

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: AN EXAMINATION
OF THE EXPANDING CONTEXT OF RELIGION AND MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES**

by

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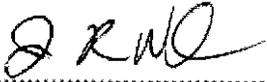
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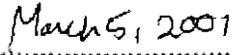
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Rev. James R. Wilson

DEDICATION

I would like to thank my wife Jayanthi for being supportive and a constant source of encouragement in the writing of this dissertation; to my daughters Shanthi and Priya for their witness to non-racialism and to Dr. A G van Wyk for sparking an interest in me in Practical Theology and for his guidance on this dissertation.

TITLE OF DISSERTATION

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE EXPANDING CONTEXT OF RELIGION AND MULTIRACIAL FAMILIES

KEY TERMS

Multiracial identity; Racism; Race; Critical pluralism; Dialogue; Christian Religious Education; Liberation; Multiculturalism; Empowerment; Pro-active

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ABSTRACT

In this study, an attempt was made to examine the impact that the multiracial identity is having on the institutional Church and in its attempts to address the problem of racism in the United States. An effort will be made to explore the emergence of anti-racist paradigms that both- move outside the social construction of race and an ideology of racial hatred and which empower people of all hues, ethnic and linguistic groups. Particular emphasis will be placed on those approaches which de-emphasize majoritarianism and a need to assert one's superior, moral, historic and pragmatic claims. A strong challenge is given to the Church to re-orientate its imagination away from the chimera of achieving a physically integrated institution in a color blind society and towards a clearer vision of empowerment in a fair and just society, incorporating pluralism in a shared framework.

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CHAPTER 1

A SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

As the United States enters the third millennium, the lines between race, ethnicity and culture appear to have become more blurred. Points of racial and cultural intersection abound: kosher burritos, chiropractic acupuncture, Mariah Carey, white rappers, Mexican pizza. The long-accepted myth that the United States is a monolithic and bi-cultural society consisting of a white majority and a black minority has been replaced by the realisation that America comprises a multicultural mosaic of Asians, Hispanics, blacks, whites as well as various other groupings that either fall outside traditional classifications or by people who refuse to define themselves as belonging to any categorical definition.

In this chapter, the researcher attempts to identify and describe the context of the growing multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic presence in the United States and the impact that it is having on the country. He raises questions about how Christian religious education may be used as an effective agent of change in a changing society. In this chapter he describes his methods and procedures, the significance of the study, and possible limitations.

1.2 MULTICULTURAL PRESENCE

While blacks constituted 96 percent of the minority population in 1960, the phenomenal growth of the Asian and Latino communities in the United States since that time has altered the demographic proportions of people of colour so dramatically that blacks now constitute a *minority* within a minority (Stephan 1992:52).

In New Mexico, people of colour comprise over 50 percent of the population, while in states like California, New York (Dugger 1997:1 & B6), Texas and Florida, are numerous people of colour. "The U.S. Bureau of Consensus (1992) forecasts that by the year 2050,

the representative face of America will no longer be white" (Root 1996:xiv). One mythical aspect of the American dream (nurtured by traditional hegemonic hopes of cultural dominance) has always been of the nuclear white family that consists of a father, a mother and two children living a homogeneous suburban lifestyle in a homogeneous suburb and garnering all the benefits that being members of such an elitist group confers. Not only has this persistent cultural myth become radically less influential since World War I; one may now plausibly inquire whether such a state of affairs ever really existed at any time in the past – except as a fiercely defended hegemonic construct of the influential American establishment who have individually and collectively ignored the significance (and often the rights) of those other racial and ethnic groupings which have always comprised a portion of the United States's population.

1.3 IDENTIFYING CULTURAL GROUPINGS

The lines of demarcation between ethnic, racial and cultural groupings is not always clear. Is the recent Latino black immigrant from Cuba, a Hispanic or African American? Is the child of a white American man and a Japanese American woman, an Asian or a white American? How can a person of mixed heritage (such as the person who has Native American and white and black American ancestry) be divided into racially defined parts? Would one say that a person (such as the hypothetical example mentioned in the previous sentence) is, for example, one-quarter white, one-half black and one-quarter Native American? Where do we locate the person who is of black-white heritage, who looks Puerto Rican, who identifies equally with the white and African American communities, and who refers to himself as "a member of the human race"?

