing, as is belief in the continuing involvement of the ancestors in the life of their successors, belief in the forces of good and evil which can be manipulated through prayers and sacrifice and belief in the efficacy of amulets and charms to ward of evil, and so forth. Belief in witches and spirits are also widely recognised, even if these can be observed as custom, tradition and part of the cultural heritage rather than matters of religion. In spite of Christian and Muslim influence, the area of health and healing is still on a great many matters about traditions. In the traditional African society, the concept of health included many aspects; well being in everyday life, success on the farm, the health of children, and so on. Misdeeds or lack of healthy relationships with one's neighbours or with ancestors could cause anger in some malevolent force, resulting in physical ailment. In several places in Africa today there is a revival of traditional religion, in many respects associated with traditional healing systems. There is also a wider appreciation of the oral traditions, whether regarded from a religious or a literary or philosophical perspective. 28

2.3 Educational Background

2.3.1 History

School education in Malawi was first established by the Christian missionaries. From 1875 to 1926 education was altogether a mission responsibility. Each mission followed its own educational policy. Although from different denominations, the missionaries were united in regarding education as a means to trying to raise Christian people. The mission schools often were sectarian in character, not least in their attitude towards Muslims. In 1926 the Department of Education was established with the first Govern-


28 Mazrui, General History of Africa, pp. 505-506. Compare with the interviews made with students at Chancellor College, Zomba. See appendix.
ment Educational Centre at Domasi started in 1929. However, the missions retained control of teacher training and the Christian religious education was integrated in the syllabus. The missions also provided the major share of the cost for running their schools, thus having great influence on its policies regardless of government guidelines. 

It was not until 1951 that a second government institution opened in Malawi.

When the African government came into power in 1963, education was regarded as the key to economic development of the country. An era of expansion in primary, secondary, technical and college education, under the overall umbrella of the University of Malawi (established in 1965), followed. The government made it a priority to rid the education system of denominationalism. This meant that the control of the schools and of education policy turned to the Ministry of Education. However, the churches still remain the proprietors of the majority of the schools throughout Malawi.  

After independence, education was supposed to be the major agency of the promotion of national unity and cultural heritage. Mass education should be produced in an effort to stimulate Malawi's economy, raise the living standard and eradicate illiteracy. Another aim was that a number of people should pass the School Certificate level (standard 8) so that they could meet the staffing needs of government, industry and commerce. To provide educational facilities for the large number of primary school leavers who did not find places in ordinary secondary schools, the Malawi Correspondence College was established by the government in 1962. Associated with it are also College Centres and Night Secondary Schools. There is a transfer system that enables the best students from these centres to transfer to ordinary full-time secondary schools.

In this period, at all school levels, Malawi educational policy emphasised education for agriculture and rural development. The two basic functions were:

1. to meet the needs of individuals for their own development and
2. to satisfy the needs of society for its general development. The primary education system was responsible of ensuring permanent literacy by stimulating the individual initiative, resourcefulness, confi-

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31 Banda, A Brief History of Education in Malawi, p. 95.
dence and sense of dedication, all necessary to the development process. Secondary education was seen as the instrument for immediate output to employment and also as a producer of students to post-secondary education. 32

In the Education Service Review, made by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Malawi, the old primary school curriculum became a target for criticism. That curriculum had been set according to the first formal Educational Plan ever for Malawi and it covered the period from 1973 to 1980. One specific target was to raise the gross enrolment ratio at the primary level from the existing 33.5% to 50% and for secondary schools from about 3% to 15% of the youths in the appropriate age group. By the end of the plan period the enrolment target for secondary school was far from being achieved. 33 In 1980/81, the net enrolment rate for 6-13 year old children was 47%. 34

2.3.2 The Present System of Education

All schools have been set up after the British system of education, concerning terms, grades, exams and so forth. Today, officially there is a compulsory primary school for standard 1-8, starting at age six. Standards 1 and 2 are called infant classes, standards 3 to 5 junior classes and standard 6 to 8 senior classes. From standard 6 onwards, all education is supposed to be in English. In 1986 about 17% of the pupils enrolling in primary education were repeaters. It is common to repeat classes, or not to proceed through all standards. 35 The number of pupils who continue to secondary schools is less than 12% (1986), and the number of girls is even less. If the number of pupils in senior classes was adjusted for repeaters, only 1/3 of those entering standard 1 arrived at standard 8 (1987). 36 In 1990, 48% of children in the appropriate age group enrolled in primary school, while secondary enrolment was equivalent to 2% of children in the relevant age group. In September 1994 the government introduced free primary education, which had as effect that the number of pupils enrolling in primary

32 Banda, A Brief History of Education in Malawi, pp. 109-110.  
34 Malawi Towards Education for All, A paper prepared by the Malawi Government for the World Conference on Education for All, Thailand March 5th to 9th 1990, p. 30.  
36 Education Service Review, § 145.
school rose considerably. This clearly showed the urgent need of qualified teachers.

Secondary school accepts pupils on the basis of their performance in the Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE). Secondary school lasts for four years, comprising two junior and two senior years. The entrance requirement for university studies is the MSCE-exam (Malawi School Certificate Examination), and it is an intense competition for places. The University of Malawi had 3,469 students in 1992/93. According to a paper prepared by the Malawi government, in 1990 the average rate of adult illiteracy was 61% (females, 75%). There is a National Adult Literacy Programme (NALP) to promote the literacy rate in the country. 38

2.3.3 Primary School Teachers

The conventional programme for training teachers for primary school lasts for two years. Due to the acute shortage of teachers, a UNICEF-sponsored one-year programme that upgrades untrained primary school teachers was in effect until recently. 39 This training is undertaken at certain Teacher Training Colleges. Teachers in secondary schools attend university where they receive their training along with regular courses in the specific subjects. In primary schools, teachers teach all subjects from standard 1 to standard 8. To meet the demand of the enrolment increase in primary school after the introduction of free education, 22,000 untrained teachers were employed after going through a three week orientation course. To train these teachers an emergency course has been designed, though still (May 1996) at the experimental stage. The objective is to arrange a three month course at the six largest teacher colleges, educating 3000 teachers at a time. After three months, they get material for self-studies to use while they are teaching. To start with, they are supposed to meet a supervisor once a week and finally to meet for a final exam. Malawi is the first country in Africa to do this type of training, and it will take three years to get all of the untrained teachers trained. 40

38 Malawi Towards Education for All, pp. 6-7.
39 Malawi Towards Education for All, p. 6.
40 Interview with Rev. David Mphande, MIE, Domasi, May 6, 1996.
2.3.4 Theological Education in Malawi

There are basically two forms of theological education at a higher level in Malawi. The University of Malawi with its Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College in Zomba and 16 Theological Seminars and Church Colleges throughout the country. There is cooperation between the (mainstream) churches and the university regarding theological education.

The curriculum for the Diploma in Theology Programme is set by the university but it is taught entirely in church colleges and seminars which are allowed to follow their respective traditions. The Department of Religious Studies at the university was set up in 1976, eleven years after the University was opened. The Bachelor of Arts (Theology) Programme is given at Chancellor College since 1991. Candidates with a good Diploma can enter the Degree program at third year and so complete the degree with two further years of study. Since 1993, the university also has a Postgraduate Studies Programme for part-time studies, open to students who have taken their degree and want to continue for a Masters (M.A.) or a Doctors (Ph.D.) degree. The university serves primarily Malawi but also admits foreign students.

The curriculum for the Department of Theology and Religious Studies offers a four year programme in Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament), Church History and Systematic Theology, and Religious studies with emphasis on African Traditional Religions and Islam. There is also an opportunity to take optional courses, such as a three year programme in either Greek or Hebrew, or one year courses in Christianity in Africa, Philosophy of Religion and the final year Dissertation. The opportunities for Theology graduates are to become clergies in the churches, serve in media, education, governmental and non-governmental agencies of development, and religious organisations.

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41 Kenneth R. Ross, ed., *Church, University and Theological Education in Malawi*, A Kachere Text, University of Malawi, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Zomba (Bonn: Verlag fur Kultur und Wissenschaft, 1995), pp. 7-9, 13-14.

42 Ross, *Church, University and Theological Education*, p. 57.
2.3.5 Malawi Institute of Education (MIE)

The Malawi Institute of Education is a parastatal organisation, established in Domasi in April 1982. It has a Board of Governors with representatives from the Ministry of Education and the University of Malawi. It is subvented by the government and also gets some financial, material and human support from donors like UNICEF and the World Bank/IDA. The Institute’s main objectives are to undertake and co-ordinate curriculum development, evaluation and research. It is also to assist with the training of teachers and to provide professional help and services for teachers. Other duties are to arrange for the production and publication of teaching and learning materials for primary, secondary and teacher training and in-service training. 

2.3.6 Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC)

The mission statement for the Ministry of Education and Culture reveals the objective of the education policies of the Government of Malawi.

The Mission of MOEC is to facilitate the delivery of education and foster cultural awareness for the people of Malawi, encouraging them to be useful and purposeful members of society. Education should be socially and economically relevant, with emphasis on permanent literacy, numeracy and other life skills. Primary education should be made available to all at the earliest opportunity. Secondary and Post-Secondary education should focus on the need for educated manpower consistent with National Development Policies. Emphasis will be placed on the need to promote and preserve Malawi's cultural identity, unity and patriotism.

2.4 Previous Studies

2.4.1 The Old Curriculum for Primary School

The studies done regarding the old syllabus in religious education are those made by persons or authorities working on the review. Their studies are presented as papers or reports. Concerning the school system in Malawi there are two books that in one way or the other deal with the history of education. I have also found a few articles that discuss religious educa-

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43 The Malawi Institute of Education (MIE): General Information, pamphlet (Domasi: MIE).
44 Education Service Review, appendix iv.
tion, particularly concerning Islam. Some of their findings can be of value in this study, either as a background or to raise questions.

In his book on the history of education in Malawi, written in the 1970s, Kelvin Banda declares that there is a gap between the communities and the schools in attitudes of values and expectations. Through the promotion of religious norms of Western as well as Islamic civilisations and the creation of elites who found it difficult to apply themselves usefully to the economic lives of their countries, Banda argues that it has been typical for countries like Malawi that education has substantially contributed to the fragmentation of traditional societies. Therefore, the curricular aspirations have been to bridge this gap and encourage the preservation of the unique cultural inheritance to the younger generation. 45

This is stated addressing the old curriculum. Apparently, the old curriculum is not capable of meeting today's requirements. Therefore, it is interesting to see if the objectives have changed and what direction the new curriculum, especially the syllabus in religious education, takes. Before I proceed to the new curriculum I want to outline some of the problems with the old curriculum that can be crucial for the understanding of the changes that are taking place.

In a review of the education service in Malawi in 1988, the Ministry of Education and Culture drew attention to problems facing the schools in the country. First of all the financial circumstances were stated as a reality in all aspects of education, as well as for the work the government does concerning education. Consequently, the goals set up must be achieved within stringent financial limits, causing a basic incompatibility between what is desired and the traditional ways of achieving those goals. The schools are generally insufficiently supplied with furniture, books, and material for teaching support. Among other things the size of the classes (up to nearly 200) causes accommodation problems. 46

The chief objective for primary schools was declared to be to prepare the pupils for secondary school via the examination in standard 8. The syllabuses demanded the memorisation of a great deal of facts without giving enough attention to the use of information. 47 Furthermore, particularly in infant classes, small learning increments were expected, and pupil activity often consisted in chanting as a response with many children unaware of

45 Banda, A Brief History of Education in Malawi, p. 98.
46 Education Service Review, §§121-122, 131.
47 Education Service Review, § 128, 165.
what was going on. For junior classes small demands on reasoning and discussions were observed. The exercises were generally based on copying from the board and there was a lack of group work. The over-loading of subjects, as well as the focusing on books and procedures at the expense of using facts and reasoning were also targets for criticism.

There are also voices raised saying that the education system under the missionaries was better than after the government took over the responsibility. In a thesis in 1977, I.A.J. Nankwenya analysed the Christian influence on education in Malawi. He felt that teaching under the missionaries was orderly, step-by-step and systematic. The methods of teaching were of higher standard and the mission teachers were more devoted and responsible than the government teachers. Nankwenya is convinced that the education in Malawi owes a great deal to Christian influence and that the old mission school should play a very important role in the future educational system in Malawi.

2.4.2 Muslims and Education

On the other hand, there is also criticism aimed at the tremendous Christian influence on education in Malawi. This can be supposed to emerge primarily from the Muslims, and therefore I find it important to give an account of some of the issues concerning Muslims and education in Malawi.

When the Christian missionaries arrived in Malawi in the last quarter of the nineteenth century there were already some Islamic schools (madrasas) where the Quran was being taught. However, the education usually consisted in elementary instruction in Islamic observances and the ability to recite the Quran. The education system offered by the Christian missionaries was of a different nature, offering skills that could be used for different purposes, giving people access to work in the wage-earning sector of the colonial economy. Thus, the Western system of schooling came to dominate in all but the Muslim areas of Malawi.

