

THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION IN A MULTI-RELIGIOUS AND A MULTI- CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT:

The Namibian case

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Abstract

With the introduction of a secular constitution in Namibia, it was also obvious that Biblical Instruction could not be taught at schools as though the Christian religion enjoys a privileged status in the country. Religious and Moral Education was introduced in the schools instead, and apart from being radically different in contents from the Biblical Instruction syllabi, a new approach to teaching was also introduced. A dialogue model replaced the instructional model in the hope that this will draw more interest from the learners in the schools.

1. Introduction

1.1 Biblical Instruction

Biblical Instruction has been the object of criticism for quite some time in Namibia. The subject did not appeal to teachers or students. Students at the university campus were particularly upset about the fact that they were forced to take the subject as part of the Christian National education system wherein the South African State took the role as probably one of the largest missionary societies imaginable.

Although the aim of Biblical Instruction in schools was the development of the whole human being to the honour of God, in all spheres of life (cf the article of Venter 1988), this was not understood as such by students, especially black students in Namibia. They instead viewed the subject with extreme caution, if not animosity, because of its political aim of Christianizing the people as part of the policies of the National government in South Africa (cf e.g. Lategan 1990:2).

Biblical Instruction also came under fire because of its subject matter. Lategan (1990:3) states in his 'honest' answer to whether it is realistic to expect that the 1975

syllabus requirements of Biblical Instruction of treating topics included in 'the believer and the community' could be fulfilled, that this will not be the case. In the current situation, he contends (1990:3), there is a huge gap between syllabi and praxis, between the ideal (of the syllabus) and reality.

Lategan (1990:4) sees the crisis (Kotzé 1982:43) in which Biblical Instruction currently finds itself as a challenge which calls for urgent attention to address the social dimension of the subject curriculum contents concentrating on the biblical issues and its value for contemporary life. Apart from this issue, the religious development of the child and the training of teachers should be addressed.

Lategan's call regarding Biblical Instruction finds its echo in the view of scholars addressing the crisis in Biblical Studies. A number of scholars addressed this issue in the past, including Lategan (1982), Kinghorn (1982) and Malan (1982). Vosloo (1990:38-47) summarizes the different views about teaching Biblical Studies and comes to a conclusion about Biblical Instruction which is not new, namely that in its relation to Biblical Studies, this subject at schools should address a wider field which includes other religions (cf e.g. Hunter 1989:3-4).

1.2 Multi-cultural and multi-religious environment

That Southern Africa comprises a multi-cultural and a multi-religious society, is a fact. The history of modern South Africa and Namibia has shown that a separatistic approach to solving the problems related to teaching in a multi-cultural environment did not work. Instead of solving the problems, numerous other ones were created, apart from the simple fact the mistrust that was created as central thrust in the exercise of separate development (cf e.g. Salia-Bao 1991 about the situation which prevailed in colonial Namibia).

The problems pertaining to a multi-religious situation are sometimes worse. Many countries suffer from the grave effects caused by a lack of understanding between religious groups, also in Africa. In a recent article Van der Walt (1992) summarizes the different approaches in solving problems akin to a multi-religious situation in schools. Strangely enough, his solution to the problem of multi-religiosity in schools is one of differentiation (cf Van der Walt 1992:185ff). Once again a separatist option is selected in the wake of the problems of the situation in South Africa. Van der Walt wants sovereignty in one's own sphere to be acknowledged by the state, while it supplies the finance, control of standards, and the structures for adequate public schooling. The parents should establish the nature, direction and spirit of a particular school in line with their and the children's right of freedom of religion (Van der Walt 1992:186).

Numerous questions normally arise from such proposals as that of Van der Walt. Apart from just normal practical matters, such as who is to decide which parents at a state school eventually have the right to establish the direction at a school and what about those in a specific neighbourhood who cannot take their children to another school, there are more fundamental questions such as the nature of the democracy practised in such a case and whether this is not just very simplistic rhetoric to hide

the real reasons for opting for this choice. These reasons seem to come to the fore with certain interjections which look *petit* but are remarkably expressive, such as the addition to the first sentence of his conclusion, which is made on the basis of Pitts (1986:61), ' ... and to protect the minorities with regard to religion\ideology' (my translation).