An ethnic group is normally identified "chiefly on cultural grounds – language, folk practices, gestures, mannerisms or religion" (Zanden 1990:188). Where therefore do we place the Hispanic American who is unable to speak Spanish and who is a member of a charismatic Protestant denomination? Where do we place the young person who identifies with an ethnic grouping other than his/her own as in the case of

...wiggers – white kids who dress and talk black. ... Nor do only white kids believe that identity is a matter of choice of taste, or that the power of "claiming" can transcend ethnicity (Bernstein 1995:87-90).

A similar assessment of the problems inherent in ethnic identification is raised by Valerie Pang in a case study of primary school children in central Seattle, Washington (Pang 1993:29).

Because more than one ethnic group may share a common culture (as one finds in the United States), any attempt to define "culture" can become both complex and transient. It is difficult to define culture because it is difficult to identify the unifying elements that permit one to say that an individual belongs to particular ethnic group with a comprehensive cultural identity, a commonly recognised value system and a commonly accepted interpretation of the group's history. Because culture is never static, it is always being influenced by the changes that each new influx of immigrants introduces into the matrix, as well as by the shifting economic and numerical influence that any particular sub-grouping may have within a culture at any particular time.

Although the concept of culture has been defined differently by different theorists and authors, *culture* (in general terms) refers to the total life of any given society. Edward Tylor asserts that it normally includes "knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (quoted by Shorter 1995:4). If any culture is to survive, it must preserve its individual uniqueness, values, myths and hopes through the education of its citizens. Michael Grimmit speaks of *cultural absolutism*. By this he means the kind of education which becomes a means of enculturation, i.e. the means that a society uses to reinforce its vested interests (Grimmit 1994:134). In recent years, the American people have been indoctrinated with images of a hegemonic white culture whose values include group-specific perceptions of patriotism, xenophobia, group loyalty, the dominance of English as America's "official language", the

harassment and removal of illegal aliens, people on welfare and criminals – as well as the tribal call to stand in solidarity against a common foreign enemy. Even though this dominant culture is portrayed as homogeneous and static, it is in fact always undergoing a process of change.

Experience demonstrates that acculturation really takes place and that different cultures often borrow significant elements such as images, meanings, traditional food and modes of behaviour from other cultures (Shorter 1995:23). Thus, what is really happening in America is that all individuals are subjected in varying degrees to conscious and unconscious processes of multiple acculturation. In the light of these processes, America's officially dominant WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture takes its place, not as the dominant culture, but as one culture among many others.

1.4 RACE AND RACISM

To be an American will always encompass more than being a member of a particular cultural, ethnic or racial grouping. One cannot pretend that the vast range of cultural diversities that constantly interact in United States can ever be subsumed into one unified "American" identity (Usry & Keener 1996:13). To believe that this is possible, is to ignore the reality of modern American life. In addition, a huge variety of modern communication technologies such as the Internet, e-mail, the "fax" and telephones, continue to subvert the attempts of individuals to take refuge in cultural isolation and ignorance – whether by choice or by chance. Global events create a ripple effect from their places of origin and extend ever outwards to reach more and more people. Human beings are also unavoidably affected by their family and ancestral as well as by the interdependence of nations linked by a global economy.

Thus, while issues of culture are confusing and difficult to define, the definition of race is equally problematic. One may consider for a moment the tremendous diversity that exists

between people who are classified together into specific racial classifications. For example, although Congolese pygmies, Basotho, Egyptians and Ethiopians are all routinely classified as being racially "black", they exhibit considerable differences and variations in terms of their physical characteristics, language, belief systems, traditional beliefs and culture. Even more difficult to pin down are those racial groupings that fall outside of traditional categories – categories such as, for example, Pacific Islanders, Mayan Indians and Arabs. Race is often defined as the classification of people on the basis of colour and physical characteristics. And yet, "no bodily feature of capacity of skin colour and intelligence can be uniformly mapped onto racial categories" (Glass & Wallace 1996:344). Nor, according to scientists, are there any definable genes which determine race. The determination of race or racial category is a political and social construct originated and preserved by the "establishment" or hegemonic group in any particular country, region or social system (Spickard 1992:18).

