

# **The Long Walk to Freedom: From Religious Instruction to Religion in Education**

**Manila Soni Amin**

## **1. Introduction**

Whenever there is a change of government, the first change it would make, is to the system of education and South African governments past and present are no exception to the rule. A brief journey through Education in "South Africa" reveals that from the darkest days of colonisation, the only form of education available to Blacks in this country was Religious Instruction (RI). Reading was taught to enable the reading of the Bible. Writing had to be taught because in the absence of a large number of Bibles, excerpts had to be written down and committed to memory. Secondly, there was a need to learn the master's language to facilitate communication. Thirdly, there was a need to learn basic arithmetic to be effective workers.

A brief journey through education in South Africa will enable us to determine the politics and philosophies that informed the education systems. The walk from R.I. in the mid-1650s to Religion Education (RE) in the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002 is indeed very, very long and spans three and a half centuries. Although I will discuss the origins of RI very briefly to give my presentation some historical perspective, my emphasis will be on the post-apartheid period.

## **2. Education during Colonial Rule in the Cape**

Soon after the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in April 1652, to establish a settlement in the Cape, he proclaimed a colonial mission on behalf of the

Dutch East India Company (DEIC), in which the name of Christ may be extended, the interests of the company promoted. Initially, education was used as a tool to colonise the country and "to convert the heathens" to Christianity. The aim of colonial education was to win over the so-called "savage" so that there would be minimal resistance to European domination.

The religions, languages and cultures of people of colour in South Africa have been the target of colonialism from the very first arrival of European settlers to the shores of the southern tip of Africa. During DEIC rule in the Cape, no other religion or even Christian denomination except the Dutch Reformed Church was allowed to teach or preach. Religious leader, and avid proponent of interfaith dialogue, Omar (1998:3) explains the harsh law in operation at this time:

In order to enhance the Dutch Reformed missionary efforts a special religious decree known as the Maatsyker Placart was enacted at the Cape. In terms of this decree no other religion or Christian denomination could be practised in public. Baptism had to take place in accordance with the Dutch Reformed tradition only and anyone who ventured to convert others to their faith was liable for a death sentence.

This Maatsyker Placart is an indication of the depth of religious intolerance and discrimination in South Africa from the earliest days of colonization. Language, education and religion were used as tools to convert the slaves and the indigenous people and possess their land. Slaves would have to learn the Master's language so that orders could be communicated more effectively and to teach "Christian" morality. As Molteno (1983:19) asserts

... the more total the slaves' subjugation was, the less they would have resisted the system of forced labour in which they found themselves trapped.

He further explains that although the slaves were torn from their homes, separated by thousands of miles "they still had each other and their beliefs". It is this minimal ideological base of independence that had to be removed if the slaves were indoctrinated with their master's religion (Molteno.1983:22).

The aim was to hold captive the minds of people and impose the master's beliefs selectively. Thus, one can see that the hidden curriculum was already at work in education in the Cape, which was the first settlement in the country and had set a pattern for the rest of the country. Barely one month after the arrival of the first "shipment" of slaves who totalled 170 in number, slave schools began and the following entry was made in Van Riebeeck's diary:

17 April 1658

Began holding school for slaves... to induce them to learn the Christian prayers, they were promised each a glass of brandy and two inches of tobacco, when they finish their task. (Christie 1983: 32).

The above is an indication of the lengths to which the colonisers went to *induce them to learn the Christian prayers*. It also illustrates how Christianity itself was abused and exploited by the colonisers to enslave the indigenous people and take their land, how alcohol and tobacco were used to further "enslave" the slave community. The effects of offering that brandy are still nightmares for the families of workers on the Cape wine lands where workers are still paid by the "tot system".

In 1676, the first suggestion of segregation in schooling came from within the church. Although some writers suggest that the segregation was linked to issues of class, I believe that all slaves in "South Africa" were people of colour, so by implication it was racial segregation. The church also instituted separate worship institutions which contradicts any suggestion that race was not the issue. In 1685, a separate school for slave children under twelve was established.

During British rule the religious laws were relaxed slightly in that all the Christian churches could now spread the word and conduct schools. Schools were developed along social class and for the higher classes there was no emphasis on Religious Education although it was there in practice. In 1893, by Proclamation No. 388, for the first time real discriminatory legislation regarding education was possible and separate church schools could be established for poor whites.

### 3. Christian National Education (CNE)

South African society has been divided, with people and institutions divided along racial and ethnic lines. Like a cancer, apartheid stretched its long tentacles in all directions and made it difficult for religious, linguistic or cultural communities across the racial divide to come together. Not only did apartheid South Africa align itself with one religion, it was informed by only one denomination of that religion.

Christian National Education was the name given to the National Party Government's intention to control all education institutions for blacks by implementing (CNE) principles of white supremacy formulated in 1939. It was felt that this policy could give concrete meaning to the Afrikaner ideology of white supremacy.

The roots of CNE may be traced back to 1902 after the Anglo Boer War. The two former Boer republics established CNE schools in opposition to the English medium schools of Milner and especially to counter-act the aggressive Anglicisation policy of British rule. The few CNE schools were symbols of hope for the Afrikaner movement. When the National Party was established, this movement gained political character. After 1915, NP caucuses gave it support and in 1918, a cultural organization, the Afrikaner Broederbond was established. It was destined to play a major role in all aspects of South African society and life and would find its fulfilment during National Party rule. It was dedicated to:

arousing Afrikaner self-consciousness, and to inspire love of Afrikaans language, religion, traditions, country and people (quoted in Willis 1994:28).