Western education under the control of Christian missionaries who actively proselytised made the Islamic communities react negatively. Muslim chiefs refused permission for the building of schools in their areas, or simply ignored the schools if there were any. Even after the colonial govern-

48 Education Service Review, §§ 136, 139-140.
49 Education Service Review, § 149.
50 Nankwenya, Christian Influence on Education in Malawi, pp. 293-294.
ment created the Department of Education in 1926 and tried to get rid of denominationalism in the schools, the Muslims felt hostile to mission education. This could be explained by the fact that the missions still had great influence on the education in Malawi. During the colonial period a few attempts was made by individual Muslims and later by Muslim Associations, to set up schools offering Western education and Quranic studies. These were in many instances a failure because of financial problems, shortage of qualified teachers, rivalries between associations and persons, and the fact that many Muslims avoided any type of Western education.

After Independence, there have been some changes. One major consequence is that it is no longer possible for Muslims to be excluded from any school on grounds of their religion. In whatever manner they want, Muslim leaders are allowed to teach the pupils of their faith at some time each week. The government also built schools in the predominantly Muslim areas. The attitude towards Western education has changed somewhat, in a more positive direction. The Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM), the main Muslim body in the country, has taken a strong lead in starting schools where there is a combination of Western education, open to children of every faith, and madrasas for the Muslim pupils. These improvements in education among the Muslims have made it less likely for the pupils to give up their faith or Islamic identity as they proceed through the education system.

However, in spite of this progress, Muslims still lag behind the Christians with regard to participation in Western-style education. According to Bone, one of the reasons for this reluctance to the Western system of education might be that the rural people who have not themselves undergone formal schooling are conservative. Another reason can be attributed to the fact that the Christian domination of the schools partly still remains. This is seen in the Christian bias in the syllabus for religious education in primary schools, as well as in the subject of Bible Knowledge at secondary schools, furthermore, in the fact that the majority of teachers are Christian, even in predominantly Muslim areas. Following Bone, of the problems mentioned, the easiest or quickest to be solved is the problem of the Christian bias in the syllabus.  

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3 The New Syllabus in Religious Education

3.1 Objectives of the New Syllabus in Religious Education

3.1.1 The Process Behind the New Syllabus and Teachers' Guides

The Malawi Institute of Education (MIE), under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC), sets the syllabuses for the different subjects. In 1985 work to revise the curriculum and all the syllabuses for primary education began. The new syllabus for primary religious education in Malawi began to be implemented in stages in October 1991. The work is supposed to be finished by 1998.

The project with the new religious education started with subject-panels, appointed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, that identified themes or concepts that would develop into units. A theme (for instance, "Idea of God") was developed into a topic (Names for God in different religions), and then into a unit (God/Allah/Chauta is like a parent), and finally into a lesson. The Teachers' guides in religious education have been prepared by this subject panel consisting of religious education professionals from Teacher Training Colleges, Secondary Schools, the Catholic Secretariat, the Christian Council of Malawi, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Muslim Association of Malawi (MAM).

The books are made and distributed in different steps. Writers are commissioned to write the material. When written, the material is sent to 50 schools for testing. Thereafter, the books are evaluated and an expert judgement is made by a group of people with a certain knowledge, i.e. teachers, parents, or persons with knowledge of the subject. After this procedure, the books are revised and distributed to all the schools (government, Christian and Muslim schools). The books are free of charge. Of what I gathered from the interview with Rev. Mphande, working at the Malawi Institute of Education, due to the lack of complimentary and even
basic material in the schools, the books distributed will most often be used.\textsuperscript{52}

\subsection*{3.1.2 Objectives of the New Syllabus in Religious Education}

The revised syllabus for religious education includes Christianity, Islam and Malawian Traditional Religion (MTR). Of the aims in the new primary school curriculum, three major aims are specifically referred to in the religious education syllabus.

1. The aim to assist pupils in the personal growth and development mentally, spiritually and physically can be reached through the study of religion. Religious education deals with how people have found meaning and value in life. This will help the pupils to answer these questions in a more mature way.

2. A second curriculum aim is to "develop, in the pupil, a knowledge of the society in which he lives and an appreciation of and desire to transmit what is valuable in the Malawi cultural heritage". Religion has a strong influence on people's way of life in present day Malawi. Consequently, in order to understand the Malawian society, an informed and open-minded study of its major religions is necessary.

3. A third aim of the new curriculum is to impart skills, attitudes and values "which will enable the pupil to become a full valuable member of his society". It is recognised that moral behaviour is strongly influenced by religious beliefs, and that ignorance and intolerance often go together. "But a true understanding and knowledge of other people's beliefs and practices promotes mutual respect, tolerance and harmony between religious groups."

All the religions will be approached descriptively and with understanding and empathy such as will bring about the inner meaning of the faith. At the same time, the religious experiences will be presented in such a way that pupils can enter, to some extent, into an awareness of what it means to be a committed Christian or Muslim or traditionalist.\textsuperscript{53}


The emphasis in the religious education syllabus is to highlight the differences between church education and religious education, but it is not stated what church education is. I understand it to be a confessional education, with the objective of spreading the only truth. Religious education, on the other hand, is supposed to be non-confessional, using the same focus for all religions dealt with in the syllabus.

Therefore, religious education will take a special role in nation building to enable people to overcome the barriers of religious prejudice and to avoid bigotry and fanaticism. Unity in any community comes with understanding of one another, accepting and respecting each other despite differences in views of God and the world.  

According to a handbook for teacher trainers in Malawi, religious education is supposed to be "the steady, continues process of leading children to their progressive discovery of God, within and around them so that they can make out their own individual attitudes to God, to life and people".  

My understanding of the aims in religious education includes a teaching that is open to pupils of different faiths, i.e. Christianity, Islam and MTR. Everyone should be able to recognize themselves in the teachings of their respective religion. The pupils should also become aware of the other major religions in Malawi in a way that promotes tolerance and understanding. Every child should have the opportunity to develop their own religious thinking while clinging to their specific religious affiliation.

### 3.1.3 Subject Objectives

Apart from the national goals of education and objectives for primary education formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, objectives for religious education were agreed by the syllabus committee. These included that the pupils by the end of standard 8 should be able to:

1. develop an awareness of the Supreme Being;
2. recognise their own religion and traditions;
3. develop their own belief system by searching and discovery;
4. distinguish the major religions found in Malawi;
5. demonstrate respect for people whose beliefs differ from theirs;

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6. develop a spirit of tolerance and cooperation with the various religious groups;
7. apply religious and moral principles into positive actions which will help them build a harmonious nation.  

The new syllabus includes a great deal of interesting aspects, some of which are going to be dealt with in this study. As far as I can tell, it is obvious that there are great expectations on the new syllabus in religious education regarding the unity among the people of different faiths in Malawi. At the same time as the children are supposed to develop their own system of belief they should be able to recognise their own religion and traditions. Thus, it is not obvious if the children are thought of as already belonging to a religion or if they are supposed to choose a religion. This will be further discussed in section 4 of this study.

3.1.4 Definition of the Term Religion

It is considered important that religious education is understood in the light of "religion". In different books for teacher training, the term religion is defined according to Ninian Smart's six inter-independent dimensions, here presented in brief.

1. Doctrinal dimension - a system of beliefs or doctrines.
2. Mythological dimension - stories about the life and deeds of founders of religion.
3. Ethical dimension - moral values taught by the religion, e.g. stories portraying love, kindness, patience, etc.
4. Ritual dimension - festivals and celebrations performed by believers (Christmas, Eid Fitre, Chinamwali - initiation rites).
5. Social dimension - church organisations, synods, diocese, Muslim Associations, etc.
6. Experiential dimension - convictions and unique experiences of believers, visions, dreams, etc.  

Another definition of religion is given in the syllabus for religious education. In that document, religion is defined as "how people have found

56 Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education, p. xvi.
meaning and value in life”. 58 In Themes in Religious Education it is stated that religion can be defined in different ways but that religion basically is a belief in a Supreme Being and that it deals with fundamental questions about life and living. 59

The definitions of religion supposedly form the basis for the new syllabus in religious education. Therefore it is interesting to notice that there are different definitions made, implying different approaches. Smart's dimensions, as described above, suggest a teaching that deals with different aspects of religion, regardless of your own standpoint. The second definition proposes a teaching that takes the children's questions into consideration. Finally, the third definition seems to be oriented towards a teaching that provides the children with answers to questions like where we come from. Consequently, the definitions of religion point to difficulties on how to choose an approach of teaching religious education.

3.1.5 A Thematic Approach

The religious education syllabus follows a scope and sequence chart that is developed in a thematic approach. A theme is an idea that is developed in a series of lessons in order to give a deeper knowledge.

Themes are important because pupils see the relevance of the subject to their day-to-day experiences. They also take care of children's interests and needs. By following the way how ideas are developed, pupils can study an idea for a long time and acquire deeper and wider understanding. 60

Eight distinctive features of religions are broken down into themes, which are divided further into topics and units, and finally into lessons. The themes are: 61

- Ideas about God
- Religious Founders/Leaders
- Festivals and Celebrations
- Moral Values
- Worship

59 Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, p. 35.
60 David K. Mphande, A Religious Education manual for In-Set Trainers (Domasi: MIE, 1993), p. 3.
61 For further information on the themes see Mphande, A Religious Education manual, pp. 4-5.
- Holy Writings
- Sin and Salvation
- Religious Symbols

The first four themes can be understood as corresponding to four of Smart's dimensions. The social dimension and the experimental dimension are not as obvious in the themes. However, the dimensions and themes might be difficult to combine. Dimensions can leaven all through the different aspects of religion while themes are more likely to keep the different aspects of religion separated. References to Ronald Goldman and the "life themes" as well as to Michael Grimmitt and "depth themes" and Jean Holm and "experience themes" are made, when discussing the approach of using themes in religious education in the handbook for teacher trainers. These thematic approaches are said to have formed the basis for the selection of the eight themes in the religious education syllabus in Malawi. 62 I understand the main emphasis on the teaching of religious education to be to follow the developmental stages in the children as they grow and to adjust the teaching after this development. In the last part of this study, I am going to look at how these ideas behind the thematic approach actually correspond to the problems the children are likely to encounter in their daily lives as they grow up in Malawi.

3.2 Thoughts Concerning the Revised Curriculum for Primary School

The curriculum is the overall document for all subjects in primary school. The new syllabus in religious education is revised according to this curriculum. Therefore, before the discussion of the syllabus in religious edu-

62 Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, pp. 15-19. In Goldman's "Life Theme Approach" learning content is centred around the real life experiences of the child. Life themes deal with "homes", "friends", "pets", etc. Grimmitt's "depth themes" should provide the child with a certain skill to help him to examine, explore and reflect at a deeper level regarding his own experiences and existence. "Love", "parents", and "friendship" are examples of depth themes. "Experience themes", as presented by Holm, have the purpose of encouraging pupils to explore and reflect on human experience so as to discover the unique mode of thought and awareness seen in religion. Examples of experience themes, which are also called "symbol themes", are "fire", "water" and "light".
cation, a presentation of the thoughts concerning the curriculum is necessary.

### 3.2.1 Critique of the Old Curriculum

When deciding to revise a curriculum it is obvious that the curriculum in use does not satisfy the current needs for education, and that by creating a new curriculum the hope is to overcome these problems. The need for a change of the curriculum for primary education in Malawi came about partly as a result of the weaknesses of the old curriculum. Among these weaknesses the following were highlighted in two papers presented at the Malawi Institute of Education:

- the curriculum was modelled at Western conceptions and traditions of education removed from the needs of the local environment and socio-economic structure of society;
- it did not promote positive attitude towards local culture, and tended to promote values that conflicted with community expectations;
- the degree of relevance was low, leaving the graduates without employable skills;
- there was an overloading in terms of subjects and the content in those subjects, as well as excessive overlaps of topics and concepts across subjects;
- it was geared to a small proportion of pupils and failed to cater for the wide range of abilities, needs and interests of the youth.\(^{63}\)

These weaknesses should be added to the criticism described in the section "previous studies". The problems with staffing, material and so forth cannot be solved through changing the curriculum, but the criticism on the content of the curriculum is possible to change. One of the changes in this new curriculum was the combining of the subjects geography, history, health, education, science, agriculture, safety and civics for standard 1-4 and combining civics, geography and history in standards 5-8. Population and environmental education were added at both levels. The new inte-

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Grated subjects are called general studies (1-4) and social studies (5-8). The effort to combine closely related subjects is recognised in the 1980 Swedish curriculum for comprehensive school as well. This can be seen in the subject social studies, which is constituted by history, geography, religious studies and civics.

### 3.2.2 Reasons for the Change of the Curriculum

Mr. Hauya, who works at MIE, placed the curriculum change in Malawi in a greater perspective, referring to a trend in many African countries. Curriculum development had been emphasised in an effort to get away from curricula modelled at Western traditions. A second effort had been to design curricula that achieved a greater balance between school content and practise, as well as between the state, nature and needs of the societies.

In view of this, the rationale behind the new curriculum in Malawi was also stated to be a natural part of changing times.

> The education system for any society is a mirror of that society. Just as society is dynamic, always changing, adapting and even borrowing, so should the education institution.

The immense increase in the general and school population had introduced pupils with varied interests, needs and potentials to which the curriculum should respond. This change, coupled with changes in social, economical, political and technological terms, suggested new aspirations. In the change of the curriculum, considerations must be made of the situation, i.e. the high in-school wastage and the size and value of the rural sector.

The reasons for the revision of the primary school curriculum seem primarily to have been pragmatic. The shortcomings of the old curriculum were major contributing factors to the review. Considering the facts that the overwhelming majority of Malawians never proceed to education at a higher level than primary schools, and that most people live in rural areas could be used as an argument for a contextualised curriculum. When people feel that the education is separated from their own experiences and needs, it is less likely that they will send their children to school. If the

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teaching is based on what the Malawian people feel is relevant, chances of more children attending school are higher.