It might seem reasonable to assume that continuous intermarriage between races, ethnic and cultural groupings would produce a corresponding decrease in levels of racism and prejudice. We live, after all, in an era in which institutional segregation and overt racism has been outlawed by legislation in many countries. Even so, by the end of the turbulent 1960s, during which much of the legislation designed to reduce social inequality was passed, racism had not disappeared. It had only become more subtle, subversive and subliminal (see Case 1996: 2-5). One finds an almost tacit agreement among many Americans on the issue of race, an agreement that might be expressed by the statement: "You may think it, but it is not politically correct to express it in public." Mark Mathabane, author of *Kaffir Boy* and *Kaffir Boy in America* makes the following comparison between racism in America and that which was practised under the "apartheid regime" in South Africa:

White Americans were simply more adept at hiding their true feelings. Crude, apartheid style racism was not their preferred weapon of keeping the black man down. It was in the subtle kind of racism, often hidden by a veneer of liberalism

and tolerance at which they excelled (Mathabane & Mathabane 1992:124).

This confirms the researcher's belief that while interaction between people of colour and white Americans continues to escalate both in the work place and other social settings, any real or meaningful contact remains fixed at a very superficial level. Beneath the surface, many white Americans continue to preserve the prejudices with which they stigmatised people of colour for centuries: rampant crime, teenage pregnancies and a disregard for traditional white European values and the English language. Thus, while most Americans are careful not to be racially offensive or prejudiced within their controlled working environments, the vast majority of white Americans still prefer to go home to their monocultural environments at the end of the day.

A number of psychologists have observed that repressed feelings and emotions frequently come to the surface and manifest themselves in various forms. In their highly publicized book, *The Bell Curve*, Murray and Herrnstein, both apparently reputable scientists, make the "blunt declaration that blacks as a group are intellectually inferior to whites which leads them to a dead serious attack on affirmative action" (Morganthau 1994:31). The book therefore not only revives the old controversy about racial differences between blacks and whites, but has also on occasion been used to reinforce the agenda of the political right¹ with regard to race, ethnicity and affirmative action (see Bartolome & Macedo 1997:222-228).

In recent years, the United States has seen an increase in the number of politically conservative elected officials, the inappropriate use of the freedom of speech rights for pejorative oratory, the passing of Proposition 187 in California, and the current threat to

¹ Robert Jackson has indicated that, in recent years, the radical right have changed their strategy to defend their monolithic culture, which they perceive as being threatened by foreign cultures and religions. Rather than basing their presumption of incompatibility on race or biological superiority, they now emphasise cultural differences. (Jackson 1997:138)

affirmative action laws (Hall 1996:409).

And yet, racism is not the exclusive domain of any particular cultural grouping. It appears to permeate all strata of American society in different degrees. The question about the racism of particular groups might be more appropriately phrased to read: "To what extent are we *all* affected by a racist society?" Commenting on the increase of anti-Semitic sentiments among members of the black community, Cornell West writes:

...it is the bitter fruit of a profound self destructive impulse, nurtured on the vines of hopelessness and concealed by empty gestures of black unity. The image of black activists yelling "Where is Hitler when you need him?" and "Heil Hitler", juxtapositioned with those of David Duke celebrating Hitler's birthday, seem to feed a single fire of intolerance, burning on both ends of the American candle, that threatens to consume us all (West 1993:76).

Recent events have further reinforced the perception that racial intolerance is still alive and well in United States. Such events include the Rodney King incident in Los Angeles and the subsequent rioting in April 1992, the O.J. Simpson trial, the Ennis Cosby killing as well as the spectacle of dozens of communities across the United States having to cope with the deliberate destruction of predominately black churches by arson. Many people in black America would agree with the statement that "White America has been historically weak-willed in ensuring racial justice and has continued to resist fully accepting the humanity of blacks" (West 1993:3).

Whether by intention or by choice, whites, blacks and other communities of colour continue to create invisible walls of separation between their respective communities.

Many Americans seem to have given up on the ideal of an integrated society. By and large, two segregated, opposed and hostile camps have emerged. More and more blacks and whites are hurling accusations of racism at each other and arguing rancorously over civil rights, affirmative action, and racially motivated violence (Mathabane &

Mathabane 1992:259).

While many people continue to project a generalised animosity towards those outside their racial, ethnic or cultural grouping, an increasing number of couples from different cultural and racial backgrounds have chosen to marry or live together outside of their respective communities. These couples have often been subjected to painful hostility, prejudice and discrimination.² What one observes therefore is that although civil interaction between different racial groupings in the work place or on social occasions is a *sine qua non* in our current political and pluralistic environment, intermarriage is (privately) regarded as unnatural and abhorrent by many otherwise apparently civilised and compassionate human beings. One young person of racially mixed origin shared her own experience in the following words:

In school, everyone would say, "What are you?" I was Zebra and Oreo. I also got things like "African booty-scratcher" because of my mother being from Africa. In social studies, someone brought in a zebra skin, and one kid was like, "Oh look, it's Joy" (Fundenburg 1994:105).

