

SECOND CONFERENCE ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION
IN OUR CHANGING SOCIETY
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE, 14-16 JULY 1981
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The first conference on Religious Education in our changing society was convened by the University of the Witwatersrand, the Johannesburg College of Education and the Christian Education Movement. It was held in July 1980 at the University of the Witwatersrand and attended by 77 delegates. During this very successful first conference the following issues of importance emerged:

- "1 The need for better qualified teachers of Religious Education
- 2 Review of the position whereby unqualified and/or unwilling teachers can be required to teach Religious Education.
- 3 Review of R E Syllabuses in the light of present needs and an examination of the desirability of a common core syllabus for all, and making Religious Education an examination subject.
- 4 The question of the greater involvement of communities in matters relating to Religious Education.
- 5 The need for examination of the potential changes in society and how religious education is to meet these changes.

These issues need further study and the Conference referred them to the Christian Education Movement in consultation with other interested bodies". (Quoted from the conference statement)

The Christian Education Movement then initiated the organizing of the second conference, which took place at the University of the Western Cape in July 1981. It was attended by 88 delegates from universities (18), training colleges (8), theological training institutions (7), schools (12), churches (12), departments of education (15), Christian associations (12), teachers' associations (3) and publishers (1).

Due to the generous sponsorship of the British Council the conference

(and several universities and colleges too) could benefit from the presence and addresses of Miss Jean Holm from the University of Cambridge.

During the plenary sessions and workshops significant points like the following were raised and frankly discussed:

- 1 A penetrating look was taken at the Christian religion in its co-existence with other religions. It was often emphasized that Christianity should never be degraded into an encrusted system of beliefs and practices. It should always be seen as a way of living - in transformed relationships, based upon a total surrender into the vital relationship with God, through Christ.
- 2 Our religious education should therefore be an experience-centred, life-related study of Christian faith as a living relation. In fearless honesty open questioning and dynamic dialogue should be allowed. Senior pupils may be further motivated by the study of other faiths. In some way or other they should obtain clarity about what religion is, and what it means to be committed.
- 3 Our society is inevitably changing, from the status quo towards an open society - in which human rights will be duly recognized, but specific religions will not be protected by law. Blacks and whites (who were present at the conference in the ratio of 1 to 2) should get together warmly and see each other as people, joined in the oneness of humanity. Regarding our present Christian society, the tremendous scarcity of the Christian way of living should be frankly conceded.
- 4 If a "renewed RE for SA 2000" is our objective, due attention should be paid to the prevailing frustration of pupils, the important insights of educationists and the hermeneutical concern for meaning. We should understand our religion (as well as the religion of others) and we should understand education. Effective renewal should be sought in syllabus design, handbooks and lesson design. The excellent example from East Africa was referred to more than once.

5 What is constantly needed, is renewed, enthusiastic teachers, who will not allow themselves to be deterred by existing barriers or problems. Teachers who listen honestly to the voice of God may be used in various, significant ways. They may especially be used to let students realize how relevant RE is, and how the miracle of a transformed mind and surrendered living may come about.

In its recommendations the conference concentrated on several issues deserving due attention, as soon as possible.

"THE CONFERENCE RECOMMENDS:

- 1 That a core syllabus for all Education Departments be adopted, with provision for the addition of specific options for individual communities; and that in the group of persons drawing up any syllabus for Religious Education serving teachers and other educationists who are committed Christians, and who are educationally equipped for the task of syllabus drafting, should predominate.
- 2 That, noting the need for better qualified teachers of Religious Education, there be a review of the position whereby unqualified and/or unwilling teachers can be required to teach Religious Education.
- 3 That syllabuses take into account the needs of children as they grow through different stages.
- 4 That the study of typology (e g in the std 5 syllabus of the Transvaal Department of Education) be deleted.
- 5 That the study of the Biblical concept of the Kingdom of God be given greater prominence.
- 6 That the felt needs of children in their life situations be used for the teaching of the Bible.

- 7 That other religions be examined as a means of clarifying the pupils' understanding of their own faith.
- 8 That the study of church history (e g in the std 9 syllabus of the Cape Department of Education) be made optional (or reduced to a minimum).
- 9 That syllabuses from other educational systems be examined, e g the Rugaba curriculum and recent agreed syllabuses from the United Kingdom.
- 10 That the possibility of making Religious Education an examinable subject from std 2 to std 7 be investigated, with a view to making such examination the general practice.
- 11 That the importance of making regular use of audiovisual aids and reference books in teaching Religious Education be stressed.
- 12 That, because a theological background is necessary for the teaching of Religious Education, the desirability of recognizing theological qualifications be brought to the attention of the Committee of Educational Heads."