Education was seen as a key area to ensure an Afrikaner - dominated South Africa. Thus, in 1948 when the NP gained control its first mission was to control education. The implementation of a countrywide CNE policy with its 14 articles based on Calvinist doctrines began in 1948. The following introduction to the document states:

We want no mixing of languages, no mixing of cultures, no mixing of religions, and no mixing of races. The struggle for the Christian and National School still lies before us (Willis 1994:29-31).

The words clearly illustrates the racial roots of Afrikaner ideology of the time. It contradicts the suggestion that self determination was the motivating factor of apartheid rather than race. I interpret self determination as a consequence of the ideology and not the cause. All the articles were an expression of the worldview of the Dutch Afrikaner people derived from Calvinist philosophy. However, Langham Dale, the first Superintendent-General of the Cape was the architect of the proposed education policy in 1893 (Quoted in Willis: 1994: 6). Ironically, this was the year of the First Parliament of World Religions held in Chicago.

The clearly demarcated living areas and segregated education resulted in a situation in which, South African children could go through life without having the opportunity to know or understand children from groups other than their own. Apartheid education imposed on our learners aimed to promote euro-centred, colonial, cultural, racial and Christian domination. Education for people of colour was a dialectical struggle, between the values, language, religion and culture of the home and that of the school. School culture was highly influenced by western concepts of values, norms, religion, language and supposed supremacy. The philosophy of Christian National Education and Fundamental Pedagogics informed this style of education, as did the belief in white supremacy. Each community lived in its own little fish bowl and "trained" its children separately.

## **4. Post Apartheid South Africa - The Long, Long Walk to Freedom**

### **4.1 Democratic Change**

With the democratisation of South Africa, we find that suddenly we are out of our fish bowls and thrust into the ocean. The ocean has potential, for great openings and opportunities on the one hand and for suicide on the other. This means we have two choices. We can learn to benefit from our diversity and make use of all the available opportunities thereby creating a rich and diverse patchwork quilt of cultures or we can sacrifice our languages, values, traditions, cultures and adopt euro American cultures.

Apartheid South Africa had segregated communities so that each had little knowledge of the cultures (arts and literatures, customs, traditions, histories and experiences, languages and literacies, religions, and

worldviews) of their fellow South Africans or of the world at large. Instead there is suspicion and disdain of the cultures of all non-western peoples. A knowledge of the cultures of fellow South Africans particularly and the world in general is crucial for people to learn to respect one another and for nation building. It is essential for people to understand one another.

While the issues of race and gender are increasingly being addressed since 1994, cultural apartheid continues and could replace racial apartheid unless it is tackled head-on. The agonising labour pangs of the new South Africa struggling to be born can hardly be heard above the deathly cries of the old, which consistently offers the strongest resistance.

Education is a major transmitter of culture yet education does not reflect the diversity of the country. The historical background of education in the country illustrates that at no time has there been an approach to education that has been inclusive of all the cultures of South Africa. In other words at no time has the diversity of South Africa been addressed by the education system (Soni-Amin 1999).

I will now discuss the process of attempting to implement Multi-Religion Education in South African Schools. I will begin with my own experiences of teaching multi-faith education in Apartheid South Africa. Although I am dealing with the post-apartheid period, the following very important experimental process was begun during the turbulent eighties and began preparing me as much as it prepared my students for what was to become a reality-post-apartheid South Africa.

#### **4.2 The First NEST School - Uthongathi**

During the eighties, the New Era Schools Trust was established. As its name suggests it aimed to prepare learners for a new era in South Africa, a post-apartheid South Africa. Unlike other private schools, that began as white schools and slowly opened its doors to learners of colour, Uthongathi was established as a non-racial, non-sexist school from its inception in 1987. Ironically, it drew twenty-five percent of its students from each of the four classified "race" groups in the country. Professing to be non-racial it used race as a category to admit students. Similarly, hoping to offer a multicultural education it set out to draw from the various cultures of

learners. Unlike other private schools, the staff also consisted of teachers from the various "race" groups. "African" teachers of indigenous origin were not only employed to teach "African" languages. In addition to a Zulu teacher, a history teacher, a mathematics teacher, a Computer Science teacher and soon a Deputy Principal were employed from this ethnic group. Merit on the basis of fair representation and commitment to multiculturalism were key to staff employment.

I was fortunate to be appointed to the staff of this private school, Uthongathi, the first of the NEST schools at its inception in 1987. It was to open up my horizon, and expose me to what was going to be post-apartheid South Africa. While the founders and the Board of NEST had the vision of an ideal to attain, it was the students on the ground, the staff and more especially the style of the Principal, Mr Richard Thompson that were responsible for the "successful" evolution of this school. The language, the culture, the religion, the history, the gender, the ethnicity, the ethos came under scrutiny as the questions, came rushing in as pupils challenged the validity of some school rules. They challenged us at every turn! Their keen spirits, their ability to question issues led to the evolution of a school which I describe as not only South Africa's *first truly multicultural* school but to date it is the "*only truly multicultural school*" in South Africa. Students questioned the use of English only as the language of communication in school while Zulu and Afrikaans were to be only to be used in the classroom for teaching and learning the language. All students at Uthongathi had to learn three languages but English was lingua franca and the language of teaching and learning for the future leaders of South Africa.