My understanding is that the wish to create a curriculum that takes the Malawian context into serious consideration is not so much a desire to repudiate the Western form of education, as it is a wish to adjust the primary education to the actual situation in present day Malawi. If the Western-models are the most appropriate to use these can be used, but if there are better methods of achieving a contextualised curriculum in Malawi these should be adopted.

### 3.2.3 The New Curriculum

The new curriculum is supposed to overcome the problems faced in the old one. In order to do this, the papers presented at MIE suggest that there should be a shift of ideology in the theoretical basis, from a preoccupation with examinations and knowledge per se to a concern with survival skills. All teaching should be pupil-based. Primary education is supposed to be community-oriented, drawing on experiences from the local environment. The pupils are supposed to apply knowledge and skills learnt in school to daily life. The process of learning should be a process of human resource development, in line with the worldwide concern with culture-based functional basic education. 68

Mr. Hauya stressed that "[...] the bias towards Malawi's own nature and potentials is meant to act as a springboard for an understanding of the outer world". It should induce civic and citizenship skills, and attachment to issues and activities in Malawi as well as promote tolerance for other cultures. 69

There seems to be a concern with the methodology to start in the environment that is known to the pupils, and then from there move the focus to the unknown. To me this makes sense because in order to understand the world around you it is easier if you understand your own situation. Moreover, a great many of the Malawians are likely to stay in the country and should therefore first be able to make the best out of that situation. With that knowledge and foundation it is perhaps easier for the individual to advance further. This pedagogical approach - to start in the well known - is acknowledged in education systems throughout the world.

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It is interesting to draw a parallel between the new curriculum in Malawi and the discussions in Sweden in the first decades of the twentieth century concerning the comprehensive school intended for all children regardless of social status. In Sweden, the efforts to create a comprehensive compulsory school for all children succeeded by and by, and the attendance in the schools underwent a rapid growth.  

3.3 Thoughts Concerning the New Syllabus in Religious Education

3.3.1 Opinions of the Old Syllabus in Religious Education

The old syllabus in religious education was implemented in 1982. According to a text from MIE, the dissatisfaction expressed with this syllabus was that:

- it was Bible-centred and the teachers used an evangelical or confessional approach in their teaching. "[...] teachers tend to preach to pupils instead of teaching them";
- it did not include other major religions found in Malawi;
- it did not include Malawian moral values, e.g. Kukula ndi Mwambo;
- there was a lack of issues concerning everyday life, thus it did not include all the aspects of the Malawian cultural heritage. 

Of what I gathered from the interviews with persons that had been working on the new syllabus they agreed with this critique of the old syllabus. One negative aspect they mentioned was that religious education is non-examinable, a fact that has not changed with the new curriculum. One reason to why religious education is not among the examinable subjects was thought to be due to historical reasons.

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71 Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, p. 6. Unfortunately, I do not have a detailed definition of "Kukula ndi Mwambo".
At the beginning of schooling there was not an agreed syllabus and different denominations that started schools did not always agree on how to interpret the Bible. 72

Another reason given was that the previous government in Malawi, under the "Life" President Dr. Banda, did not think of religious education as a developmental subject. The same argument was used for not having a Department of Theology until 1991. 73

These arguments go in line with the great emphasis on the developmental aspects of the new curriculum and syllabus. Development is talked of both as individual development and as development for the nation. In the case of the Department of Theology the argument concerned national development. This is verified in a book written by John Dubby, vice-chancellor of the University of Malawi 1987 to 1991. He states that the previous government saw the university as having a key role in national development and that theology was not a developmental subject. 74 This type of argument does not seem to fit well into the history of the Malawian people. If religious education had been regarded as unable to develop the individual I would find it difficult to understand the great influence religion still seems to exert on the life of the Malawian people.

Of what I comprehend there is nothing that intimates that religious education is going to be examinable even under the new government. This situation is supposedly still a problem - if the examination orientation is continuing in primary schools. It is possible that the teachers put greater effort into teaching the subjects that are part of the final examination.

At a Post Graduate Colloquium arranged by the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, I had the opportunity to interview two secondary school teachers. One of them had experiences from teaching in a primary school. Their opinions on the old syllabus in religious education were more supportive than those stated by the Education Service Review. They could not think of any disadvantages.

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72 Interview with Mr. Robert Chonzi, Chancellor College (CC), May 30, 1996.
73 Interview with Dr. Felix Chingota, CC, May 13, 1996. "Religious education is not examinable, not even at the Teacher Training Colleges, so not many teachers opt for it. [...] even this department and the introduction of the Bachelor of Arts (Theology) was rejected by the authorities. The argument was - and I think it is the same with primary school - that religion is non-developmental."
74 John Dubbey, Warm Hearts, White Hopes (Gaborone, 1994), pp. 68, 184.
The great advantage with the old syllabus was that it was based only on biblical principles and that the teachers taught only the word of God. 75

These teachers' opinions mirror some of the thoughts among Malawian Christians concerning the new syllabus. Their more conservative thoughts on religious education might be explained by their membership in the most conservative synod among the three Presbyterian synods in Malawi, and also by their education at the African Bible College, which is an evangelical, though interdenominational college in Malawi. 76 There are possibly other factors behind their thoughts. Regardless of that, this positive attitude towards the old syllabus is a reality existing when the new syllabus is going to be fully implemented throughout the primary schools in Malawi.

3.3.2 Reasons for the Change of the Syllabus in Religious Education

One of the lecturers, Mr. Chonzi, thought that one of the reasons Malawi changed its syllabus was because other African countries, such as Kenya, Zambia and Zimbabwe already included different religions in their syllabuses. 77 Another lecturer at Chancellor College, Dr. Chingota, explained the revision of the syllabus in religious education like this:

I do not think that there are thoughts like moving away from the Western culture behind the new syllabus. I think that the actual reality with Muslims and Christians is the motive behind the revision of the syllabus. It is more pragmatic than ideological. 78

Dr. Chingota reported that several Muslims he had talked to told of a feeling of alienation with the bias of the old syllabus. The government saw this need among others, and chose on these more pragmatic grounds to change the syllabus for religious education. 79 The motive to incorporate all major religions in Malawi into the syllabus was agreed upon among the persons I interviewed, and it was also stated in the material on religious education.

75 Interview with Jonathan and Flemmings, Limbe, May 11, 1996.
76 For more information on the different denominations in Malawi see Ross, Gospel Ferment in Malawi, pp. 18-24.
77 Interview with Mr. Chonzi, May 30, 1996.
78 Interview with Dr. Chingota, May 13, 1996.
79 "(...) the problem has been that, because of the kind of education that was introduced by the missionaries, one section of the community, mostly the Muslims, have been alienated. In order to have them integrated into the education system there was a need to integrate the whole religious education." Interview with Dr. Chingota, May 13, 1996.
From what I gather, the basic reason behind the change in the religious education syllabus was to incorporate Islam and Malawian Traditional Religion. A problem with the old syllabus was the bias towards Christianity. With the new syllabus there seems to be hope for a wider integration of the so-called major religious groups in Malawi, especially the Muslims and also of Malawian Traditional Religion. I understand the incorporation of MTR as a mark of the emphasis on the Malawian, which is obvious throughout the whole curriculum. Even though the schools have previously been open to all children, regardless of religious affiliation, the religious bias made it difficult for Muslims to join schools. Now there is an effort to create a primary school that not only is open to all children, but also tries to discuss different religions. This ought to be important in a country where most people seem to think of themselves as belonging to a religion.

3.3.3 Advantages of the New Syllabus in Religious Education

The new syllabus is still to be fully implemented in the primary schools of Malawi, which makes it difficult to evaluate what turns out to be "good" or "bad". Nevertheless, there are opinions of what advantages and disadvantages the syllabus might entail.

Mr. Chonzi, a lecturer and member of a religious education committee expressed the view that the new syllabus is likely to be better on emphasising the special relationship between religion and society than the old one. He regarded the syllabus as the servant of society. Both the society and the religions want better members and he thought that religious education has the capacity to make better persons through stressing fairness, helping, and so forth. 80

Another lecturer, Dr. Chingota, stated that when you only learn about your own religion, intolerance towards others can easily arise. The Malawian children grow up in communities where there are different faiths and by learning of all of them in school they have to learn to co-exist. 81 This thought receives support in "Themes in Religious Education". There it is stated that the goal for combination of the three major religions in Malawi in the new syllabus is

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80 Interview with Mr. Chonzi, May 30, 1996.
81 Interview with Dr. Chingota, May 13, 1996.
[...] to promote tolerance and a broader understanding in children. The process of instruction will therefore deal with commonalities and uniqueness while avoiding methods that are evangelical. 82

The advantages of using themes throughout primary religious education are outlined in "Themes in Religious Education". The thematic approach is justified on educational grounds because it takes children's moral and intellectual development into account. Furthermore, through studying an idea for a long time, knowledge is seen as a unity and the teacher can use a more child-centred teaching and take the pupils' experiences into account. 83

The old syllabus was not contextualised. The new one is an integrated and conceptualised syllabus. It is supposed to address many areas from the three major religions in Malawi; Christianity, Islam and Malawian Traditional Religions. The approach is thematic and non-confessional, supposed to address the classroom situation. This can make it easier to take the development of the children into consideration. 84

3.3.4 Disadvantages of the New Syllabus in Religious Education

A disadvantage with the approach of using themes was stated to be the repetition throughout the years, since the same themes are dealt with in every standard. For Christian churches a disadvantage was seen in terms of evangelisation. There is a risk of the religion becoming relative, that "anything goes". 85 The two secondary teachers went further, expressing their dissatisfaction with the incorporation of Islam and MTR in the syllabus.

We do not like that change of the syllabus, that is to teach Islam and ATR, because it defeats the Christian teaching. Christianity looses its power over its learners' lives. However, since the teachers lack knowledge of Islam they will continue to teach along the old lines, which mean that Christianity will still be in focus. 86

Maybe more than the adding of Islam and MTR to the syllabus, the new approach of using themes can alter the understanding of Christianity. During a conversation with Dr. Klaus Fiedler, a lecturer in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College, I got the impres-

82 Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, p. 36.
83 Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, p. 15.
84 Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.
85 Interview with Dr. Chingota, May 13, 1996.
86 Interview with Jonathan and Flemmings, May 11, 1996.
sion that the sequence in the teaching might become less obvious when there is not a structured path for the teacher to follow from, for instance, the Old Testament to the New Testament over to the Revelation. This perspective of salvation is recognised in a book by Bengt Sundkler, Missionens Värld (The World of Mission, my translation). The convenants of Noah and Abraham are regarded as decisive in the history of salvation of the Bible. Throughout the Bible there is a salvation history that unites. There are two principles, the chosen one ("utkorelse") and vicarious ("ställöreträdande"), that act as a main thread in the Bible. The Old Testament portends the New Testament. If this is true - and if the churches want to hold their grip of the teaching of Christianity - they will have to put greater emphasis on the teaching in their own churches.

3.4 Pedagogical Aspects and Practical Problems

The different definitions of religion provided in the syllabus and in the teaching material point to different ways of teaching. Smart's definition suggests that the religions are presented according to their similarities and divergences. The definition suggested in the syllabus - "how people have found meaning and value in life" - suggests a teaching that deals with the questions the children have and how these types of questions have found their answers. The approach of using themes does not follow this line with questions about life, but rather concerns phenomenology of religion.

The whole methodology used in teaching is supposed to change, placing great expectations on the teachers. I gather that the term child-centred should be understood as concerned with the developmental aspects in the children, i.e. psychological aspects. For pupils to be able to work in a different way than they are used to, they need to understand what it is that is expected from them. The pupil-based activities must be explained so that the pupils know what to do and how to do it.

The incorporation of Islam and MTR in the syllabus seems to be in line with the emphasis to promote national unity and, perhaps to encourage positive attitudes towards local culture. The Muslims form a minority which has been more or less left out in the national school system. With the teaching of Islam in primary schools there is possibly a platform for a dialogue between the Christians and the Muslims. Historically, the local

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culture could be argued to include different aspects of MTR. The conflict observed between community expectations and the values promoted in the schools could also be abated. With a greater knowledge people might be able to better understand their own and other person's situation. This perhaps promotes unity. When the objective in the new syllabus is to teach about all three religions there has to be given if not equal so at least somewhat proportional weight to each of the religions. It also requires knowledge of the religions, a great problem among the primary school teachers in Malawi today. Perhaps, a genuine knowledge of the religions is especially important when it comes to MTR. 88 In the interview with Rev. Mphande I was told that due to lack of money, a great deal of the facts used about MTR were based on old material or old experiences. 89 Furthermore, when planning and working out the new syllabus and the books, there seem to have been representatives from both Christian churches and associations as well as from Muslim associations, but no one to represent MTR. This is probably explained by the fact that there are hardly any representatives of MTR who have received education. When MTR is described as one religion this will perhaps present a picture that does not correspond with all tribes in Malawi.