While Van der Walt argues that his option of differentiation will enhance a colourful religiosity in South Africa, it seems this option will lack the one characteristic needed in Southern Africa today, namely an understanding of each other's religious background and motivation. This latter characteristic seems to be central in the option Namibian educationists have opted for in their planning of syllabi for Religious and Moral Education.

2. The quest for moral education

2.1 The main problem with Biblical Instruction

Although we have already pointed at certain deficiencies inherent in the teaching of Biblical Instruction in the past it seems the most severe and damning point of criticism would be the fact that it did not do what it intended to, *viz.* the creation of a public ethos to the benefit of the country. It failed to give an understanding of individual values. I find it most condemning if an Afrikaner can come out of our system and make the observation Kriel (1992:16) does:

I am sure most Afrikaner children go through our positivistic based, so-called Christian National Education system from sub A to Matric without being able to spot a value even if you painted it red - or even, for that matter, if you painted it orange, white and blue.

His view is shared in as many and more words by other scholars (cf Sebothoma 1992; Deist 1991).

Mitchell (1992:44), on the basis of Deist (1991), describes the current syllabi for Biblical Studies and 'Bible Education' (his word for Religious Instruction) in South African schools as functioning 'as instruments of religious, cultural and even political imperialism'. The authoritative approach of its teaching and its enforcement onto all people probably contributed more to its lack of success, even within the society where the approach was supposed to work best (Afrikaner children and students).

2.2 Future with moral education

The fact that moral teaching should be part of a curriculum in schools, is accepted by a number of scholars, either directly or by implication (cf e.g. Moulder 1991; Badenhorst 1992). My premise here is that moral behaviour is dependent on the public ethos which prevails in a country and that such a public ethos could be created as a result of education, also at school level.

Smit (1991:52) reasons that when speaking in public and on public media, 'the professional ethicists' demonstrate that even when they call for principles and norms

to be applied to contentious socio-political issues, their arguments reflect and rationalize those of the group they belong to.

Smit (1991:53) further argues on the basis of Hauermas that the influence of the public ethos on moral decisions made by individuals is greater than the arguments of individuals regarding particular moral decisions. Within the larger context of a community wherein a public ethos has been established morally better decisions by individuals are more likely. This ethos of the group to which the individual belongs might influence the individual's decision 'unconsciously unreflectively in every-day actions'.

It is, of course, difficult to answer questions such as 'what are values?' 'Whose values?' and 'Which situations call for values to be exercised?', but at the same time there seems to be a consensus in public for the need of values. On one level this need is fulfilled by the Constitution, Bill of Human Rights, Freedom Charter, The Common Law, etc. Such formal arrangements in countries and the world help towards a public ethos. It is furthermore evident that these could be fostered within a democracy featuring the inevitable partner of democracy, viz. responsible citizenship by educated, informed thinking citizens. A mouthful, but the only guarantee for morally sound behaviour and for the protection of a tradition of such behaviour in a country.

The aim of the subject Religion and Moral Education is ultimately to influence both the public ethos and individual decision-making on important aspects of society. It would thus accept the idea of a public ethos which becomes part of the living world of the people belonging to a group, whether that group is confined to a small area or a larger one occupying a country or even ultimately the world. Such a larger group feeling developing in the world today is, for example, the emphasis on Africa by the African people and the development of Africa.

2.3 The role of religious texts within Religious and Moral Education

Smit (1991:53-54) explains that a public ethos influences the moral decisions made by individuals, but there are certain situations which force Christians to fall back on a position which is in agreement with their understanding of that situation in terms of the Bible.

Although not put within the context of the public ethos idea as is the case with Smit, a number of scholars indicate a pertinent role for the Bible within a moral programme, specifically within the broader context of the 'New South Africa'. Hartin (1991:4ff.) describes a number of important hermeneutic principles which would ensure a sound approach to using the New Testament in moral decisions. These principles are the following:

- to uphold and respect the gap between the world of the New Testament and the world of today;
- to view the Christian faith as context out of which the very ethical perspectives emerge;

- to remain true to all principles of hermeneutics;
- to be faithful to the purpose of the New Testament;
- to view the New Testament from the context of the community of believers;
- to view the New Testament from the perspective of narrative.

