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**Du Toit, C W & Kruger, J S (eds) 1998 – Multireligious Education in South Africa: Problems and prospects in a pluralistic society**

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**Reviewer: Dr S Schoeman (University of South Africa)**

As in other parts of Africa, the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994 necessitated innovations in education. Part of this educational renaissance is the restructuring of Religious Education (previously known as Biblical Studies) as a school subject. Prior to 1994 a single-tradition approach to Religious Education was favoured which ignored the non-Christian religions and hence prevented learners from becoming properly informed about religions other than their own.

Since 1994 South Africa has changed from a so-called “Christian” state to a neutral one. Religious Education in public schools could have been severely limited or even abolished, as is the case in the United States of America, but the South African government favoured the teaching of Religious Education in public schools provided that an equitable system could be drafted. As a contribution to this process of restructuring Religious Education, the Research Institute for Theology and Religion and the Department of Religious Studies, both from UNISA, arranged a conference on Multireligious Education (MRE). The aim of the conference, which took place on 3 and 4 July 1997, was to address the many conflicting interests in the field of Multireligious Education. The papers read at the conference are included in this publication.

*Multireligious Education in South Africa. Problems and prospects in a pluralistic society* consists of an opening address and eleven chapters. The first nine chapters deal with various historical and theoretical aspects of Multireligious Education, and the last three come to grips with the practical situation in the classroom.

A brief review of the contents of the book will give the reader an idea of what the book contains:

- In the opening address, the Deputy Minister of National Education, Smangaliso Mkhatswa, indicates that the government, given its position of non-alignment to any particular religion, welcomes active and constructive interaction between all religious traditions and organisations. Government accepts the critical role religion has to play in society and is prepared to listen to its prophetic voice, and will honour the conducting of religious observances at school as guaranteed in the Constitution. However, the latter should not interfere with goals set for Religious Education in the proper, strict sense of the word. He then discusses pitfalls in this regard and touches upon the important problem of proper teacher training.
- Chapter 1, “Religious pluralism in South Africa”, gives an overview of religious pluralism in South Africa and stresses the fact of human suffering underlying the reality of religious diversity in South Africa. Religious pluralism in the sense of active engagement and inter-religious dialogue has until now been virtually non-existent in South Africa – an aspect of the debate that needs urgent attention, according to the contributor.
- Chapter 2, “The value of a multifaith approach in transforming a society”, points out how during the apartheid years a system of segregation operated in the areas of education and religion, and discusses aspects of a multifaith approach as an alternative to the previous system. Indicating the link between Multireligious Education and the academic discipline of Religious Studies, several aspects of a multifaith approach are highlighted. Finally, it is recommended that all traditions should be given the opportunity to freely develop their life skills, and that religion should never again be misused for divisive, oppressive and discriminatory purposes as was the case in the past.
- Chapter 3, “Why multireligious education?”, explains what is meant by Religious Education and, against this background, indicates what Multireligious Education entails. Several models in this

regard are discussed and it is stated that the entire adult population of South Africa is in need of Multireligious Education. More specifically, it is imperative that all teachers be trained in this regard with special attention to those teachers who would want to specialise in Multireligious Education teaching at school level.