Of what has been discussed so far, the pedagogical objectives seem to build on conceptions of a reality that is desired but perhaps not existing. Practical problems seem to be a very real part of life in Malawi, naturally setting limits to what is possible to carry out in the teaching in primary schools. The problems that were called attention to concerning the previous curriculum probably effect even the new one. Many teachers lack education in all subjects and the teaching facilities are limited. This also concerns religious education. Perhaps the financial circumstances are the worst barriers. There is a lack of funds for the schools to buy books, thus suggesting that they use the books produced along the lines of the new syllabus which MIE distributes. Paradoxically, there are not any Pupils' books produced in religious education, which denotes that the only books the pupils have are the old books focusing solely at Christianity. 90

As far as I understand, the new syllabus does not place great emphasis on a critical analysis of the religious thoughts, although when you have other religions to compare with it might be easier to raise questions regarding

89 Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.
90 Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.
your own religion. This could point to an understanding of the religions as an obvious part of life for the Malawian. In the following section I will discuss how this is dealt with in the new religious education syllabus.
4 Dealing with Three Religions

4.1 Religion in Focus in the New Syllabus and Teachers' Guides

Looking at the primary teacher education syllabus, announce the attempt to give equal weight to each of the three religions by giving examples from them all. When examining the entire syllabus for religious education in primary schools as well as two of the Teachers' guides, a different picture becomes visible.

Each of the eight themes in the syllabus for religious education discusses findings from each of the three religions. However, there seems to be a tendency to emphasise more on Christianity and least on MTR. Telling figures are that Christmas is included as a topic or unit in every standard, whereas the feasts in Islam and MTR are not discussed throughout primary school. Without analysing the content of the units, it is illustrative to show how many lessons are suggested for each unit when considering which religion is used as an example in respective unit.

I have examined the Primary religious education teaching syllabus to find out what religion is focused at in the 60 topics from standard 1 to standard 8. Where there have been more than one religion in focus they have been counted as equal, even if one of the religions has been emphasised more than the other(s). It should be noted that the examples are drawn from Christianity more often than from the other two religions. For instance, in standard 3 the topic "Religious feasts" refers to Christianity in 15 of the 21 objectives, and only 3 to MTR and 2 to Islam while 1 objective could be stated as "objective" ("mentioning the things done in school before an important visitor arrives").

I have also looked at what stories are used in the Teachers' guides, and tried to determine the purpose of using them, i.e. to highlight the religion or just as an illustration on the topic telling as much of other religions as of the one used in the example. The results are displayed in tables that show the number of lessons where one, or two or three religions are focused at. Where there are examples from all three religions these have been counted

as "Chr. + Islam + MTR". If the topics use examples that are not typical for one certain religion these have been counted to this last section as well.

**Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTR</td>
<td>Malawian Traditional Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr.</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr.+Islam</td>
<td>Christianity and Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chr.+Islam+MTR</td>
<td>Christianity, Islam and Malawian Traditional Religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1

**Religion in Focus in the Topics Described in the Primary School Teaching Syllabus for Religious Education, Standard 1-8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MTR</th>
<th>Chr.</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Chr.+Islam</th>
<th>Chr.+Islam+MTR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 topic</td>
<td>15 topics</td>
<td>1 topic</td>
<td>5 topics</td>
<td>9 topics+MTR</td>
<td>60 topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0%)</td>
<td>(25%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>(8%)</td>
<td>(15%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Malawi Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education Standard 1-8 (Domasi: MIE, 1991).

Table 2

**Religion in Focus in the Teachers’ Guide for Standard 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MTR</th>
<th>Chr.</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Chr.+Islam</th>
<th>Chr.+Islam+MTR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 lessons</td>
<td>16 lessons</td>
<td>8 lessons</td>
<td>1 lesson+MTR</td>
<td>24 lessons+MTR</td>
<td>53 lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(8 %)</td>
<td>(30 %)</td>
<td>(15 %)</td>
<td>(2 %)</td>
<td>(45 %)</td>
<td>(100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Malawi Primary Education: Religious Education Teachers’ Guide for Standard 3 (Domasi: MIE, 1994).

Table 3

**Religion in Focus in the Teachers’ Guide for Standard 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MTR</th>
<th>Chr.</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Chr.+Islam</th>
<th>Chr.+Islam+MTR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 lessons</td>
<td>29 lessons</td>
<td>14 lessons</td>
<td>3 lessons+MTR</td>
<td>5 lessons+MTR</td>
<td>59 lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(14 %)</td>
<td>(49 %)</td>
<td>(24 %)</td>
<td>(5 %)</td>
<td>(8 %)</td>
<td>(100 %)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Malawi Primary Education: Religious Education Teachers’ Guide for Standard 4 (Domasi: MIE, 1995).
In the syllabus, in which the suggested teaching and learning experiences for each topic are described, 30 of the 60 topics (50%) are suggested to deal with all of the religions. When described in the Teachers' guides the topics cover several lessons, which might change the picture of the total number for each religion. Regardless of that, the syllabus clearly put emphasis on covering all three religions in most of the topics. It is also obvious that the religion that receives the greatest attention is Christianity, 15 out of 60 topics (25%), while MTR is not solely focused in any topic. Islam is the main object in 1 of the topics (2%). Furthermore, it is worth paying attention to the number of topics dealing with Christianity and MTR, 9 topics (15%), compared to Christianity and Islam, 5 topics (9%). Noteworthy is that Islam and MTR are never emphasised together without referring to Christianity as well.

It seems as if the syllabus stresses the characteristics that are comparable in the three religions. This might denote that the religions have many similar features. According to the syllabus, the role of Christianity is still great. It can be a result of the fact that perhaps as many as 70 percent or more of the population in Malawi adhere to Christianity. When looking at the number of lessons each religion is suggested to have, the Teachers' guides reveal different figures. Christianity is nevertheless the single religion most often referred to in the Teachers' guides examined here. In standard 4, Christianity alone is emphasised nearly half of the time, 29 lessons out of 59 (49%). The corresponding figure for standard 3 is 16 lessons out of 53 (30%). It does not lead too far to say that Christianity still receives a great deal of the attention in religious education in primary schools in Malawi. On the other hand, it does not go without saying that it is the same kind of Christian teaching as the one proposed in the old syllabus.

When looking at the number of lessons each religion receives on its own, Islam receives more attention than MTR in both standard 3 and 4. Both Islam and MTR are focused more often in the Teachers' guides than what is suggested in the syllabus. Like in the syllabus, they are never used as examples together, except when all three religions are highlighted. Christianity and Islam are focused together in a few lessons, while MTR and Christianity are never focused alone. In standard 3, most of the lessons (24 of 53, 45%) are supposed to deal with all three religions.

Again, there seems to be effort put into using examples that can be relevant for each of the religions. This approach is somewhat different in standard 4. In that standard Christianity and Islam receive more attention than MTR, and also more than the three religions together. The number of lessons
dealing with only one of the religions can suggest that there are specific characteristics for each of the religions, thus focusing on the differences between the religions. Examples of this found in the Teachers’ guide are "the resurrection of Jesus" (Christianity), "zaakat" (charity) in Islam, and "the Malawian traditional story of creation" (MTR). 92

The figures above do not cover all of the teaching in religious education. In spite of this it can give some hints to how the intentions are followed when developed into Teaching Syllabuses and Teachers’ guides. The major religions are focused, although the examples in the books are more often collected from the Bible than from either the Quran or the Malawian traditional stories. The syllabus pointed to dealing with the three religions at the same time as often as possible, but the Teachers’ guide for standard 4 turned out different. The intentions are not always realised even in the material provided to the schools. It is therefore interesting to examine the focus used in the Teachers' guides to discern how the religions are dealt with there.

4.2 Similarities and Differences

4.2.1 God/Allah/Chauta

First of all I just want to comment briefly on one aspect of the presentations in the Teachers' guides that can be confusing. In the Teachers' guides it is clearly stated that there are three religions, and that a lower case g for god is used when talking generally about religions. When talking about the particular god for each religion a capital letter is used for the start of each name (Allah for Islam, Chauta for Malawian Traditional Religion, and God for Christianity). 93 However, there are several instances where this rule is not followed. One example is found under the unit "Religious leaders today" where one part of the activities is to say a prayer "thanking God for giving them religious leaders". 94 This may indicate that every pupil is supposed to pray to the Christian God, but it can also be interpreted as a misprint.

Irrespective of this, my understanding of this inconsistent spelling of god is that it is a matter of different writers and negligence in editing. I have

interpreted the instances when the pupils are supposed to say prayers to God as to pray to what they believe is their god, since that is what the objective for the topic implies. A conclusion that is more interesting to draw from this discussion - but perhaps less convincing since Allah and God can be used interchangeably - is that this inconsistent use of the names for god can point to an understanding of the gods of the different religions as one and the same god. If this is true, an effort to stress the features that are similar between the religions regarding this above all central point, could be visible in the Teachers' guides and syllabuses.

One of the units in standard 4 that deals with "Ideas about God" reflects the similarities found in the religions.

The nature and character of God/Allah/Chauta is the foundation for every religion.

Therefore in this topic pupils are helped to understand the greatness of God/Allah/Chauta as the Creator, the Loving and the Source of all good things. 95

The quotation also indicates that the children should understand the world as a creation of god. Thus, the only alternative given to the pupils is what to call god; there is not an option to not believe in god. 96

The unit "Allah as the provider of all good things" tells about Allah as provider of food, animals, fruits, rain, air and clothes. 97 The same could be said about the Christian God and of Chauta in MTR. In this respect, the religions are presented as similar. The unit "Cleanliness before God/Allah/Chauta" under the theme "Signs and symbols" follows this interpretation.

God/Allah/Chauta wants us to be clean both outside and inside. If we obey our god, He will make us clean. He will wash away our wrongdoings. 98

In standard 4, the topic under the same theme is "Death and new life". Life continues with God/Allah/Chauta after the body is dead. Here there are stories from oral traditions as well as from the Quran and the Bible. However, one difference between MTR on the one hand and Christianity and Islam on the other is noted.

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96 In the religious education in primary school in Sweden there is no prerequisite that the pupils adhere to a specific religion. Although most of the children are baptised Christians, they would not necessarily call themselves Christians.
Christians and Muslims believe that they will one day come back to new life and be with God/Allah forever. African traditional religion teaches that the dead go to the land of the 'living dead', (i.e., those who died but are still remembered by those who are alive).  

The theme "Worship" and the topic "Praying to God/Allah/Chauta" can serve as an example of trying to highlight the similarities between the religions. Worship is described as a central part of every religion. Both private and public worship are described for each of the religions. Public worship is suggested to give people a chance to learn more about their faith and to get more involved in their religious community and with their fellow brothers and sisters. Prayer is supposed to be of equal importance and content among Christians, Muslims and Traditionalists. Nevertheless, however, among the 11 units, only one ("How people pray to God/Allah/Chauta") deals with MTR. The other 10 units are exemplified with stories from the Bible or the Quran.

In the interview with Rev. Mphande, he discussed the new syllabus and stated that: "There is also emphasis on strengthening the morals, so that all religions can agree". This quotation, I think, reveals part of the answer to why the Teachers' guides deal with aspects that are found in all three religions. I interpret the aim with highlighting the features of the religions that are similar as an effort to promote tolerance. If the pupils learn about the similar aspects of the religions it is supposedly easier to understand people with a faith different from one's own. This again suggests that the children are already supposed to belong to one of the religions. To promote tolerance and understanding is also stated as an objective for religious education.

**4.2.2 Stories from the Bible, the Quran and Malawian Traditions**

When it comes to the use of stories as examples in the different units there are both suggestions that the religions differ from one another and that they are similar. The themes "Religious founders and leaders" and "Holy writings" do not contain any story from MTR, nor any suggestions on how to teach the oral traditions. This is somewhat confusing considering the rationale for the topic "Scriptures as a library":

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101 Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.
Religious people believe that their God/Allah/Chauta speaks to them through holy writings. In the case of Malawian traditional religion, He speaks to them through oral tradition. In these writings or oral stories, beliefs which are important to the religion are passed on. It is therefore important that pupils learn where these basic ideas in the three major religions in Malawi come from and how they relate to their everyday lives. 102

The topic "Illness and handicap" under the theme "Sin and salvation" is drawing on stories from the Bible and the Quran. One story from traditional sources is mentioned, although only given as an optional choice. 103

The intention with the use of stories appears to me to be to stress that each of the religions have their stories, hence in this aspect the religions are similar. On the other hand, one difference that can be more important is that these stories look different for the three religions, thus pointing to the divergences and uniqueness of each religion. Another interpretation is that a story drawn from one religion could be applicable on the other two religions as well. The stories most often used are collected firstly from Christianity and lastly from MTR. Considering this, Christianity would perhaps have an advantage if the pupils were supposed to choose between the religions. 104

4.2.3 Examples of stories:

The story of Jesus healing the lame man (the Bible: John, chapter 5, v 1-8)
Once upon a time, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. He went through the pool of Bethzatha. At the pool was a large crowd of people suffering from different ailments (diseases), eg, the blind, the lame and the paralysed. If the water in the pool was stirred up by an angel, the one who got in first was healed. Among the patients was a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him, he asked, 'Do you want to be healed?' The man's reply was, 'I have no one to help me get into the pool. When the water is stirred up, someone gets in long before I do. So I have no chance to get healed.'

Jesus commanded him to rise up and walk, which he immediately did. The man carried his beddings and went away.

103 Religious Education Teachers’ Guide for Standard 4, pp. 70-89.
104 Here it is also interesting to notice what was said in an interview. "The Christianity which is focused is not a certain denomination, but a mainline type of Christianity. The sacred texts that are used are supposed to address all and not one particular denomination." Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.
Jesus healing a lame man near the pool of Bethzatha.