To these principles we would add from the perspective of the syllabi of Religious and Moral Education in Namibia also the point:

- to gain moral perspectives in dialogue with others.

This has been the way Jesus preached and acted in the New Testament and therefore, to my mind, a very sound New Testament perspective. Only in dialogue can we hope to discover the other persons and people in the school rooms and not by forcing them to take Christian principles from the Christian Bible as the ultimate. If Christians are worthy of their faith the other will discover this in the dialogue as well.

Burden (1991:17ff) starts his article on the use of the Old Testament in the 'New South Africa' with a situation analysis indicating that South Africa has 77 per cent Christians (one should probably add that these are nominal Christians) and a total of 18 per cent of its population indicating that they belong to no specific or unknown religion. This should also indicate to South Africans that Christian education cannot simply be forced onto everyone at school, especially if one wants to reach all people with moral education. The public ethos is dependent on the subscribing of all the inhabitants of a country to be part of it.

Christians wish to have their text functioning in the schools. This is probably the case with every religion which forms part of the kaleidoscope of the South African nation. This should also be accepted in a Religious and Moral Education course. The text of any religion is still part of the process of learning. Issues in class are discussed from the different perspectives offered by learners as will be seen in the discussion of the syllabi. If learners have difficulties with decisions when they write essays, do projects and experiments, the text still functions as the basis of information and guidance.

2.4 African Religion

Texts are part of the great religions in Africa, viz. Christianity and Islam. But in Africa the major factor within Religious Education could be the influence of the African Religion. This influence of African religions as part of the belief systems of the African students in classes should be the object of research of scholars at university departments. To rely, as Badenhorst (1992) did, on a very rudimentary characterization of African Religion, is not enough.

African societies have traditionally operated on a system of belief which carried the values and norms of its members. These were mostly seen as the objects of missionary activities instead of attempting to explore them for their value in society.

2.5 Towards a new approach to learning

One of the most serious problems that is encountered in South Africa today, is a proper understanding between the peoples of the countries, and I would contend that this is mostly because of a lack of knowledge of each other's traditions and ways of doing and thinking. This lack of knowledge is further perpetuated by the use of theories in our approach to communication which are quite conspicuous for their language of separation. One of the models which, for example, became widely used is one which was originally intended for communication in literature.

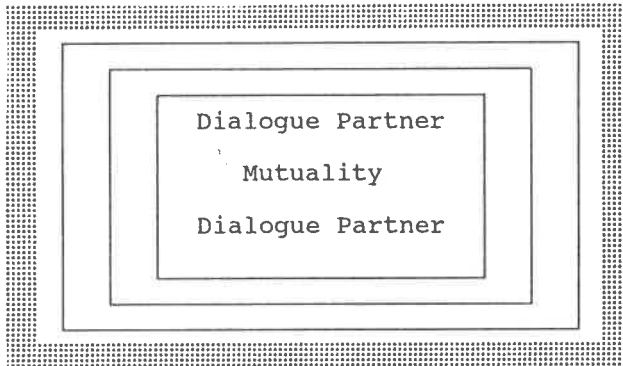
This model takes as vantage point the gap that exists in the communication process between the sender of the message and the receiver of the message and is usually illustrated as follows (in its most basic form - cf e.g. Hartin & Petzer 1991:1ff):



This model is one that further perpetuates the differences between people. It seems that if understanding is to be fostered amongst people, the theoretical models that we are working with should also start with a vantage point of mutuality rather than with separation. Even if the above model is adapted in such a way that we pose a fluctuation between the sender and the receiver in the process of communication, it still aggravates the basic problem, viz., the fact that it views the distance between people in the understanding process as the most important factor to overcome. The misunderstanding of the message is the point of departure.

It serves the goals of Religious and Moral Education as they were explained above, and further on, better if the theoretical model we are working with also reflects mutuality as the basic point of departure. The South African situation serves as an excellent (albeit tragic) example of how separatist thinking has drawn people apart. If theoretical models also reflect this separation, it further aggravates the situation. In the place of the above model, I would therefore advocate a model that takes understanding on certain basic levels as vantage point.