Students questioned, "Why can't we use our mother tongue to speak on the play-ground and in the dining hall?" It led to Tuesday becoming a Zulu day, when all teachers and students had to use Zulu for communication. Afrikaans was never going to be outdone and the Afrikaans teacher also protested. So, Thursdays became the day for communication in Afrikaans. In this way it was the learners who implemented "multilingualism" a term that has now become cliché yet very few understand how it can be implemented in institutions of learning.

I used to teach English and History and was probably the first teacher in the country to teach Comparative Religion at the High school level to a very religiously diverse group of students. However, Second

Language speakers of English had to attend English as Second Language classes to improve their English so they could not attend these classes. A visit to the Hare Krishna temple, the Mosque, the Synagogue and the Cathedral, awakened their interest in Religion Education. At the next Indaba, (monthly meetings between staff, Principal and students), where all these issues were discussed, students challenged the Principal saying that if we wanted to expose them to multicultural education, how could we deny them attendance at the Comparative Religion class! So, the students won and Uthongathi was another step closer to evolution. They questioned "why could girls wear earrings while boys were not allowed to do so? How can that be non-sexist?" The Principal Richard Thompson came to the staff and said, "what now?" Well, replied one smart young lady "Ask them to wear a pair of studs, just as the girls do and not a single one!" Guys don't wear a pair of earrings- they wear one. So, not many took up the challenge. One young male from grade seven wore a pair of earrings (Amin, Soni-Manila. 1998: Address to WCCES, C.T. SA).

These anecdotes tell people in education how the early battles of the first true integrated school were fought, lost and won. We know that schools have been and are contested areas in South Africa. These anecdotes are also a tribute to those students who were responsible for educating the staff just as much as staff, were expected to educate them. It also reveals that "transformation" and "change" is not instant and that you cannot order it like you can order a pizza which will be delivered free in thirty minutes. The road to freedom, transformation and equality is long, painful and hazardous. Just as Madiba's walk to freedom was long, the road to real "freedom" in learning institutions, where we accept not only people of all races and ethnicity and impose our culture, religion and language but where we respect the cultures, religions and languages of our learners in our curricula and daily lives is a very long way off.

#### 4. 3 The National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI)

Discussions about religion in education began soon after De Klerk's twilight speech when he un-banned all the political parties and freed former President Mandela. The NEPI document asserted that the Religious Instruction or indoctrination established religious discrimination and coercion in education (quoted in Chidester). NEPI offered three alternatives.



- 1) Eliminate religion totally from the curriculum but held that neglecting religion, which played such an important part in South African life would be denying our religious diversity.
- 2) Establish parallel programmes in Religious Education for each religious group, which would be a continuation of apartheid education and the promotion of particular religious interests.
- 3) Implement a multi-religion education programme in which children learn about religion. It should have clear educational objectives and promised tolerance and respect for diversity.

There were debates and discussions but the main question states Chidester (1994), was: "whether a compromise could be worked out that accommodated both options two and three"?

This would mean serving individual or particular interests on the one hand and learning about religion, religions and religious diversity on the other. No agreement could be reached but the debate was destined to continue in different places at different times and probably different people.

#### **4.4 The National Education and Training Forum (NETF)**

Serious transformation strategies began in 1994, when the National Education and Training Forum (NETF) established working committees to decide on policy, principles and interim curricula for all subjects. Professor Kruger of UNISA and I were the only persons who were elected for representation on both committees, that is one for Curriculum Development and the other for Policy Formulation. However, when the two committees were collapsed into one and a set of names was sent to Ms Mary Metcalfe the MEC for Education in Gauteng, neither Professor Kruger nor I were on the short list. Ms Metcalfe rejected the list, as it was not balanced in terms of race and gender. I was then invited to serve on that committee.

From the very first meeting of the NETF committee, it was a struggle with one of our conservative brothers taking over the chairmanship of the committee without consultation. Members sorted the matter and at the second meeting we had a neutral "outsider" on the chair. As in all other subjects there were eight persons on the NETF subject committee that formulated the interim policy and suggested options for Religious Education. During this process there was an opportunity for the public to respond to

whether multi-faith education should be introduced. To my surprise, as early as 1994, the majority of the responses were that Multi-faith education should be introduced. These were mostly submissions by universities and colleges and were carefully thought out. The chairperson of the committee suggested that in the light of public submissions multi-faith was the way forward. The following week, a barrage of submissions had come in. They were mostly copies of a typed letter with numerous signatures on them. Each of these was a negative response to the suggestion of multi-faith education. There were individual letters also which showed that people were genuinely concerned and had questions. The main thrust of the letters illustrated that people assumed that they had to become practitioners of all the religions or World Religions. This means that people could not differentiate between the academic study about religions and the confessional approach to religion as taught during the apartheid era. One very indignant response was "I do not think that Muhammad or the Buddha are Gods!" I thought that if the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH, heard that he would turn in his grave, but not the Buddha, for he was cremated!

While collating and analysing the public responses an alarming and most degrading and unethical situation was exposed! One of the teachers responded on a letter that was sent to the school. It stated: "Important decisions are being taken in Pretoria with regard to Religious Instruction. Biblical Studies will be out and World Religions will be taught! Fax your objections immediately ... (Amin 1987-2002). This meant that some one from the committee had sent the faxes to schools creating a situation of mass hysteria, urging them to object to the introduction of multi-faith Religious Studies. It was in black and white. The fax number of the sender was on it. After a dressing down by the chairperson, the committee continued its work.