Although intermarriage is on the increase across the United States, the number of people who contract such marriages still only represents a small minority of those who marry. However liberal official rhetoric may be, many Americans are still firmly opposed to racial and ethnic mixing of any kind in society.

1.5 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

If religious education is defined "as the process whereby Christian learning takes place, ... the adoption and deepening of Christian beliefs, attitudes, values and dispositions to

² According to Debra Dickerson, mixed race/multiethnic individuals have often found themselves the subject of attack within those very communities from which they have received a part of their racial identity (see Dickerson 2000:B01).

experience and act in a Christian way" (Astley 1994:9), then addressing racial and ethnic issues within the context of a Christian education is both warranted and necessary. If one agrees with Astley's assertion, then the Christian faith and its commitment to social action cannot be divorced from a world which is still deeply enmeshed in social turmoil and personal and institutional racial prejudice. Furthermore, Christian religious education – as an integral dimension of practical theology – is called to be "responsive to the complex needs and demands of the church as well as to the ever shifting demands of the civic order" (Tracy 1987a:139).

If one believes this, as the researcher does, then the careful examination and deconstruction of racial and ethical issues becomes an absolute necessity because such a process enables practitioners of Christian religious education critically to examine the institutional church's role within a pluralistic society and the relevance of that witness in times of racial and ethnic tension. At the same time, religious educators are challenged to develop programmes that will help to eliminate the discrepancies experienced in practice between the official attitudes of the church and the indignity and pain suffered by many Christians from varying racial and ethnic backgrounds.

This study proceeds from the premise that it is the responsibility of practical theologians critically to reflect upon what happens in the church, and that it is the responsibility of the institutional church to be involved in praxis and the accomplishment of those actions. In other words, "Practical theology is indissolubly linked with praxis in the sense that it critically monitors it" (Heyns & Pieterse 1990:13). The researcher utilises an empirical and descriptive approach to the issues which he examines in the study: he proceeds to his conclusions by means of collecting, describing and processing empirical data that relates to race, racism and the institutional church's response to such issues. By focusing particularly on praxis in Christian religious education, the researcher hopes to create opportunities to reflect on those approaches and actions that are currently being used by the church in its perennial fight against racism. This study is undertaken with the explicit understanding that

academic analysis should never attempt to become a substitute for the day-to-day fight against every manifestation of racism in the world.

While it is true that it is more important to change the world than interpret it, one first has to understand the world before one can change it. But perhaps changes will come too little and too late if we do not at the same time attempt to have a deep understanding of what we mean when we make the claim that we are interpreting features of the world as we experience it (Tracy 1987b:114).

The central question of this dissertation is therefore the following: How can the institutional church, which is becoming ever more multiracial and multiethnic, use effective Christian religious education programmes in order to be an effective witness in American society on issues of race and racism? As corollaries to this central question, one may also raise related questions such as: Does the institutional church, in the context and culture in which it currently finds itself, operate from a position of exclusivism or from a position of inclusion and cultural plurality? What Christian religious education pedagogies are most appropriate and effective in a pluralistic society? How can Christian religious educators help to re-educate all those people (both oppressor and victims) who have been damaged by the historical circumstances and social conditioning that were a direct result of racism?

We should recognise at the outset that neither a mere embracing of multiculturalism within Christian religious education, nor opening the church's doors to all people, will in itself eliminate racism and its many and subtle manifestations. The history of the church in the United States supplies ample evidence that these approaches alone may not be effective or produce the desired results. We should also recognise that the problems of racism, prejudice and exclusion will not be solved solely by simple tolerance towards people different from ourselves, the use of politically correct language, or in the asking of critical questions about manifestations of racism and exclusivity in church circles (although all such questions are absolutely necessary to provide the groundwork for answering more

complex questions).

The researcher hopes that this study will help to identify the most appropriate Christian religious education pedagogies for the United States in the 21st century. Such pedagogies will be based on theologies and approaches that are dialogical, proactive, pluralistic and humanistic. Inevitably, they will require Christians to dissociate themselves from and repent of the sins of racism and ethnocentrism. Christian religious education should also include liberatory and multicultural dimensions, i.e. it should call on Christians to struggle to manifest truth, justice and compassion in the world so that non-believers may see visible manifestations all around them of the desire of the Body of Christ to institute justice and reparation in the lives of all the individuals who constitute society. It should be evident, even to outsiders, that Christian religious education and racism are mutually exclusive.