Basic to this model is the understanding that we do not work with literature in the first place in our courses but with direct communication. People can therefore start with a number of mutual grounds for understanding. Such things on a very practical level in the schools are, for example, language, situation, cultural similarities, etc. Furthermore, in a democratic society those things that form the cornerstone of the democratic of such a society serve as consensus regarding the mutual goals for a public morality.



With the above theoretical point of departure which takes mutuality as a vantage point, partners in dialogue can work towards expanding this mutuality. This does not mean that no differences between people will exist in the end, but within such a model people can work towards finding each other in dialogue and furthermore, use the mutuality between them to enhance further understanding.

The dialogue model does not want to expand its outside lines to full consensus. Students in the classes of Religious and Moral Education are not there to do missionary work on other religions. They are there to put forward their views on issues and to defend those from their own points of view on the basis of their own understanding of their religion and their religious text. For this reason the outside lines are perforated in the model.

3. Religious and moral education in Namibia

3.1 Introduction of Religious and Moral Education

Religious and Moral Education has been introduced in Namibia with the eventual aim of striving towards such a public ethos as has been described above. This will be approached as a religiously oriented programme, but at the same time as a programme which does not affront learners who do not belong to a specific faith.

The syllabi attempt to establish a dialectical programme focussing on exploration by the students. The student discovers through interaction and self-study. He/she approaches issues from his/her own religious and moral perspective. The programme does not pretend to be solely Christian and does not only encourage and allow discussion that focuses on Christian perspectives. The programme purposefully aims at a multi-religious and multi-cultural group. It wishes to enhance understanding and respect without losing your own religion or ethnicity. It requires a determination to transcend these for the common interest whereby everyone could learn from the other.

It is important to note that Namibia as a country realizes the importance of religion and the churches in society. Its constitution stresses the freedom of conscience and belief [Article 21 (b)], although it is a secular state [Article 1 (2)], and that 'no

person may be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economical status' [Article 10 (2)]. In this context RME cannot even expect to teach moral education purely from a religious perspective. Although Christian religion will obviously enjoy a 'privileged' position in the sense that it has the most representatives in classrooms, it should not be and is not expected that every child should come with a Christian perspective on matters discussed in class, nor will it mean that other perspectives are necessarily made the objects of missionary activities. In the dialectical process where dialogue features prominently, children will discuss and interact in openness and respect for each other.

In his presentation on 7 May of the work done on syllabus materials for Grades 8 and 9 (the only ones finished at this stage) Prof Christo Lombard, the chairperson of the syllabus committee, emphasised that

RME is the only school subject where the moral issues of our personal, inter-personal and national agendas can be addressed thoroughly and purposefully. Where else can we confront the next generation with their responsibility on matters such as the break-down of discipline, teenage pregnancies, rape, robbery, murder, AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, proper family life and parenting, respect for others and tolerance, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, bad sportsmanship, waste of resources, deforestation, respect for life, property and truth ...? (Lombard 1992:1)

In his address Prof Lombard emphasised the following aspects of the 'new teaching paradigm for RME'(1992:2-4):

1. Personal choice. Students are one year away from making major choices in life regarding religion (e.g. affirmation in Christian churches) and citizenship. This programme sets out to help students towards mature informed choices.
2. Self-activity. Rather than instruction which was the basic teaching mode of Biblical Instruction in the past, this programme is oriented towards interactive exploration.
3. Critical understanding and meaning. The programmes are tuned into thought skills, creating with the students an understanding of their own traditions, customs, texts and problems and those of others.
4. Life-relatedness. The programmes address the life situation of the students, their experiences and background.
5. Alternative forms of evaluation. This is a non-examination subject. Other ways than the traditional examination of gauging the understanding and skills of students had to be sought. Joy, experiment and projects provide evaluation in dialogue.
6. A focus on moral practice. The focus is on moral issues towards a conscious public ethos wherein children will explore the application of convictions (esp. religious conviction) in every-day life.

3.2 Syllabus outline

As an introduction to the syllabus outline it should be noted that the content and orientation of this outline is 'basically Christian', and other perspectives are brought in 'to ensure the basic freedoms guaranteed by the Namibian Constitution' (Syllabus Outline, Appendix A6). As will be noted again further on, this is problematic. The 'basically Christian' position of the syllabus probably reflects the constitution thereof as a committee of Christians. It is also a reflection of the fact that the country as such is nominally Christian, with other religions only making out a very small number of the total population at this stage.