Finally, the principles were laid down and policy options designed. While some members suggested that some degree of multi- religion education should be taught, the two inspectors of Biblical Studies were of the opinion that schools should be given a choice. Others felt that "the degree to which multi-faith education was implemented could be negotiable but that every school should implement World Religions and any other combination it selected." Some of us felt that we were back where we had started! The committee could not agree and the matter was put to the vote. The group for multi-faith had one vote more. By the next meeting

NAPTOSA had contacted a teacher from Cape Town who was on the Committee and who voted in favour of World Religions to vote against it. He was devastated but once again the reactionary element had succeeded in blocking democratic educational reforms. The reason for the resistance was, "where would children get nurturing into a religion?" My response, "for years we have been sending our children to Madressas and Hindi and Tamil schools in the afternoon," was greeted with:

You do not understand, white parents will not take the trouble to send their children to school in the afternoon!

This means that because "white" parents would not take the extra trouble to ensure that their children learn their religion, the entire country must be denied the study of religions and religious diversity practised in South Africa. Following this step, Religion in Education was destined to take eight years to find its feet in post-apartheid South African schools. The result of the 1994 consultations was the Accommodation Model.

The title 'accommodation model' reveals the tensions that went on in the Committee. For some members on the committee, it was a condescending accommodation of religions other than Christianity. One of the members of the Catholic Institute of Education was on the committee and she fought hard for multi-faith education. According to the Accommodation model, parent bodies had the right to select the type of Religious Education that would be taught in their schools.

The Committee formulated principles for religious education and an interim policy for schools to select from. The following options were made available and parent bodies may select one or more of the options:

- African Traditional Religion
- Christian Religious Education
- Hindu Religious Education
- Islamic Religious Education
- Jewish Religious Education
- Education in world Religions

(N.E.T.F. Field and Phase Committee for RE:1994).

As was expected this proved to be problematic and very few schools offered the subject. The reasons for this are varied. In the Western Cape, teachers complained that they were intimidated by the Provincial Department. The Department maintained it only wanted to know which schools were opting for multi-religion education and what they were doing. Were the teachers mistaken or were their fears justified? Why were they afraid? It does seem odd that none of the public schools opted to reach multi-faith education while private schools did.

Most schools took the easy way out and opted not to have RE while others continued as they had done in apartheid South Africa. The Accommodation Model resulted in the diminishing of the status of Religious Instruction generally and of Biblical Studies especially, which had had a stronghold on education of the "African" and Coloured communities, explicitly and all communities implicitly lost its grip. The desire to keep students ignorant of the religions practised in South Africa has led to the death of Biblical Studies and Religious Education and has set us back ten years. With the exception of some of the private schools, it died a natural death. Among the few schools that offered Multi-faith education, were the private Catholic schools. One needs to commend them for their perseverance of multi-religion education. What emerges from the consultations for Religion -in -Education is the fact that *people do not see or do not want to see the difference between Religious Instruction /Religious Education and Religion Education on the other*. David Chidester (in Dept. of Didactics 1990:30) explains the difference very succinctly;

In the old regime, religious education was directed towards compelling learners to make a confession of faith. According to a manual for Biblical Instruction published as recently as 1990, learners were expected to embrace a particular version of Christian faith. Not merely acquiring knowledge, Children must personally accept, and trust for their personal salvation the triune God introduced to them in the Bible.

Similarly, one of the aims of the syllabi for Religious Instruction in The Primary teacher's Diploma urged the teacher to *bring the light of God's word to the students*, thus blurring the distinction between school and church (Amin 1987-2002).

Religion Education on the other hand says Chidester, "is teaching and learning about religion, religions and religious Diversity."

#### 4.5 Curriculum 2005

When Curriculum 2005 was being designed, two Biblical Studies inspectors represented the sub-field "religion" in the Life Orientation learning area. The reactionary attitude of the two representatives for "religion", refusing to accept the principle of all religions being included in the curriculum, resulted in there being hardly any explicit mention of religion education in the curriculum. Educators had to discern what they could. Some of us selected outcomes for the teaching of religion across the curriculum. However, for educators with no background knowledge in religions, it was difficult. Further, there was still resistance from many quarters and breaking this internal barrier has proved to be difficult. The Western Cape Education Department had urged all teachers who were teaching multi-faith education to report to the supervisors of Religious Education. While the Supervisors suggest the reason behind this was to keep them informed of what was happening, the reality experienced on the ground was different. Teachers felt that it prevented them from doing creative work.

A former Biblical Studies Inspector was appointed Director of Religion Education by the Department of Education in the nineties. He seemed to have had minimal effect in arriving at a solution or creating an environment for a suitable solution. Although the position of Director seemingly contributed to his movement slightly from the far right, the proponents of Religion Education see little visible influence or progressive effect during his term of office. In other words, he was not able to work out an acceptable solution. The persistence of religious communities requesting Religious Education albeit single faith and the department's intention to promote religion- in -education based on constitutional principles, led to the establishment of a Religious Education Committee in 1998, to formulate a policy for the country by the Minister. This body, in its introduction to the report asserted, that the controversy with regard to the provision of religious education in South Africa arises out of the different understandings of the term *Religious Education*. They claimed that broadly speaking there were "*two ways of understanding it*":

- *Educating learners to be religious*
- *Educating learners about religion and religions*

In order to meet the requirements of the different positions held by the committee members and the broader South African community, we have agreed to accommodate both these understandings of the nature of religious education in our policy proposal thereby making it possible for individual schools to provide the religious education that meets their particular understanding of the term, provided that, in doing so, they do not violate the Constitutional Rights of the learners or educators in their school community (1999: Department of Education, Report of Ministerial Committee).