**Source:** Teachers' Guide for Standard 4, p. 77.

**The story of the Prophet Muhammad healing Ali (from the Hadith).**
During the life time of the prophet Muhammad he was with a group of his companion (disciples) and after careful checking, it was found that Ali, his cousin, was not among the group. 'Where is Ali?' the Prophet asked. 'He is sick', the group answered, 'he is suffering from eye-sores'. The Prophet asked his disciples to go and bring him. When Ali came, he was really in pain and could not see anything. The Prophet made a prayer to Allah, the Almighty and spat into Ali's eyes. Ali's eyes were open and cured. He was able to see again.

**Source:** Teachers' Guide for Standard 4, p. 75.

**The story of the banana tree (adapted from Land of Fire: Oral Literature from Malawi, by J M Schoeffeleers and A A Roscoe)**
A man had two wives and each wanted to be his favourite. Mangepo was the name of his senior wife. She made beautiful pots. Mkundikana was his junior wife. This one used to make baskets. One day both Mkundikana and Mangepo made lovely examples of their craft and asked the husband to judge which was better. The husband finding it hard to choose between the pot and the basket, threw both to the ground to test their strength. The pot broke and thus Mkundikana won the contest and became the favourite wife.

Soon Mangepo died and was buried in her hut. But they believed that she was 'immortal' (not subject to death) and would return one day. After Mangepo's death Mkundikana used to see her husband going daily to the senior wife's hut with a pot of water, and sometimes he stayed there a long
time. This worried Mkundikana, so she decided one day to sneak into the hut and see what was happening. When she opened the door she saw that Mangepo had risen from the grave in the form of a beautiful banana tree. This made her furious, and fetching a big knife, she cut down the banana tree with one stroke.

Immediately blood flowed from the tree and she heard Mangepo's voice saying, 'Now it is all finished, I die without hope of returning. The same will happen to you and all mankind.' Thus it was Mkundikana's sin that caused man's eternal death. And thereafter it was forbidden for women to make baskets. They only make pots now, in memory of Mangepo.


4.2.4 Parallelisms

In a handbook for teacher trainers the thematic approach is explained to serve as a basis for building commonalities and relationships, as well as uniqueness among the three religions, thereby "[...] allowing the child to
start forming ideas, opinions and feelings as a process of development”. It is emphasised that the parallels, such as the initiation into the Nyau cult and the 'baptismal' experience in Christianity, have to be underlined. Such parallelisms are understood as vital to a general appreciation of the topics.105

There is not a specified explanation of what development is supposed to include. It is however most likely to think of personal development. It can be interpreted as if it suggests that the child as it grows can choose whatever religion he/she discovers is right. Although I am more inclined to believe that development means that the child develops his/her awareness of the religion he/she already belongs to.

4.2.5 Pictures

The books on religious education that have cover pictures show drawings of three places of worship; a church, a mosque and a hut under a tree. This expresses the differences among the three religions and the aim to let all three religions find their place in the religious education for primary schools. As far as I understand, the drawings inside the books are also distinguishing between the religions. The traditional story of praying for rain is illustrated by a drawing showing people in traditional clothes, kneeling under a tree in front of their huts. The stories from the Bible are illustrated by people wearing robes and sandals. When the Muslims are pictured they wear trousers, tunics and hats.106

The use of drawings indicates that there are three alternatives presented to the pupils. I gather that this is not so much pointing to the option of a child to choose between the religions as it is a hint that the children already belong to one of the pictures.

105 Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, pp. 36-37.
106 Pictures are found in the Religious Studies Teachers’ Guide for Standard 3 and 4, and in Themes in Religious Education. For example, pp. 31, 68, 71 in the Teachers’ Guide for Standard 3.
4.2.6 Examples of pictures:

Source: A Religious Education Manual for In-sets Trainers, cover.

Praying for rain


Jesus washing the feet of His disciples

4.3 Choices and Religion

In standard 7, there is one topic called "how people make choices". The objectives are to describe how one becomes a full member of each of the three main religions in Malawi, and to state the main aim in life of these religions. The pupils are also supposed to be able to explain how a person's religion may affect the choices that person makes. The content of the topic is declared to be "choosing a religion" and "choices and religion". 107

This topic suggests that the religions are different and that the pupil has to choose, or is supposed to have chosen, one of the three religions. At this point, I also find it noteworthy that my comprehension after my field study in Malawi corresponds with the content in the books for primary religious education. During my interviews with students I asked if they knew anyone in Malawi who did not belong to a religion. The answer I received was most often "no". The students had heard of a few persons that did not belong to a religion, although they did not know anyone personally. 108 There is not a religious education without there being a prerequisite that every Malawian belongs to a religion. Religious education is not a matter of offering different perspectives on life, regardless of religion. Rather, the pupils are thought of as belonging to one of the three religions dealt with.

This is also seen from standard one in the syllabus. The topics "Myself as a creature of God" and "The world around us a creation of God" seem to build upon the recognition of a Creator. 109 I have not found a discussion of a scientific world view, although this is perhaps described in another subject. Since the secular society does not seem to be an option for most Malawians, the need to discuss a scientific world view might not be regarded as relevant in primary school.

The religion also forms the "social netting" for each person. As a member of a community you have certain obligations towards that community, and in the case of Malawi the community includes religious affiliation. Therefore, I do not find it likely that the pupils through their education in school choose another religion than that to which their families belong.

107 Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education, pp. 210-211.
108 The question about belonging to a religion might have been ambiguous. It is possible that some of the students only thought of Christianity and Islam as religions, without considering MTR as a religion. Summaries of the interviews are found in the appendix.
4.4 Religion - a Natural Part of Life

Although I am positive that this study is not enough to solve the problems dealt with above, a few conclusions can be drawn. The themes are used in each standard, although with varying topics and units. According to the intentions behind the syllabus each of the three major religions in Malawi is supposed to receive attention. In spite of this, Christianity still receives the greatest part of the attention in primary religious education in Malawi. Christianity is focused in the greatest number of lessons, the Bible is referred to more often than the Quran or Malawian traditional stories, the majority of the teachers are Christians, there is a lack of books on Islam and MTR, and the majority of the people are Christians.

The syllabus nevertheless also provides room for Islam and MTR, and that is a considerable change in contrast to the old syllabus. Every pupil is supposedly affirmed in his/her religion. I understand the prerequisite to be that every pupil already is thought of as belonging to a religion. The religious education is supposed to broaden the understanding in the children both on their own religion and also on the other religions. On the other hand, the one-sided emphasis on the three major religions in Malawi excludes the minority groups. The Asians who are Hindus do not receive any attention at all in the new syllabus, nor do other religious minorities. Consequently, the feeling of alienation previously recorded among the Muslims probably continues to be a problem for smaller religious minorities like Bahai, Rastafari and Hinduism.

I understand the themes to serve as a common ground for every religion. However, this does not necessarily denote that the religions are similar when it comes to the content of the religions. For all religions, there are similar features that seem to be emphasised, but there are also efforts to highlight the differences found under the themes. Thus, I do not find it verified that the distinctive characteristics of each religion are lost. In line with the goal for including the major religions in Malawi in the syllabus, there seems to be focus on both things in common and uniqueness.

One interesting aspect with this picture of the religions, where both similarities and differences between the religions are presented, is that the Christians and Muslims could regard this as a challenge. When there are similar aspects found in both religions this could inspire to dialogue. In a country where probably over 70 percent of the population are Christians and approximately 15 percent are Muslims, it ought to be important to have good relationships between Christianity and Islam. The common
ground for Muslims and Christians in Malawi is that they are both missionaries in the country; neither of the religions was there before people came from the East or the West. (I do not take into account those theologians who argue that there were Christian beliefs in Africa long before the European missionaries began their work. 110) Perhaps this points to the similar situation in which Muslims and Christians find themselves. The Malawian context has to be dealt with, and the ways of coping with its traditions and customs, and also religion, has to be applicable to both Islam and Christianity. There are questions of life that supposedly are the same for both Muslims and Christians. These questions can emerge out of the comparison with similarities and differences presented in the teaching material.

It is important to remember that we are talking about primary education. Thus, the religious issues on a higher level cannot be expected to be discussed. There is also an awareness of the growing insights of the pupils as they get older - at least I hope we develop our thinking, although sometimes a child can give better answers or pose better questions than adults!

110 At a consultation of African theologians in Ibadan 1965 it was stated: "We believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of heaven and earth, Lord of history, has been dealing with mankind at all times and in all parts of the world. It is with this conviction that we study the rich history of our African peoples, and we have evidence that they know of Him and worship Him. We recognise the radical quality of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ; and yet it is because of this revelation we can truly discern what is truly God in our pre-Christian heritage: this knowledge of God is not totally discontinuous with our people's previous traditional knowledge of Him." K.A. Dickson & P. Ellingworth, *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p. 16. Also see Ross, *Gospel Ferment in Malawi*, pp. 67-70.
5 Religion and Culture

In the new syllabus in religious education it is clearly stated that there are three major religions in Malawi; Christianity, Islam and MTR. However, after spending some time in Malawi and after talking to different persons, mainly teachers and students in the Theology and Religious Studies Department at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, I am not convinced that MTR is understood as a distinctive religion. The students talked about conflicts between their culture and their Christian faith, but only one discussed problems of combining two religions. Therefore, I find it difficult to distinguish between MTR and the traditions and customs referred to as Malawian culture. It is thus of interest to examine how MTR is described in the new books in religious education. In order to get an idea on how the Malawian culture is described it is likewise necessary to inquire into the new books for primary education in social studies. Since there are not any Pupils' books written in religious education, the Teachers' guides for standard 3 and 4 will serve as reference. The findings in the books will be compared to the answers I received in the interviews with students in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College. In that way theoretical aspects can be compared to practical problems.

5.1 General and Social Studies

According to Kabwila the subjects deal with "human interaction with environment, interdependency and the inculcation of concepts and facts about human to human relationships and how they relate to survival". It studies humans in their daily life at home and at work, in the village and in the nation. It also concerns the knowledge and actions considered important to the relationships humans have with each other, themselves and the rest of the world. The place of the subject in the curriculum is motivated by the functional and cognitive skills it teaches, and above all that it deliberately

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111 An example of answers I received concerning ATR is: "It is hard to separate ATR from culture, they go together." (Interview with Malla, May 9, 1996.) However, one of the students thought of ATR as a religion. "I think that the church should not incorporate more African traditions because syncretism causes problems. There is a danger in mixing two religions". (Interview with Christopher, May 7, 1996.) For more examples see footnote 131.

112 Kabwila, Teaching General and Social Studies, p. 2.
encourages desirable attitudes and actions. Social studies are supposed to assist students to develop the ability to make rational decisions; to determine good or bad.

The children need to be aware of the community or the people they have to live with all their lives. The family, the villagers, the churchgoers, and their schoolmates are their community. They must learn that this community has certain rules, norms, and regulations that all its citizens need to comply with. They need to know that if you do not comply with these norms, you disrupt the smooth functioning of the community. They should be made to realise that their contributions to this community preserves (!) peace, and that to go contrary to the norms attracts punishment and rejection. The child must be taught that the teachers, the village headman, their parents and the police, all represent authority. 113

These features and objectives are of interest since they reveal the ideas behind the specific importance of social studies and consequently also the ideas regarding culture.

Culture is defined as people's way of life, including customs as well as traditions. Focus in social studies is on culture in the specific region of the pupils. 114 Among the aspects of culture, seven are dealt with in social studies in standard 6. These are social norms, birth and marriage ceremonies, coming of age, chieftainships and funeral rites. 115

5.2 Cultural and Religious Traditions in Malawi

5.2.1 Every Malawian Belongs to a Tribe

Unit 12 in social studies in standard 6 deals with "Aspects of culture in the region". The rational behind this unit is described in the Teachers' guide.

There are many tribes in each of the three regions in Malawi. Each tribe has its own culture. Pupils belong to one of these tribes but may find themselves among people of different cultures. In this regard therefore, they need to learn about as-

113 Kabwila, Teaching General and Social Studies, p. 6.
pects of the cultures of different tribes so that they may appreciate and respect customs and traditions of other tribes or races in their region. 

In the Pupils' book it is also stated that every person in Malawi belongs to a particular tribe. The consequences of these statements must be that each and every one of the persons living in Malawi belongs to a specific group of people with specific cultural practices and values. It is also a conception that the majority of Malawians confesses to Christianity and that quite a number are Muslims and adherents to MTR. According to the books regarding social studies there are no suggestions that the cultural practices could create any problems in combination with any of these religions. In line with my question a problem still exists. It is not obvious what constitutes the culture, and what MTR is made of. On one hand, it is not possible that every person is thought of as being born into MTR, on the other hand it is likely that every person is born into a culture with its traditions and customs. Moreover, if everyone is supposed to belong to a tribe the Europeans, Asians and other minority groups living in Malawi are not considered.

5.2.2 Initiation

In the social studies Teachers’ guide, both positive and negative effects of the cultural practices are observed. However, there is nothing indicating that the negative effects are pointed out because they do not match the religious practices. It thus appears to be strictly cultural traditions, regardless of the religious reality. For instance, one positive effect of the ceremonies marking the coming of age is that it gives advice on moral and cultural values, i.e. respect, courage and endurance. Things like the wastage of food, financial resources and the risk of transmitting HIV-virus are mentioned among the negative effects. That the mainstream churches, to whom many pupils and their families belong, are usually not accepting many of the traditional rites concerning the coming of age or initiation is not included in the assessment.