It should be noted that the syllabus outline follows a certain logic, in which the difficulty of the topics increase with the years and within a specific year.

<u>GRADE 8</u>	<u>GRADE 9</u>	<u>GRADE 10</u>
<p><u>UNIT 1: PERSONAL VALUES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on BEING A PERSON ** 1 Creation 2 Personhood 3 Morality and morals 4 Values and character 5 Personal values e.g.: discipline, honesty, self-esteem, humility, courage, truthfulness etc.</p>	<p><u>UNIT 1: PERSONAL VALUES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on INDIVIDUAL IN SOCIETY 1 Individual and society in Africa 2 Meaning through shared activities 3 Love through sharing and caring 4 Expressing joy and celebrating life 5 Myth and ritual</p>	<p><u>UNIT 1: PERSONAL VALUES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY 1 Growth to maturity: freedom and responsibility 2 Finding purpose in life 3 Making a living 4 Coping with crises and disappointments 5 Responsible choices: drugs, alcohol etc.</p>
<p><u>UNIT 2: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on HANDLING BASIC RELATIONS 1 Basic relations 2 Nature and environment 3 Friendships and peer groups 4 Parents and relatives 5 Teachers and authorities</p>	<p><u>UNIT 2: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE 1 Community and ethos 2 Friends, enemies, opponents 3 Social concern: the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised 4 Social concern: the sick, disabled and senior citizens 5 Social concern: prisoners and refugees</p>	<p><u>UNIT 2: INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on SEX, FAMILY AND PARENTING 1 Religion and sexuality 2 Sex and love 3 Marriage customs 4 Family life: children's rights, divorce, parenting 5 Sexual abuse</p>
<p><u>UNIT 3: NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on WORKING AND PLAYING TOGETHER 1 Work ethos 2 Work and recreation 3 Recreation and health 4 The arts 5 Worshipping together</p>	<p><u>UNIT 3: NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on BEING A GOOD CITIZEN 1 State and citizenship 2 Nationhood 3 Democratic structures 4 Laws and rights 5 Authority and obedience, accountability and protest</p>	<p><u>UNIT 3: NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on HUMAN DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS 1 History of human rights 2 Bill of Fundamental Human Rights 3 The Namibian Constitution 4 Reconciliation and nation-building 5 Working for justice and peace: churches, unions and courts</p>
<p><u>UNIT 4: INTERNATIONAL ISSUES</u> Christian and moral issues from THE ECUMENICAL AGENDA 1 Ecumenism and its agenda 2 The role of common values 3 The struggle against racism, ethnicism, tribalism 4 The struggle against sexism, nepotism etc. 5 Challenges to the Namibian churches</p>	<p><u>UNIT 4: INTERNATIONAL ISSUES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives on CARING FOR OUR PLANET 1 Ecology and environment 2 Conservation and tourism 3 Consumerism 4 Appropriate technology 5 Global threats</p>	<p><u>UNIT 4: INTERNATIONAL ISSUES</u> Christian and other religious perspectives from POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS 1 Religion and politics 2 Social justice: wants and needs 3 Economic systems: Capitalism, Socialism, Communism, Mixed Economy 4 Totalitarianism and Apartheid 5 The ideals and problems of Democracy</p>

3.3 Success of the programmes

The ultimate success of these programmes will, amongst others, probably depend on the following:

1. Very well schooled teachers. Religious departments at universities must start RME programmes as early as possible. The government should be convinced that these will in the end be to the benefit of the country and its people and its ideals.
2. The churches and religious groups must do their work properly. They are the instruments ultimately responsible for the basis and health of the faith of the child to be able to convey his\her ideas in class. Therefore the churches should address the issue mentioned as well and not take the ostrich politics approach which became such a typical part of their approach, especially in Afrikaans churches.
3. The university department should have its finger on the pulse of the world for which it trains its teachers. Morals change, but through phases of change the aim should be established of an ethos which transcends small group attitudes and politics to create a civil life based on respect.
4. The ethos itself should be of such a nature that it transcends pure religious argument and makes sense to everyone living in a country.
5. Excellent library facilities will enhance the success of these programmes.