The above statement reveals the politics within the committee, which was partly a reflection of the politics in the broader South African community. Some of us in the Minister's Review Committee were of the opinion that Private schools would also have to implement some degree of multi-faith education to ensure that all the stated outcomes were achieved. Any discussion surrounding the need for private institutions to be bound by the policy was immediately dismissed by the Director of Religion Education.

In terms of the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education- 1999, Government Gazette No. 19775 published 23 February 1999, schools offering Curriculum 2005 (It was being introduced in phases) would have four basic options to choose from with regard to the provision of religious education. While it would be compulsory for public schools to deal with the religious content in Curriculum 2005 and to deal with it from a multi-faith perspective, the degree to which a school did this was left to its discretion.

## **4.6 Proposed Policy for Religious Education (Feb. 1999)**

### **The four options**

1. The school offers Curriculum 2005 as it is, dealing with those outcomes, assessment criteria, range statements and performance indicators that contain specific religious content in the same integrative way as with any other that

the curriculum requires. ( It has been explained by the review committee to mean it has to be taught from the perspective of a variety of worldviews).

2. The school offers Curriculum 2005 in a way that makes explicit the many contributions that religious education can make to the outcomes. The religious education dimension adopts a multi- perspective approach.

3. and 4. Options 3 and 4 provide for additional religious education to be offered during flexible time. Using part of flexible time, a school may offer a single programme, a multi-religious programme, or a range of single perspectives or both. The main criteria being that all learners should participate and should be catered for.

This meant that RE was integral and inherent in Curriculum 2005. It also implied that it needed to be included in the school syllabus and should be taught from the perspective of a variety of worldviews. Another implication was that public schools may not ignore the subject.

It is interesting to note that The Western Cape Department of Education, Curriculum Committee for R.E. responded to this proposal by suggesting that only options 1 or 2 be offered in the province.

Although it was said that the policy options were for public schools, it was felt that independent schools seeking to do justice to Curriculum 2005 needed to take cognisance of the policy. I argued that to ensure that the required outcomes were realised, for the GET band, all learners would have to have achieved the relevant assessment standards. I was told by the director that I was only supposed to review the document according to public responses and that the legal representative of the Department of Education had assured the committee that they could not enforce this policy on private schools. I still believe that while policy cannot be forced on private schools, they need to ensure that every learner realises all the outcomes and achieves the assessment standards.

#### **4.7 Proposed Policy for the FET Band**

The discussion document *The Restructuring of the Senior Certificate Curriculum*, (the fourth Draft, August 1998, p.68) recommended that provision be made for compulsory instruction in Physical Education,

Guidance and Religious Education with combined credits totalling 5 for Fundamental Learning. It has already been accepted by FET that two credits may go to religious education presented from a multi-faith perspective.

In addition, learners may select a core elective in religious education, for academic study for the FET band. The following courses could be offered at either the HG or SG for the Senior Certificate under the Human and Social Sciences sub-field:

- \* African Christianity;
- \* African Traditional Religion;
- \* Biblical Studies;
- \* Hindu Studies;
- \* Islamic Studies;
- \* Jewish Studies;
- \* Religious Studies.

The above policy document, (Report 1999) was warmly welcomed by the public and many of the public responses were very positive. By the time the Report was published for public submissions and the Review committee had completed their report after reviewing public submissions, the new Minister of Education decided to halt the process. Although many educators felt this was a blow to religion education, Professor Asmal has consulted very widely before coming up with a plan. From the time, Professor Asmal became the Minister of Education he used every opportunity to discuss the unconstitutionality of teaching only one religion in a public school. I believe that in this way he was preparing the way for Religion-in-Education, based on constitutional principles.

#### **4.8 Religion in Western Cape Schools**

There was no progress on Religion in education with regard to the new policy. It must be noted that there was a difference between the policy of the WCED and implementation (Amin Case Studies RE 1987-2002). In 1999, I approached an ex-student of mine who teaches in Mitchell's Plain in the Cape Flats to teach a multi-faith lesson for Education Express, the television programme for teachers and learners. We discussed the format of the lesson



but the next day, I received a frantic call saying she was too busy to participate in the video. I learnt that her Principal would not allow it. She was so afraid of her Principal that I had to ask a teacher from an ex-model C school to teach the lesson. I had done a workshop with them using -Rainbow Religions. This reveals that although there are some teachers who can teach multi-faith lessons they are terribly scared of autocratic Principals, guided by religious fundamentalism, who still run the roost in our schools.

Apart from conservative Deans of Theology, even Education Deans have been very slow in implementing multi-faith education in their teacher education programmes. When I suggested to the Dean, that we move in the direction of new discussions, he said "but nobody told us anything! The Department has not sent anything to us!" This mentality of waiting for instructions arises from Apartheid South Africa's autocratic style. I believe that with the available competition from overseas universities and colleges in the country education faculties need to be pro-active and wherever they see a gap or need they need to respond to it.