In the interviews I made with students at Chancellor College, they said that their churches did not tolerate the initiation rites conducted outside the church. The only kinds of initiation allowed were those for girls conducted within the churches. One of the male students had been excommunicated from the Catholic Church after taking part in traditional initiation rites. He

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117 Social Studies Pupils' Book for Standard 6, p. 47.
did not gain membership in the Catholic Church until he succeeded to join a Catholic Seminar. The answer of many churches to the initiation rites is to create certain practices within its own church so that they themselves can mark the coming of age without causing a conflict with the Christian faith. 118

5.2.3 Marriage

In the Teachers' guide for standard 6 for social studies three different types of marriages are recognised: traditional, religious, and civil marriages. Religious marriages are defined as 'those marriages consecrated at churches and mosques'. This implies that the marriages consecrated by persons adhering to MTR is not a religious marriage but rather a traditional marriage, chinkhoswe. 119 This traditional marriage is a regular procedure in southern Malawi and applies to many Christians as well. The same is true of practices like birth rituals. According to the syllabus in religious education, in standard 6 the pupils should be able to 'describe some traditional Malawian customs practised when a child is born'. The suggested teaching and learning experiences are to, in groups, list down the traditional customs practised when a child is born and to present these customs to the whole class. As a comparison, to learn about Islamic birth rituals it is suggested to invite a female Muslim visitor to speak to the class. The pupils are supposed to ask questions on Islamic birth rituals. 120

Out of this discussion of marriage and birth rituals, I conclude that the distinction between tradition and religion is unclear. It seems to be a prerequisite for all pupils to know about traditional birth rituals without any further teaching, whereas these rituals seem to be regarded as unfamiliar to most of the pupils when it comes to Islam. If culture can include religion what is religion, and what distinguishes MTR from Malawian culture? If MTR is the same as the Malawian culture the clearly divided religions in the syllabus for religious education do not make sense.

119 Social Studies Teachers' Guide for Standard 6, p. 68.
120 Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education, p. 182.
5.2.4 The Chief

Another statement, that I can suspect is not uncontradicted among Christians or Muslims, is the sentence in the social studies Pupils' book for standard 6, "every community needs a chief". I do not aim to discuss the necessity or not of a chief, I just want to point out that I do not think that these kinds of statements are easily accepted by every Muslim or Christian in Malawi - most certainly not if the chief is a religious leader. A chief is declared to be a religious leader in MTR, and as far as I can see there is no difference between a traditional chief and a chief in MTR. In the unit called "leaders in the region and their duties" the leaders mentioned are at political level and at traditional level (paramount chiefs). There are no suggestions indicating that these chiefs are religious leaders, rather the leaders of the tribes are referred to as political. Likewise, in religious education, the theme "Religious founders/leaders" deals with Moses in Christianity, Muhammed in Islam and M'bona, the rainmaker, in MTR. The story of M'bona is taken from a book on oral literature in Malawi. As a traditional religious leader a chief is portrayed. The duties of the religious leaders are explained to consist of responsibilities like living exemplary lives, visiting sick people and look out for anyone in times of trouble. They should also carry the messages of their god to the people, lead people in worship and hold services like burials and weddings.

5.2.5 Holy Communications

The stories of MTR are together with the Bible, the Quran and the Hadith regarded as holy communications. It is observed that while the Christians and Muslims have their scriptures, the stories from MTR have been passed down orally, hence lacking a standard reference. Stories from a variety of contributors are used in the Teachers' guides. In the sections of background information, which serves as a help for the teacher preparing each unit, there are stories either from the Bible, the Quran, the Hadith or a Malawian traditional folktale.

121 Social Studies Pupils' Book for Standard 6, p. 52.
5.2.6 Examples of stories:

The story of how Prophet Muhammad received the Qur'an (the Qur'an: sura 92, ayah 1)
Allah sent prophets and messengers to show mankind the right way of worshipping one Allah. Some prophets received guidance in a form of books. These books were sent through Angel Jibrel (Gabriel) to these messengers. The book sent down to the last prophet, Muhammad is called the Qur'an. The Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad by Allah through Angel Jibrel.

The first revelation of the Qur'an started in the year 610 AD. The revelation came when Prophet Muhammad was praying in a cave on Mount Hira in the city of Makkah (Mecca) during the month of Ramathan. Angel Jibrel came and asked him to read in the name of Allah. The Qur'an has 114 chapters called 'suras' which form 309 books called 'juzz'. Some suras, ie, 'chapters', were revealed when the Prophet was in Mecca while others were revealed while in Medina.

Source: Teachers' Guide for Standard 4, p. 68.

How the Book of Law was discovered (the Bible: 2 Kings, chapter 22, v 8-13)
In the year 621 BC, there lived a king in the land of Judah. The name of the king was Josiah. He was a God-fearing man and was not happy with the idol worship that was taking place in the Temple of God. His predecessor, Manasseh, did not fear God and so at the time that he was the ruler of Judah, he filled the Temple with idols. Josiah ordered that these idols be destroyed and the Temple be cleansed.

One day, as the men of Josiah led by Hilkiah were busy cleaning the Temple, they found the Book of the Law buried amongst idols. Hilkiah took it to King Josiah and read the contents to him. The king was happy with the contents of the book. It contained the commandments (teachings) which God had given to Moses, for the Israelites to follow and obey.


In Malawi, some people have special occasions for celebrating.
Occasions for celebrating may include the installation of a chief, a remembrance ceremony (chikumbutso), etc. During such occasions, women may prepare beer, food and organise dances such as chioda and chimtali. Men, too, organise dances such as gule wamkulu, malipenga, ingoma, etc.

Both women and men regard such occasions as special, and therefore, in some cases, put on their best clothes. What is remarkable on such occa-
sions is the fact that people do not forget the spirits of their dead relatives. Thus, special offerings and thanks giving are made to them and the spirits are believed to enjoy these remembrance festivals.

In the end, everybody who participates in the festival goes away happy and satisfied. However, it should be noted that most traditional feasts and celebrations are respected because it is believed that individuals are born once, initiated once, installed to chieftainship once, etc.

Source: Teachers' Guide for Standard 3, p. 27.

It is supposed to be a prerequisite knowledge among pupils to know local stories and proverbs "which are commonly told and heard in their homes". These stories are talked of as part of the religion, MTR, but as far as I can tell these are also the traditional stories described as culture in social studies. Likewise, referring to traditions as culture is suggested in unit 3 "The Malawian traditional story of creation". The creation story of the Chewa is used as an example of MTR creation stories. Chewa is the major tribe in Malawi; thus it is also part of the culture expressed in social studies.

The eighth theme "Moral values" has some moral stories collected from Malawian traditions. It is not obvious if these stories differ from the cultural traditions, or if they are the same. Moral is not only religious but cultural, this is seen in the new curriculum for primary schools in that moral teaching is taught in both social studies and religious education where traffic rules can serve as one example. The stories told as moral examples in religious education point more often to the Bible than to traditional stories or the Quran.

5.2.7 How to Become a Member of MTR, Islam or Christianity

Apart from telling something about the differences among the three religions, the way to become a member of MTR appears to me to include exactly the same features as described as culture in social studies. The suggested teaching and learning experience is to find out from Malawian elders about traditional Malawian initiation or marriage ceremonies. Concerning Christianity, pupils are supposed to talk to church leaders about how one becomes a Christian or a church member. From Muslim leaders,

127 Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education, passim.
pupils should find out "how one becomes a full member of the Muslim community".\textsuperscript{128}

5.2.8 Dimensions of Religion

In a handbook for teacher trainers the thematic approach is discussed. In relation to this, definitions of "religion" described by British authors like Ninian Smart and Michael Grimmitt are discussed. As examples of different dimensions of religion relevant for Malawi, only features of Christianity and Islam are provided. There is not any example drawn from MTR. For example, the mythological dimension is exemplified by the stories about the birth of Christ, the passion and resurrection of Christ and, concerning Islam, the stories of the ascension of Muhammed to heaven and coming back.\textsuperscript{129} However, the handbook deals with aspects of MTR in separate chapters where ideas about God and ancestral cults among the Malawian ethnic groups are described. What is interesting to notice, concerning the discussion of culture and religion, are the description of the secret society Nyau as a religious institution and, at the same time, as a culture.\textsuperscript{130}

The Nyau cult has resisted all Christian forces. It provides an eloquent testimony to the conservative strength of traditional religious institutions in the Chewa community and gives challenge that traditional social institutions with their religious core, my (!) not necessarily disappear by church forces alone. They play the role of religious consciousness and help to maintain the identity of African culture. Christianity must not offer a conservative view in the way of propagating the Gospel. A recognition of these African cultures is necessary.\textsuperscript{131}

Taurinus, one of the students I interviewed, saw a problem with the same cult, the Nyau. He found it difficult to see how Nyau could be incorporated into the church. He talked of Nyau as a culture and as a traditional religion.\textsuperscript{132} The distinction between culture and religion is a dilemma in the different books produced along the lines of the new religious education syllabus in Malawi. The solution to the problem is not likely to consist in clear-cut borders between culture and religion. The syllabus and the material provided to the schools should rather serve the pupils with sets of concepts

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{129} Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, pp. 1-4.
\bibitem{130} The Nyau cult is said to be a system of beliefs but also a society where the dancers play a great role. (Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, p. 31.)
\bibitem{131} Mphande, Themes in Religious Education, p. 33. My Italics.
\bibitem{132} Interview with Taurinus, May 8, 1996.
\end{thebibliography}
that can be helpful when they reflect over these questions. It is therefore a problem when the learning material, according to Rev. Mphande, does not focus on the African perspective on Christianity. 133

5.3 Christian Faith and Malawian Traditions

5.3.1 Problems Concerning Christian Faith and Malawian Traditions

In a series of interviews with students in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College in Zomba, among other things, opinions on MTR were discussed. One of the students, belonging to the Seventh Day Adventist Church, had gone through a change regarding his belief. After learning more about MTR at the university (in primary and secondary schools he did not learn a great deal about MTR), he felt that the belief in God was already existing in Africa before the missionaries came. Therefore, the Western form of Christianity, which most often is practised in Malawi, is not the right thing. The true roots he found in the original African traditions that were neglected or banned by the missionaries. He did not see an option in incorporating the African traditions with Christianity because to mix two religions would cause problems. To make Christianity universal he regarded as a betrayal, since in Africa, for example, there already was a religion. 134

This student obviously regarded MTR as a religion but that was not the general opinion expressed by either the students I talked to, or the general impression I got through informal talking to Malawians. To convert from Christianity or Islam to traditional religion is something very unusual, as far as I can tell. On the other hand, to become a Christian or a Muslim for a person living in the traditional Malawian society apparently has been common. This, perhaps, points more to MTR as a culture than as a distinctive religion.

133 “The African perspective is not something obvious in the units dealing with Christianity, but only in the units concerning African Traditional Religions.” Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.

134 Interview with Christopher, CC, May 7, 1996.
The distinction between religion and culture was not always clear in the discussions but I understood that the most common view was to regard MTR as a culture with certain traditions and customs. Nevertheless, the ambiguity in the matter cannot be overemphasised. At the same time as the students discussed MTR as cultural traditions they told me that they hardly knew anyone who did not belong to a religion. I do not know if they meant that they only knew of Christians and Muslims, or if they also regarded the traditionalists as one distinct religious group. An illustrative example is the answers I received from Lucy:

I think they [ATR] are not religions. Like Christians and Muslims, they believe in one God, a spirit, but African Traditional Religions do just have traditions.

I think that very few people do not belong to any church or any religion. 135

In many students' views, part of the African traditions should be incorporated into Christianity to a greater extent than is the case today. For instance, Master, a first year student, felt that the incorporation of more Malawian traditions would not cause problems since there are already differences between different Christian denominations. 136 A forth year student, Miriam, expressed similar thoughts as she said that she would like to see more of inculturation and indigenisation in the church. She also felt that if the churches would be more indigenous, people would hold on to one church and not move from church to church, which happens today. It would not cause conflicts to inculturate, because she thought that all religion and theology must be contextualised.

I feel that the church is not flexible. Three fourths of the hymns are Western and the liturgy is Western. Both the music and the liturgy should be more African. The preaching should concern all corners of life, however some issues are not touched. I think people go to church without their needs being fulfilled. 137

Another female student, Lucy in the first year, spoke of the conflict between the African traditions and the Christian faith. For example, she would not kneel down for an elder person to show respect if she was in a town, but in a village she would have to do it. All the students I interviewed talked of conflicts between the traditions and the Christian faith, even though some of them did not experience it personally. One example was mentioned by Akim, a fourth year student who told of funeral rites as

135 Interview with Lucy, CC, May 8, 1996.
136 Interview with Master, CC, May 7, 1996.
137 Interview with Miriam, CC, May 7, 1996. (No tape recorder was used.)
problematic. Traditionally you are supposed to talk to the deceased while the Christian does not believe that the person can hear you. Akim also said that most often the conflict between traditions and Christian faith is seen in times of crises. 138 Christopher, a first year student expressed the conflict as follows:

I feel that I am part of two worlds; one Western influenced and one traditional. In the churches there is tension between African customs and Christianity, as for example seen in initiation rites. 139

Miriam, a fourth year student, also talked of a conflict between the Western values, including the Western form of Christianity, and the African traditions. She said that she would like to call herself African but that she should call herself Western African because of all the Western influences on her life. 140

Of what I gather, the material concerning religious education in primary school does not encourage the pupils to regard the religions from scratch and thereafter decide which one to follow. It would probably not be relevant in the Malawian context. A thing that can turn out more problematic is the lack of discussions of the incorporation of MTR with Christianity or Islam. What is promoted is to accept one's own faith in relation to, and with understanding of, the other major religions in Malawi while preserving the uniqueness of each religion.