3.4 Criticism against the RME syllabus

The major criticism against the introduction of the RME syllabus came from the Dutch Reformed Church. The churches which belong to the Council of Churches in Namibia accepted the proposed courses. The latter group of churches also accepted the RME course as part of a theological course which is intended for introduction at the University of Namibia.

The major points of criticism from the Dutch Reformed Church were submitted under the name of Prof C. Basson of the Department of Educational Sciences at Rand Afrikaanse University. Basson's criticism emphasizes especially one point which runs through all his points. According to him the RME syllabi are a perpetuation of Marxist and neo-Marxist thought. He believes the syllabi are humanistic, pragmatic, moralistic and socialistic.

One cannot go into all arguments of Basson, but one stands amazed at the logic that operate in his piece. He believes that the syllabi are humanistic because they treat all people as equals. They strive towards promoting responsible citizenship, justice, peace and progress in society (Basson 3.1.5). According to Basson (3.1.6) tolerance in RME will be used to enhance universal humanism. Apart from the fact that the logic of Basson is hardly comprehensible, one fears that he did not understand the RME proposals which exactly wants every Christian to demonstrate biblical tolerance within a group situation (cf RME, Grade 8, Unit 1, 49ff.).

Basson further believes that the focus on values in society with this course is aimed at a pragmatic abuse of the Bible without focussing on the principles of the Bible. He believes that the

... primary relationship in the Bible is a personal relationship between man and the Trinity (Basson 1991: Statements 2-4).

Suffice it to say that Basson seems to work from a very thin Bible, wherein the other relationships that God entrusts man with, do not feature at all. The RME courses address all relationships that people are engaged in. A simple glance over the included syllabus would immediately prove this. Again, the RME classes are tuned into the discovery of these relationships within a group situation and at home. The fact that these are discovered in a group situation should enhance the belief in the Bible and God. The students are, for example, encouraged to discuss sharing in class. They are then referred to texts such as Matthew 10:5-15. These are values which are also included in the Bible as part of man's relationships with God entrusted him. The 'Rationale' of the RME syllabus outline which Basson used for this criticism in fact states this directly,

... the Bible will feature as point of departure throughout this syllabus (Appendix A1).

To my mind this point should be brought as criticism against the syllabus, but for a different reason, viz. that with this statement the syllabus could disadvantage other groups who might feel that their texts are equally valid. In fact, throughout the syllabus this appears to be a problem. Other texts are not analysed or used as illustrations. This could, in the end, appear to be another Biblical Education syllabus.

When Basson addresses the RME syllabus as Marxistic and neo-Marxistic it becomes evident from the rhetoric what his core problem with the syllabi is. People are treated as equals. The syllabi fall back on an ideology that already gained popularity at the time of the French Revolution. Equality focuses, according to Basson, on material problems in the RME syllabi and not on that which matters most:

... van enige vorm van geestelike geluk word nie melding gemaak nie (Basson 1991: Statement 6).

It again becomes clear that Basson did not understand the syllabi and looked for problems, especially those that he could call 'Marxistic'. Suffice it to say that the child is encouraged to always discuss all problems from the perspective of his or her text. In the case of Christians that would, of course, be the Bible. If the Bible does lead the child away from any material happiness, then the child is discussing this in class and is putting that view to the test with other Christians and faiths that might believe differently.

In another document submitted to the 1991 synod of the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia, the congregations of Windhoek express their belief that the parents and children are not mature and interested enough to handle the topics put to them by

A further point of criticism could, to my mind, be raised which concerns the use of African customs and religion in the syllabus. One should take care not speak about African customs in too general terms. In Namibia and in South Africa these customs are specific and should be treated like that. A lot can be learnt with comparison, also in this respect, rather than simply making a comparison between, e.g. biblical and African perspectives. This should be cited as a warning for further programmes.

4. Conclusion

The Religious and Moral Education syllabi and programmes should first be put to test to see all deficiencies. Prof Lombard is currently busy monitoring the implementation and operation of the syllabi. The University of Namibia is already teaching courses that incorporate Religious and Moral Education to train teachers to fill positions in this regard. It is too early to judge the success, but judging from the reaction of the majority of the churches, the Ministry of Education, the teachers and children at this stage, these courses will prove to be a success.

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