### **5. Religion Education in the Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy:**

In February 2001, at the Values, Education and Democracy Conference Albert Nolan of "Challenge" magazine clearly distinguished between "religious education", which he described as "nurturing a religious consciousness and ...should be done in churches," and that the aim of "religion education" was to "provide knowledge about different religions". Amin discussed the implementation aspects. She asserted that qualified teachers should teach the subject, the importance of training of teachers to teach the subject, the need for the correct use of terminology with regard to African Traditional Religion and the need for the use of positive terms when discussing aspects of African Traditional Religion as it has become customary for many to use negative terms such as 'witchcraft', 'superstition', 'fetish' and so on. The Manifesto asserts that the South African Constitution guarantees the freedom of all religions and the observances that go with them. The school may not promote any one of these over another. The Constitution guarantees the right to equality, to non-discrimination on the basis of religion, and to freedom of belief, thought and conscience. "Religion Education" in schools can contribute to the values of

diversity, tolerance, respect, justice, compassion and commitment in young South Africans. Schools have reason to provide learners with knowledge about the diversity of religions ... and the morality and values that underpin them.

It adds:

Furthermore, it can teach students about a world of religious diversity, and, at the same time, encourage them to think in terms of a new national unity in South Africa (Manifesto:2001: 44).

The Manifesto, with information on the approach to and principles of teaching RE and facilitating assemblies reads like a suggested policy on Religion in Education:

- Religion Education and consciousness about the role and effect of religion- will be integrated into the General Education and Training Band, specifically in Life Orientation and Social Studies.
- "Religion Studies" will be introduced in the Further Education and Training Band for matriculation purposes as an optional, specialised and examinable subject.
- Religion Education should be motivated by educational outcomes and taught by trained professional educators rather than by professional clergy.
- Because "religion education" should be taught according to educational rather than religious outcomes, educators –particularly those in Life Orientation and Social Studies- will require significant retraining.
- According to the Constitution, schools may be made available for religious observance so long as it is outside of school hours, association is free and voluntary rather than mandatory, and the facilities are made available on an equitable basis to all who apply. School governing bodies need to be familiarised with these conditions.
- Weekly assemblies are a long-standing tradition of many of our schools, and play an important role in bonding and unifying the school community. Nevertheless they should not be compulsory and

should, under no circumstances, be used as occasions for religious observance.

- Like the rest of the school's programmes, the assembly should be an occasion for affirming and celebrating unity in diversity. Accordingly if religious materials are used in assembly, they should be presented in the framework outlined for "religion education" as an educational exercise rather than as a religious ceremony. School governing bodies need to be empowered with ways of transforming assemblies from being occasions for imposing religious uniformity to being forums where diversity is celebrated, along with the values of our constitution (Manifesto 2001:43- 45).

Chidester's comment on the new "suggested policy" illustrates succinctly the final analysis after decades of consultation on the part of the department: The Department of Education has found that trying to accommodate the particular, with the teaching about religion was an educational contradiction rather than a viable compromise (Chidester: 2002:4; Mangena 2001). This discussion, debate and negotiation is as foreign to us as democracy.

## **6. Public Response to New 'Policy' Suggestions**

### **6.1 Response to Deputy Minister's Speech**

The Deputy Minister of Education Mosibudi Mangena spoke about the future of religion in South African public schools in June 2001 at the Annual Conference of the Students Christian Union. He said:

Public schools must uphold the principle that their educational responsibility lies only in the teaching and learning about religion and religions. This is different from the religious education, religious instruction or religious nurture provided by the home, family or religious community.

...We assume that as learners develop creative and critical thinking abilities about religion and religions, they will also develop the capacities for mutual recognition, respect for diversity, reduced prejudice and increased civil toleration that are necessary for a peaceful coexistence in a democratic society.

In outlining the new “policy” for religion in education, based on constitutional values and educational objectives, he asserted that within the framework of a democratic South Africa, the role of religion in public schools must be consistent with core constitutional values of a common citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom, tolerance and so on.

...Policy on the role of religion in education must be driven by the dual mandate of respecting religious diversity and building national unity (Mangena 2001: Address; Dept. of Education Draft ...).

The headlines in *The Teacher*, in response to this speech screamed: “Keep God out of the public schools says Mangena.” Mangena had outlined a framework guided by constitutional rights and freedom. Yet the media, in this case, *The Teacher*, a newspaper dedicated to teaching and learning and meant to contribute to the development of the teacher deliberately misrepresented the speech. This is a good example of media sensationalism, which could have had serious repercussions. While the Minister certainly did not invite God into the schools, he did not exclude God from the schools. The “policy” outlined was based on educational outcomes and constitutional freedom. There was no mention of God. This irresponsible sensationalism tells us about the quality of our media and the communities, who are fed by the sensational media.

## 6.2 Response to: The Revised National Curriculum Statement

In the draft Revised Curriculum Statement for public comment, religion is located within the Life Orientation learning area. It is seen as part of social development viewed within a Constitutional Responsibilities and Human Rights framework. The relevant outcome read:

The learner should be able to demonstrate an active commitment to constitutional rights and social responsibilities and shows sensitivity to diverse cultures and belief systems (DOE 2001).<sup>xv</sup>

This outcome was the target of criticism. It was argued that one could not enforce “active” commitment to the Constitution. Thus, the outcome has been changed to read:

The learner will demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities and show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions (DOE 2002).