Concerning Christianity and MTR, there are African Christian theologians who argue that the belief in (the Christian) God already existed in Africa, including Malawi, before the missionaries brought their form of Christianity to the African countries. Thus, these African theologians stress that MTR (or ATR) basically consists in the belief in God. 141 Therefore the cultural practices that are part of MTR could and should be incorporated into Christianity. Using this approach means to contextualise theology, but to contextualise cannot possibly mean to mix two religions. This creates problems that can be very decisive in relation to the new syllabus in religious education. It seems as if the students are willing to incorporate more of the African traditions than what is done today. This problem concerning the Christian churches in Malawi is probably also a problem for the Muslims. To a great extent, Muslims in Malawi have incorporated aspects of

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138 Interview with Akim, CC, May 8, 1996.
139 Interview with Christopher, May 7, 1996.
140 Interview with Miriam, May 7, 1996.
141 See footnote 110.
the African traditions with their Islamic belief. Therefore, it is interesting to notice that these types of issues are not discussed in the material regarding primary religious education.

5.3.2 African Independent Churches

When asking about the students' opinions of the African Independent Churches, all students agreed that these churches are poor, interpret the Bible literally and incorporate African culture. One student, Akim, expressed the view that the African Independent Churches appeal to people because they take better care of people's day-to-day problems.

They are very much better [than mainstream churches] to take care of people's problems. My position is that, though I know there are others that are extreme, basically they keep the Christian message. They take the Bible literally, just as it is. They show many correlations with the African kind of culture, they are better equipped [than the mainstream churches].

Aspirations from so called African Independent Churches are to incorporate more of the traditional practices into Christianity. These churches have been a target for criticism since there has been a tendency among them to separate from the mainstream churches. In the making of the primary school syllabus in religious education, there have not been any representatives of African Independent Churches, whereby this problem is not considered in the teaching of Christianity for primary school pupils. However, in the social studies Pupils' book for standard 6 there is a chapter dealing with the history of these independent churches. Two early churches are mentioned; Providence Industrial Mission and Black Man's Church of God.

For African Christian Theologians identifying themselves with liberation theology, the African Independent Churches are said to play an important role due to their consideration of the African culture in their worship, organisation and community-life. The neglecting of these churches in the new religious education syllabus indicates that these theologians have not had a great deal of influence on the working out of the syllabus. The theologians that are educated at a higher level in Malawi are not numerous, and what the proportion are for the theologians who have accepted the thoughts of liberation theology I do not know. In Africa as a whole these

142 Bone, Religion in Malawi No.1, 1987, p.28.
144 Social Studies Pupils' Book for Standard 6, pp. 81-82.
theologians are making their voices heard through associations like EAT-WOT, therefore it might be a problem if the teaching of religious education does not discuss these churches or other issues that the liberation theology takes into account in their form of Christian teaching.

5.3.3 Witchcraft and Healing

In the interviews with the theology students at Chancellor College, the topics witchcraft, healing and ancestor spirits were touched upon. These beliefs were seen as traditional. All the students I interviewed thought that these beliefs, especially healing, are common in Malawi. Perhaps healing is easier to discuss since it is a positive power contrary to witchcraft, which can be negative. The teachers whom I talked to at Chancellor College all agreed that these beliefs are a reality today, even among Christians. Every student but one would go to a healer if they were sick and the doctor at the hospital could not cure them. 145 A fourth year student explained in the following manner:

Witchcraft is not so much talked about today but healers are used frequently. Healing works, everyone would use it! The church leaders condemn certain practices in the stand, but in practice they would themselves go to a healer if necessary. Wherever people do not find solutions to their problems or questions they go back to their traditions. 146

The informal talks I had with Malawians clearly put emphasis on the traditions like healing and witchcraft. Therefore, it is interesting to notice that these aspects of the Malawian traditions - whether considered as culture or religion - are only dealt with in one topic in religious education throughout all the primary school standards. The topic "Health and sickness" in standard 7 has as one objective to "explain the traditions about what should be done when a person is sick". Traditional Malawian treatment is supposed to be compared with modern treatment. Christian teachings about sickness and disease, illustrated from the New Testament and the work of churches, are supposed to follow the dealing with the traditional teachings. There are also objectives to deal with spirit possession in Malawian traditional life. However, the concluding objective is to "explain how God's different from the other spirits." 147 This sequence points to the statement concerning witchcraft and healing made in the interview with Rev. Mphande:

145 Interviews with students at CC, May, 1996.
146 Interview with, Miriam, May 7, 1996.
147 Primary School Teaching Syllabus: Religious Education, pp. 226, 228.
It is not taught that much. When it is talked of, the attitude towards it is negative. For example, in primary school witchcraft is taught through simple stories. The moral is that witchcraft is not wanted. ¹⁴⁸

Witchcraft is not mentioned in the syllabus but the topic on health and sickness is the most likely topic under which witchcraft could be discussed. If the attitude towards witchcraft is negative and the syllabus suggests the teaching to conclude with the Christian teaching, there is reason to believe that the traditional methods of treating sickness are not positively looked upon.

A reason for not providing room for witchcraft and healing was stated by Dr. Chingota who thought that these issues are considered too abstract for the pupils to grasp in primary school. ¹⁴⁹ A secondary school teacher gave an explanation to why issues such as witchcraft and healing were not dealt with in the old curriculum. He thought that the history of education in Malawi was the answer. "The mission churches like the Catholic and the Presbyterian did not put emphasis on issues they did not feel were worthwhile". ¹⁵⁰

There is a conflict between these traditions and the Christian belief. This can be a great problem because the education people receive does not include working on the problems they encounter in their day-to-day life. Therefore, the education in the schools leaves problems for the Christians and Muslims to handle in their churches or mosques. If this is not done, the people will not find solutions to their problems. I do not believe in handing out ready-made answers, since there is no such thing, rather what should be worthwhile for the religious education in schools and outside is to provide tools and form ideas on how to deal with the questions that people are thinking of.

### 5.4 Christianity, Islam, MTR and the Malawian Culture

The examples, collected from both social studies and religious education, show that there are difficulties in distinguishing between Malawian culture and Malawian Traditional Religion. Although by no means exhaustive, the examples provide a basis for discussion. It is possible that the distinction between what is regarded as a culture valid for every Malawian regardless

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¹⁴⁸ Interview with Rev. Mphande, May 6, 1996.
¹⁴⁹ Interview with Dr. Chingota, May 13, 1996.
¹⁵⁰ Interview with Jonathan, May 11, 1996.
of religious affiliation and what is to be considered as a religion is more obvious if you have access to all the material written in accordance with the new primary education curriculum, i.e. other Teachers’ guides, pupil’s books, etc.

Apart from this, there is nothing indicating that what is considered as a cultural practice in social studies differs from what is described as a religious practice in religious education. The traditional chief and the chief as a religious leader is one example; the weddings and initiation ceremonies constitute other examples. Moreover, whenever the Christian stories are referred to references to the Bible are given, and likewise with Islam and the Quran. The stories drawing on MTR are collected from oral traditions, which do not make them less relevant as stories. The point is rather that these stories seem to build the basis for stories referred to as cultural traditions as well as for religion.

In spite of these overlappings, there are some aspects that would make MTR more of a religion than a culture. The prayers and the ideas about god constitute examples. It is not my aim to rid MTR of all aspirations of religion. As a concept, MTR is synonymous with ATR, African Traditional Religion. ATR is usually thought of as a religion, or rather perhaps as religions. As far as I understand, every African society has had their own traditions, therefore there is not one single religion or culture that can apply to Africa as a whole. 151 The problem I see is not whether MTR is a religion(s) or not, but in order to put the other two religions in relation to MTR it is important to be aware of the religious as well as cultural aspects. It does make a difference for Christians, and for that matter Muslims, if MTR is a religion or a culture.

To discuss MTR as a religion makes the reality in Malawi appear as a society with three religions existing side by side in the same context. If this context is made up of traditions and customs that constitutes the Malawian culture the three religions must each deal with this culture. If MTR builds on the same traditions and customs as the Malawian culture that must have implications for Christianity and Islam. You can be a Christian and inculcate certain practices that go in line with your faith. On the contrary, it is more difficult for a Christian to conduct practices that are part of another religion.

The Christian students I interviewed spoke about conflicts between their Christian faith and the traditions commonly practised in their home areas.

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151 See Phiri, Woman in African Church and Culture.
They wished to see more of inculturation in their churches. This thought is in line with the emphasis on indigenisation stressed by African Christian Theologians in organisations like EATWOT. This would perhaps be easier if what they regard as MTR is considered to be cultural practices. If MTR is regarded as a distinctive religion, there is a risk that the incorporation of traditional values might violate the Christian teaching, and that is something these African theologians do not intend. However, the description of Christianity in the teaching material and syllabus seems to be based on interpretations of Christianity from a Western perspective. Thus, the picture of Christianity presented in religious education is one of the mainstream churches in Malawi. That makes it difficult to interpret Christianity in African terms.

For the Muslims in Malawi the situation is special in that a great deal of the Malawian traditions has been incorporated into Islam. Therefore, the problems of inculturation should be just as important for the Muslims as for the Christians. However, in the teaching material in religious education I have not found anything that suggests that Islam is presented with regard to its special situation in Malawi. Rather, the traditional teaching of Islam as a religion from the East is described. The references to literature on Islam mainly concern Muslims worldwide rather than the Muslims in Malawi in particular. This can create problems for the Muslim children belonging to those Muslims who have incorporated many Malawian traditions. When they learn about Islam in the schools it is a different type of Islam than that with which they identify themselves. I have not found anything in the material that indicates that the pupils receive help to understand how Islam is in Malawi. When these Muslim children are going to be integrated with the Christian children the religious education presents a picture of the Muslims that suggests another type of Islam than the Islam they know. Thus, these Muslims have to change to be integrated!

Out of the discussion of religion and culture it can be concluded that there seem to be existential problems that the syllabus and textbooks should help the pupils to deal with. The children are supposed to develop interpretations of life and make their own systems of belief, but I am not convinced that the syllabus and teaching materials help the children to do this without condemning certain practices. The books seem to focus on descriptions of the religions in order to develop an understanding, rather than to discuss conflicts that are part of everyday life.

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6 Final Discussion

6.1 The New Syllabus in Religious Education

In the introduction to this study a quotation drawn from the Primary teacher education syllabus in religious education read "[---] Nothing is more difficult in the field of education than to plan and develop a suitable curriculum." The revised curriculum for primary school in Malawi has as an objective to change the methods of teaching from a teacher-oriented to a child-centred teaching. Of what I gather from the new approach in the curriculum in Malawi, the prime aim is to let the children take a greater part in the teaching through activities than before. Through the teachers' greater knowledge of the different developmental stages as children grow it is perhaps easier to adjust the teaching to the perspective of the children. There is also an attempt to use a Malawian, rather than a foreign, context as a basis for the different subjects in primary education. Hence, the conception of knowledge could be said to be contextual.

The intention behind the new syllabus in religious education is to incorporate what is stated as the three major religions in Malawi; Christianity, Islam and Malawian Traditional Religion, in order to promote tolerance and understanding. There is also a new approach to use themes as a basis for the teaching of religious education in primary school. This is a radical change of the previous Bible-centred teaching, and it also suggests a changed role for Christianity. Nankwenya, who analysed the Christian influence on education in Malawi, concluded that the missionaries' way of teaching was "orderly, step-by-step and systematic". Regarding the old syllabus in religious education, this could be true. It followed a sequence in which the study of Christianity moved from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The new approach of using themes might cause a loss of sequence in the Christian teaching, where the perspective of the history of salvation - which is a crucial element of Christianity - runs the risk of disappearing.

It seems as if the new syllabus has tried to meet the demands of the Muslims in the country. They have been able to be members of committees and to write in the Teachers' guides. MTR has not had any representative, apart from people (I gather mainly Christians) who have interpreted the traditional beliefs and customs. Irrespective of this, with the incorporation of
MTR it might be easier to achieve the curricular aspirations that Kelvin Banda stated for the curricula in the 1970s, and which apparently still was a problem with the previous curriculum in Malawi. That is to bridge the gap between the communities and the schools in attitudes of values and expectations, and to stand up for Malawi’s cultural heritage. At least the new syllabus provides greater possibilities for the Muslims and the traditionalists than the previous religious education in primary school. Nevertheless, with a teaching that demands understanding and ability to enter into other faiths, the new teaching might prove more difficult for the Muslims than the previous one where there was a concentration on facts. One problem with the emphasis on the three major religions is that all the other religious groups, like the Hindus, are not considered at all in the teaching of religious education. The new syllabus definitely is a challenge not only for the teachers and pupils, but also for the churches and Muslim associations. Even though MTR is described as one religion it is understood that there are several different tribes and traditions in Malawi, all of which might not feel content with the description of MTR in the syllabus.