- Chapter 4, "Sharing values: The place and function of values in multireligious education", looks at values as a common denominator in Multireligious Education, because underlying most differences in approaches to Religious Education is the issue of values. Ways to attain a just approach concerning values in Religious Education are discussed; the promotion of common values and the integration of African values in a new context are commented on; and, finally, the problem of comparative ethics is addressed.
- Chapter 5, "Multireligious education: Confusion or appreciation?", deals with the often-raised question of whether Multireligious Education might not confuse children. In order to dispense with this misconception the aims of Religious Education are clarified and valuable teaching principles, based on an understanding of the stages of religious growth in the development of the child, are clarified. It is stressed that teachers of Religious Education should be phenomenologically reflexive, allowing them to do justice to the faith of others without denying their own.
- Chapter 6, "The teaching of African religion in school", deals with the future place of African religion in Multireligious Education. This is done against the backdrop of an analysis of the treatment this religion has received in South Africa in the past and in the present. Examples from African countries where the study of African religion has successfully been implemented in Multireligious Education are discussed. Various themes in African religion, such as the use of songs and poetry that may feature in a school programme, are discussed.
- Chapter 7, "The Christian school in an integrated, pluralistic society: A South African experience", provides a case study, the Sacred Heart College in Johannesburg. It describes the development of a Catholic school into a school which succeeded in inserting a dynamic, religiously pluralistic dimension into its character and ethos, thereby providing an example of what can be achieved in a heterogeneous, pluralistic setting – not the loss of religious (in this case Christian) integrity, but a gain in its quality.
- Chapter 8, "Multifaith textbook production: The case of *Festivals and Celebrations*", deals with the urgent matter of the production of appropriate textbooks for multifaith education programmes in schools. This is done with special reference to the principles and elements involved in a pioneering project launched by the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town in 1993, which resulted in the publication *Festivals and Celebrations*. Some important implications for the teaching of Multireligious Education are extrapolated from the University of Cape Town researchers' experience in producing this textbook.

- As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, three successful workshops on the actual practice of Multireligious Education teaching in classrooms were conducted by specialists.
  - Workshop 1, "Light as a theme to engage young children in religious enquiry and exploration", focuses on Multireligious Education for five-year-olds and younger. Attention is paid to the stages of faith development and explains, with reference to the theme of light, how Multireligious Education teaching can become a valuable experience in the lives of pre-school children. Light, for example, plays a key role in various religions, and lends itself to vivid teaching via art, music and movement, thereby contributing to intercultural understanding and the growth of the individual learner.
  - Workshop 2, "Teaching Religion in primary education", deals with the teaching of Multireligious Education in the intermediate phase of the General Education and Training Band (Grades 4 to 6). With reference to the changing situation in South Africa where children from different backgrounds need to be accommodated in public schools, the author discusses the paradigm shift needed in Religious Education teaching in primary schools towards the development of a Multireligious Education model, premised on the conviction that Multireligious Education should lead to the learners' becoming well-informed, balanced, creative and thinking individuals. She refers to certain typical fears of teachers with regard to Multireligious Education as these came to light in her research and that of others.
  - Workshop 3, "Teaching world religions in the senior phase (Grades 8 to 12; Grades 8 to 9: SS)", pays attention to Multireligious Education in the senior phase with special attention to the relationship between teacher and learner. Various Multireligious Education approaches (system approach, comparative approach and life theme approach) are discussed, and various types of cooperative learning are explored. In addition, an example of how religious topics may be dealt with in Multireligious Education learning programmes is provided. This is done by utilising, on the one hand, a religious-specific theme (the Jewish *Bar Mitzvah*) and, on the other, a theme of universal human relevance (euthanasia).

Even if one does not agree with all the above analyses and interpretations, the book nevertheless contains some interesting and provocative ideas about Multireligious Education teaching in Curriculum 2005.

Disappointing, however, are the many errors and incorrect statements and information. There are not only editing and typing errors (such as on pp. vii, 52, 54, 72, 80, 93, 174), but also incorrect statements and information on Curriculum 2005 (such as on pp xi, xiv, 42, 172, 184, 185).

*Multireligious Education in South Africa. Problems and prospects in a pluralistic society* is, nevertheless, recommended as a refreshing read for people interested in the building and healing process on the way towards a common South African nationhood. Readers not interested in these issues could find the

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book worthwhile in so far as it provides a wider understanding of the problems and prospects of Multireligious Education in South Africa's pluralistic society and the establishment of a system of Religious Education that would be welcomed by all. The publication will above all also prove to be of value to all educators in whose hands the future of South African society rests.

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