This outcome is loaded and unpacking it has resulted in five Assessment Standards for every grade originating from this outcome. Each Assessment Standard deals with different aspects such as human rights, constitutional promotion, social relationships, culture and religion. The resulting controversy was beyond anything I had imagined. Firstly, there were some very good comments and these were a pleasure to read and the team was happy to incorporate these ideas. Secondly, there were people with genuine concerns but thirdly, a host of letters were objections written and in many cases this was done without having read the curriculum. We found that there was no understanding of what the study of religion in a democratic society entailed. There was mass hysteria and emotional responses rather than thoughtful logical arguments. The curriculum, based on constitutional principles was regarded as an ANC ploy to enforce a particular religious worldview. The Christian Democratic Party was among the most vocal in its objection to a policy that promoted the principles of the very constitution that they as Members of Parliament swore by, while other opposition parties who are supposed to represent all religious groups, made no attempt to ease the situation.

One of the assessment standards read that learners in grade nine should be able to:

Debate at least three Basic Rights which illustrated tensions such as 'right to life and abortion', 'freedom and authority', and 'equity and affirmative action'.

The word "abortion" was taken out of context and responses suggested the curriculum promoted abortion when in fact it encouraged debate. The response to it was mind-boggling. The assessment standard stated: Discuss "the celebration of life cycles in South Africa by at least four cultural groups," was met with: "Life cycles! Reincarnation! There is no reincarnation in Christianity!" (Amin 1987-2002).

Firstly, the study of life cycles does not mean 'reincarnation' but what Shakespeare has termed the "Seven Ages of Man" or to use "Christian" lingo Baptism, Christening, Confession, Marriage, Death and the Afterlife. Secondly, supposing it was about "reincarnation" so what! Curriculum designers for a country as diverse as South Africa do not have to be guided by any one tradition. Suppose I was designing a curriculum, I could very well discuss reincarnation in those traditions that believe in it and discuss the Doctrine of Original Sin in Christianity. A curriculum developer would know what to discuss in each of the traditions when selecting a theme.

The public responses illustrated that we need to teach all South Africans about religions in South Africa especially adults. The interesting point about the public response is that people from various and differing points of view were joined in their criticism of the curriculum. In other words, the left, the right and the centre were all unhappy. I believe that is supposed to mean we must be doing something right! Chidester's identification of the philosophical thinking behind the various objectors is useful to illustrate how "opposition has come from a range of different Christian points of departure." He has identified four different Christian positions - "Reconstructionist, Protectionist, Ecumenical and Interfaith." (Amin 1987-2002).

He notes that at a meeting at The Christian Centre in Cape Town, "Concerned Christians" argued that the main problem with the curriculum was, "the active promotion of a single set of values under the guise of tolerance." It was labelled "a New Age worldview" and state support for "a secular humanism worldview." It was claimed that it was in "total contradiction to the constitutional provision of freedom of religion... an act of religious discrimination against Christians." This group of Christian Reconstructionists has been very loud in its objection to the curriculum and have been writing letters, staging media events and organising public meetings. I need to reiterate that one needs to read the curriculum in terms of constitutional principles and human rights. If the state supports or promotes it, it is promoting human rights and the constitution, which is its task. The portfolio committees discussing various aspects consist of members of all political parties. Many critics label multi-faith as an ANC policy and forget that it is a policy based on the South African Constitution which was our point of departure. As Curriculum Designers we did not consult with the

government, the ANC or any other political party but worked with the Constitution and educational objectives.

The home-schooling group, the Pestalozzi Trust, which is directly linked to a group in the United States and to the work of R. J. Rushdoony, the American founder of Christian Re-constructionism, vehemently opposed the curriculum on "constitutional grounds". He wrote: *Segregation or separation is a basic principle of Biblical law with respect to religion and morality*. Rushdoony opposes any form of civil toleration of religious difference. His disciple Gary North, aims for the construction of a *Bible-based social, political and religious order which finally denies the religious liberty of the enemies of God* (North 1982: 25, quoted in (Chidester 2002:6).

Following the publishing of the draft of the revised curriculum, at the Parliamentary hearings in Cape Town, a member of the Pestalozzi Trust cut a cute figure, brandishing a copy of the South African Constitution, using it to assert his constitutional right to oppose the indoctrination of "a particular worldview". Interestingly he was using the Constitution to deny the freedom of all "other" religions, and held the view that the "inclusion of a variety of religions," was "a particular worldview" (Amin, Manila Soni. Case Studies RE 1987-2002). One needs to ask whether the South African Pestalozzi group is aware of the Pestalozzi ideals. If the answer is affirmative, then South Africans need to be made aware of this.

The Protectionists, formed the second set of objectors who had enjoyed the privilege and protection of the apartheid regime and who would like to maintain the status quo. Professor De Villiers, chairperson of the Society for Biblical Studies, which recently changed its name to Biblical and Religious Studies attacked the policy as "a new ideology in school religion." He lamented the fact that particular faiths were not allowed alongside the "other". The term Religious Studies has been used by academia throughout the world, to refer to the study of World Religions. Does Professor De Villiers imply expertise in interdisciplinary work by using the term "Religious Studies"?