Hypothesis 1

As a decisive factor for the realisation of the new syllabus, the practical reality facing the schools in Malawi cannot be overestimated. The background and previous studies highlighted some of the great problems that are part of reality. It is positive that the number of pupils enrolling in primary school has grown rapidly since education became free in 1994. The negative aspect is that the already crowded class-rooms or other facilities in use have become even more crowded. The size of the classes has increased with numbers up to at least 200 at a time, there is a lack of all kinds of material and there are around 22,000 untrained teachers in primary school. Most teachers lack knowledge of Islam and the examination-orientation is still a fact, thus suggesting that the new syllabus in religious education will not be easily adopted throughout the schools - regardless of the good will of the teachers. This shows that my first hypothesis is verified; the philosophy behind the new religious education syllabus does not match reality. In spite of all this, the aspiration to try to create a syllabus that actually deals with more than one religion, and the effort to stress the pupil-based activities are laudable attempts in a difficult educational context.
6.2 Dealing with Three Religions

Hypothesis 2

My second hypothesis turned out to be falsified. In line with the objective in religious education to promote tolerance and understanding, both the similarities and differences between the religions are described. I do not comprehend the dealing with commonalities to result in an effacement of the distinctive characteristics of each religion. Of what I gather from the presentation of the differences between the religions the pupils should be aware of the uniqueness of each religion, in order to acquire knowledge and develop an understanding of people with different beliefs. However, considering the emphasis in the Teachers' guides, Christianity receives more attention than the other two religions.

My understanding is that the three religions are not there as alternatives among which the pupils are supposed to choose. The religious education rather has a presumption that the pupils already belong to one of the religions. If the aim was to present different, available alternatives I would have expected to find stories about conversion. As far as I understand, conversion is not dealt with anywhere in the syllabus. Considering the great number of Christians and Muslims in the country, conversion should have played a great role in the life of the Malawians. Following this, one thought that comes to mind is that most often the conversion supposedly has taken place among traditionalists who have become either Christians or Muslims. Conversion the other way around or between Muslims and Christians is not very common. Perhaps this implies the problem with MTR as a religion or a culture.

Previously, the Christian Church did not have a great deal of dialogue with Islam. When the primary school syllabus creates a picture pointing to both similarities and differences between the religions there is a challenge for Christians and Muslims to answer. Since it is difficult to delineate similarities and divergences between the religions, perhaps it is better to point to possibilities to dialogue. It should be of interest to the Church if the schools provided material for discussions.

6.3 Religion and Culture

It is not surprising that there is a difficulty in distinguishing between religion and culture in a country where religion is a natural part of life.
Judging from the material on religious education and social studies used in this study, in many respects MTR could be said to consist of the same traditions as those that make up the Malawian culture. At the same time in the syllabus it is clearly stated that MTR is one of three major religions in Malawi. When MTR is described as a religion it should provide features of a complete religion, a requirement that the material used in the syllabus and Teachers' guides does not seem to fulfil. A reason as to why MTR is not described in as many aspects as Christianity can be that the traditional Malawian cultural and religious practices are the same, thus suggesting that there are two major religions in the country, not three: Christianity and Islam.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis of this study has been verified. The description of MTR and the Malawian culture has implications for Christianity and Islam. When you are supposed to follow one of the three religions it makes it difficult to describe an interpretation of Christianity and Islam that is interpreted in African terms. The Christianity described in the syllabus and teaching material is the mainstream Christianity. The African Independent Churches are not dealt with, except as part of the history in the subject social studies. These churches, among others, have attempted to incorporate parts of the African culture into the Christian teaching. They are also mentioned in EATWOT documents as a formative factor for African Liberation Theology. With a syllabus that describes Christianity as something that distinguishes itself from the tradition, the interpretations of Christianity made by African Christian Theologians, who argue for contextualization, are excluded. It is not possible to incorporate a religion with another religion, or to incorporate a religion with traditions that form a different reality. If MTR is a distinctive religion, I find it difficult to discern what it is that constitutes the Malawian culture that Christianity can work in.

For the Muslims, the picture of Islam that stands out in the syllabus and Teachers' guides seems to build on the Islam found in the East. The specific situation in Malawi where many of the Muslims have incorporated aspects of the Malawian traditions into Islam does not seem to be considered. The previous syllabus with its emphasis on Christianity left the Muslims with a feeling of alienation. With the new syllabus there are great expectations on the incorporation of the Muslims in the primary education system. Therefore, the description of Islam in terms that might not corre-

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spond to the experiences of the Muslim pupils can be problematic. If the Muslim children do not recognise themselves in the picture presented in the religious education in primary school, it is not likely that their questions are dealt with. The children of the other religions learn to be tolerant and understanding towards a Muslim that is not the type of Muslim with whom the Muslim child identify him/herself. Carried to extremes, the religious education suggests that the Muslim children who belong to the groups who have incorporated Malawian traditions should change themselves in order to be accepted. If Islam would be described with special reference to the Malawian situation, the questions the Muslim children have would probably be taken more seriously.

The presumption that every pupil belongs to a religion does not exclude the possibilities of developing and changing the thoughts within a religion. Several of the Christian students I interviewed told of a conflict between their Christian faith and the Malawian traditions. They also wanted to incorporate more of the Malawian traditions into their (mainstream) churches. This would presumably be easier if MTR was described as consisting of traditional customs and traditions as part of the Malawian culture. The presentation of MTR as an alternative to Christianity and Islam makes it more difficult to deal with the questions concerning tradition that supposedly both the Christians and the Muslims have. Issues like witchcraft and healing, which are very urgent matters in the life of the Christians in Malawi, are only dealt with in one unit in religious education throughout primary school. The students I interviewed did not feel that the churches tackled these problems sufficiently either.

Even though the persons I talked to are adults, the questions they have are supposedly valid even for primary school children. If the children grow up with a feeling that they are part of two worlds or that traditional customs cause problems for a Christian or a Muslim, it would be helpful if these issues were discussed even in primary school. The point is not to hand out ready-made answers, but to provide the children with sets of concepts so that they themselves will be able to find solutions to the problems they are actually facing. Even though the students belong to a religion they still feel conflicts. The books I have been able to examine seem to be directed towards a description of the religions in order to create knowledge and understanding. They do not appear to be written with the conflicts of real life in mind.
6.4 Final Comments

It would be interesting to follow the implementation of the syllabus throughout the primary schools in Malawi and to make interviews with teachers and pupils. It would be especially interesting to try to get hold of the questions the children have about their lives. If the syllabus provides the churches and other religious institutions in the country with questions I think that is good. With more children attending school, this could also stress the advantages of dialogue between the religions at a higher level than primary education.

A study of the syllabus in religious education in Malawi is valuable for more than the Malawians themselves. I have learnt to contemplate more clearly on problems that are important also from a Swedish starting-point. The problems with the new syllabus outlined in this study are hypothetical assumptions, and I am not convinced that these are the problems that are going to be visible in reality. Primary problems like getting all children to attend school might overshadow the effort to renew religious education. What I have become aware of is what a description of a religion can bring about. It does not solve all problems to incorporate Islam and MTR into the syllabus. The pluralism of Islam and Christianity, and I gather also of MTR, are not discussed. This shows the difficulties of interpreting religions, and - perhaps even more - it points to the difficulties of interpreting tradition as religion and to distinguish between the two. My understanding is also that if there is going to be a school for everyone, it is important for the pupils to be able to recognise themselves in the teaching. It is supposedly easier if they feel at home in the description that is presented at school.

After examining the primary school syllabus in religious education in Malawi I think that what might be more difficult in the field of education than to develop a curriculum is to carry out its objectives in reality.
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Appendix

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with students in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Chancellor College and with persons working on the review of the syllabus in religious education for primary school in Malawi. The interviews were held in May 1996. Provided here are a few samples of questions and answers. For more detailed summaries of the interviews please see my Masters dissertation: Olausson, J, Christianity, Islam, Malawian Traditional Religion and the Malawian Culture: Possible Implications of the New Primary School Syllabus in Religious Education in Malawi (M.A., Institute of Tema, Department of Religious Studies, Linköpings universitet, Sweden, 1996).

Do you think that Christianity is a universal religion that fits anywhere in the world?

- Yes, for me, after reading some books I have realised that what we call Christianity, at first was mixing up with the European culture, and we thought that was Christianity. But we did not even know or notice that when Christianity was coming it came together with European culture. So that culture now is what we are trying to demarcate from Christianity. We are trying to remove the culture itself and get the Christian core. We take the Christian faith and marry it with the African culture. The Christian message itself which can fit anywhere in the world but there is a need that we should take only the Christian message and then incarnate it in our culture. (Taurinus, a third year student)

- I think my point of view is that Christianity is not supposed to be everywhere in the world. Those early Christians tried to convert everybody to Christianity because they wanted to make it universal. But I think it is not right because, like in Africa, we had our African Traditional Religions and we Africans believed in God, only we had means of communicating to God through our ancestral spirits. But the whole idea about God, even before the white man in Africa, it was there. I feel that I was betrayed being committed into Christianity. (Christopher, a first year student)

What does African Traditional Religions mean to you?

- At Chancellor College, they do not present it as a distinct religion. The way it is presented is very theological. You cannot pinpoint that this is African Traditional Religion in essence, it is not there because it is expressed
in different ways. There is not much of traditional religions because most of Malawi is christianised. I would not call people traditionalists, not even in the villages. In some pockets, yes, but even in those traditions that have identified with African Traditional Religions, at the same time they have invited Christianity so they are different. (Akim, a fourth year student)

Is it possible to incorporate aspects of the African culture with Christianity?
- My church is Western, the songs are translated from English to the vernacular language. I think that the church should not incorporate more African traditions because syncretism causes problems. There is a danger in mixing two religions. I think it is better to leave the Christian church and adhere to a traditional religion. I belong to the Seventh Day Adventist Church but I will go back to African Traditional Religions. I feel more for ATR after studying at University level. (Christopher, a first year student)

Do you know anyone who does not belong to a religion?
- No, I do not know anyone who does not belong to any religion at all. I only know a few who have decided to go back to their roots and worship ancestors. Then there are some people who say that they are Christian but they do not go to church. (Akim, a fourth year student)
- I do not know anyone who does not belong to a religion. Everyone in Malawi does belong to a religion, there would be very few who do not belong to a religion. (Miriam, a fourth year student)

Do you feel any conflicts between your African identity and Christian faith?
- Yes, before there were some conflicts because the one who tried to live a more African way of life were said not to be a Christian. But today as we are going towards inculturation, as for me I do not see any conflict. I can be identified as an African but I can also be identified as a Christian. I am not taking Christianity as a foreign culture. It is not a culture but a belief that can be incorporated in any culture, so for me I do not see any conflict between African identity and Christian faith. I can be an African and a good Christian too. However, those who are taking Christianity with the Western culture can feel a lack of identity. If they can discard and take the Christian faith and maybe put together with the African that could cause no problems. But we are going towards our own identity. (Taurinus, a third year student)
- I do not feel any conflict, but there are rituals that are making a person not feeling free, like puberty rites. Christianity do not like people to practice those African rites, but Africans themselves will value those rites. There is a conflict: 'should we abandon our culture or should Christianity cling to my culture or should I abandon Christianity?'. (Malla, a third year student)

**What are the teachers’ opinions on the new syllabus in religious education?**

- I think most of the teachers like this new approach, but the problem is that most of them have not been oriented to that kind of teaching. And, again, very few teachers right now have had this kind of religious education. Most of them have been taught in a certain denominational line. So the unit of Islam, for example, they find it very, very difficult. We need a lot of work to introduce this kind of method even at Teacher Training Colleges.

Another problem, because I also visited one of the Teacher Training Colleges in Blantyre, there I found a tutor who had passed through this university. But, religious education is not given prominence, not even at Teacher Training Colleges. Religious education is not examinable, not even at the Teacher Training Colleges, so not many teachers opt for it. (Dr. Chingota, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Chancellor College, Zomba)

**Advantages with Teaching Religious Studies as Bible Knowledge in Secondary Schools**

1. Estimated 75% of the people profess Christian religion.
2. ATR is about 10%
3. The Bible is regarded as traditional tool of moral education
4. Religion impinges on the life of Malawians.

**Disadvantages with Teaching Religious Studies as Bible Knowledge in Secondary School**

1. Few trained subject (BK) teachers.
2. Ignores ATR and Islam.

(Mr. Chonzi, Department of CATS, Chancellor College, Zomba)

- In terms of evangelism in the sense that you end up with a sense that everything seems to be relative, with no absolutes. If there are no absolutes
you do not see any need for evangelization. That is a disadvantage. Maybe what that means is a different way of evangelism where you are attracted by way of behaviour rather than words. How do you evangelise, do you converse or demonstrate by living? (Dr. Chingota)

**The Nkhoma Synod of CCAP and Religious Education**

- The Nkhoma Synod of CCAP was not satisfied with the teaching of the Bible, even though the former curriculum was occupied with Christianity only. Therefore, they prepared their own topics for their own schools. The aim was to teach proper words of God twice a week. In the government schools the Bible was taught alongside with allegorical stories but in CCAP schools the plain Bible was used. CCAP saw a moral decline and wanted to set standards for behaviour, enabling the students to grow spiritually and to see how the teachings from the Bible should affect one's life. The aim of the regular syllabus is knowledge, but we think that education should contribute to spiritual growth as well. (Jonathan and Flemmings, members of the Nkhoma Synod, the Presbyterian Church, Malawi)
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