The third category of objectors was the Christian Ecumenical organisation, the South African Council of Churches, which supports the learning about religions and religious diversity but would like provision for particularism also.

Believing that religious education in public schools is a complex and sensitive issue; that it is important for learners to be informed about the various religious beliefs of the people of South Africa; and that spiritual resources of religious communities are crucial in the building of a just, moral and peaceful South Africa;

Conference resolves that the General Secretary should initiate engagement with the Education Ministry with the intention of promoting a religious education policy that makes provision for both a multi-religious approach and for single faith learning programmes (SACC:2001).

A fourth group of objectors may be described as proponents of Interfaith who promote the study of World Religions. Among this group were colleagues I have worked with. They were people I would have counted on to strongly support the implementation of multi-faith education. Their reasons for objecting were different from the Pestalozi's. While they were proponents of Multi-faith Education, they criticised the curriculum for lack of explicit use of the term "religion". Their objection was noted and the term "religion" is now used in the Curriculum Statement. Further, the Director of the Catholic Institute of Education argued: 'The new policy, will not invite the learner to the challenge of spiritual and moral development, or to the free commitment to a specific faith commitment' (Faller 2001).

Faller's statement reminds me of the need for the teacher "to bring the light of God's word" as described in CNE curricula. As an educator, I am prepared to listen to a student who comes to me to discuss her/his faith commitment but for me to exhort the learner to do this is to propagate and I am definitely not a preacher but a teacher. Speaking to the Dean of Theology at a South African university, I suggested that if Biblical Studies was taught from a confessional aspect, teachers should to be taught separately from preachers. I said, "You send me preachers and my first task is to convert these preachers to teachers". He asked, "What is she talking about?" I know that he was not being sarcastic but honestly had no idea about the difference. This illustrates the depth of ignorance that exists with regard to teaching about religion even in academic circles.

Discussing the various groups and their objections illustrates that although it may be said to belong to some form of Christian church, each of



the discussed groups had different reasons for objecting to the new curriculum. Yet they joined hands in forming an opposition to the policy.

Following the public submissions, adjustments were made where it was thought necessary or possible. In other words the curriculum designers moved slightly to the right so that they could include the right and meet them at the centre. For those who object to multi-faith altogether there is no hope unless they are prepared to meet for interfaith- dialogue. The term 'religion' has now been included with an explanation:

The term 'religion' in this Life Orientation Learning Area Statement is used to include belief systems and worldviews. Religion Education in the Revised national Curriculum Statement for Grades R- 9 (schools) rests on a division of responsibilities between the state on the one hand and religious bodies parental homes on the other. Religion Education, therefore, has a civic rather than a religious function, and promotes civic rights and responsibilities. In the context of the South African Constitution, Religion education contributes to the wider framework of education by developing in every learner the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary for diverse religions to co-exist in a multi-religious society. Individuals will realise that they are part of the broader community, and will learn to see their identities in harmony with those of others (Revised National Curriculum Statement 2002, Dept of Education, Pretoria).

## **7. The Way Forward**

As South Africans we need to constantly remind ourselves that South Africa is a country with diverse communities and we need to constantly assert that:

We, the people are African Traditionalists, Buddhists, Christians of various denominations including African Independent churches, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Baha'is Rastafarians, Secularists, Zoroastrians and a number of worldviews too numerous to mention. We speak a variety of languages and practise a range of cultures. We are not a homogenous society.

Our present constitution guarantees the rights of all our people to practise and propagate religion. The freedom that is enshrined in our constitution must be the catalyst for an education that reflects the diversity of our population and the cultures of all our people. Not only have the oppressors denied us that right in the past, but even today, the effects of their “cultural bombs” plague our society where ethnicity reigns supreme. When I speak of ‘ubuntu’ as a South African philosophy, I am told that it is a Zulu and not a South African philosophy. It leaves me wondering whether Zulu traditions were not part of South African culture! Within this context of diverse languages, ethnicities, religions and cultures, religious and cultural pluralism can be a response not only to manage diversity, but for nation- building and effective citizenship for all South Africans.

My aim in this presentation was to discuss the long and painful process of arriving at Religion Education in South Africa. Multi-religion Education has been included in the Revised Curriculum Statement for the General Education and Training Band to be implemented from 2004 onwards. It will be assessed like any other subject and has educational rather than religious outcomes. Teaching is assigned to qualified professional teachers and not to clergy. This is a big battle won for recognition of diversity and for the promotion of pluralism specifically and education generally. However, the time to sit back has not arrived yet because there is a gaping wound in the education system with regard to Religion in Education. As has been illustrated, the process of introducing multi-faith religion education in school education has not been without pains and finally some gains. Unfortunately, the next process, curriculum development for the (FET) Further Education and Training that is for grades ten, eleven and twelve, has begun but there is no religion in Education at all! This cannot be allowed to continue.

I have discussed the policy –type guidelines outlined for Religion in Education in the Manifesto on Values and Democracy. “Religion Studies” will be introduced in the Further Education and Training Band for matriculation purposes as an optional, specialised and examinable subject. The FET process has begun and there is no study of or about Religion whatsoever. I urge this august assembly to take the matter further. While the FET process is still in its infancy, we can ensure that we take all necessary steps to have it installed. I reiterate that openness and inclusiveness are still

on the horizon and that the struggle continues - as Madiba has said:

*It is A Long Walk to Freedom.*

Ministerial Committee on Religious Education

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