Since the central focus of Christian faith is life itself (Richards 1975:22), it follows that Christian religious education should never hesitate to engage in the critical examination of a wide range of life related issues. Even when such issues may appear to be non-congruent with the interests and value system of the majority of the population, a mandate is in place. Thus, unless they are very strongly challenged, most white Americans (because they are the beneficiaries of a privileged hegemonic culture with very specific exclusionary values), will feel little or no inclination to address issues as important as racism, whether in the church itself or in society as a whole. Most white Americans would far rather continue to take refuge in their exclusive and solipsistic cultural and economic universe which shelters them from the pain, suffering, uncertainty and anxieties of the world "outside".

Working towards racial reconciliation, like building a good marriage, requires commitment to *intentional change*. Given a choice between initiating a conversation with a black or a white person, most of us will choose our racial cousin. Because most of us prefer to be comfortable, we tend to tailor our Christianity to harmonise with the way in which we already live our lives (Perkins & Rice 1993:218).

Because the church stands on the cutting edge of social issues, it is called to maintain its prophetic witness to society as a whole. Christians do not raise the voice of prophetic witness in order to remain "relevant" to current trends and fashions in social and political thought. From the point of view of the Christian educator, the church needs to grapple with issues of social, political and economic justice if Christian education is to remain a potent force that truly touches the hearts and minds of human beings. If it is to fulfil its function properly, Christian religious education should not allow itself to focus on any one, single dimension of the human experience at the expense of others.

In the institutional church of past centuries, practitioners often focused on the spiritual dimension of human existence to the exclusion of social, economic and political justice. In order to do this, the church had to position itself above the socio-political dynamics of any given situation. Because the church has a shameful record of frequently failing in its duty to practise its office of prophetic witness in the past, we now need to analyse and critique both how the church acted in the past as well how contemporary Christian religious education engages with questions of social, racial, economic and political justice. We must also not hesitate to ask awkward questions about whether or not Christian religious education pedagogies are teaching an inclusionary or an exclusionary ethic, and whether we ourselves are also contributing to the preservation of what might be called "two nations" – one that is relatively affluent, white and perpetually in a position of dominance and power, and the other that is poor, non-white, powerless, defenceless and beyond the advocacy of any interest groups.

Historically, Christianity in the United States (both Protestantism and Catholicism) has failed to challenge racial divisions in a way that has radically shaken the structure of American society. It has even sometimes embraced separation – if not in theory, then most definitively in practice. More precisely, the church on the whole has a dismal record of being one of the most *de facto* segregated institutions in American life. Yet, despite such

divisions, this author believes that Christian religious education has the ability to act as an effective agent for change in a divided and racially divided society by promoting racial and ethnic justice and equality. This is what makes Christian religious education distinct from education as a general discipline. Christian religious education not only helps people to absorb a specific body of knowledge; it also calls on us to integrate that knowledge into a plan of action in the world. It calls for the development of theologies that enable one to view life from a point of view that is radically different from the culturally and politically Eurocentric paradigm. It calls for the promotion and actualisation of cross-cultural, multi-ethnic and cross-denominational approaches to Christian religious education.

This dissertation is less concerned with the accumulation of facts than with helping the church to develop new ways of thinking about human relationships and with the development of anti-racist paradigms. In this study, the researcher will explore various anti-racist models in Christian religious education.

1.6 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study will consist of a literature survey of various approaches to religious education, general education and the social sciences, approaches that will be drawn primarily from South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. What these approaches have in common is that they provide a common basis for answering the practical theological questions which the author raised earlier in this chapter. No attempt will be made to harmonize conflicting assessments of the subject.

Accordingly, chapter two will focus on the essence of race and racial identity and its influence in both society and the church. Chapter three will focus specifically on how the church should face racism in religious education and societies dominated by one specific influential or hegemonic point of view. Special attention will be given to approaches that currently work in practice. Chapter four will examine key pedagogic approaches, i.e. those

involving critical pluralism and proactivism. Chapter five will present the researcher's conclusions.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Richard Shaull, in his Forward to Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, clearly states the agenda of all education.

There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or to become "the practice of freedom", means by which men and women discover how to participate in the transformation of the world (Shaull, in Freire 1982:15).

Religious education should aspire to do no less than that. Religious education that attempts to be politically neutral becomes politically active by default: it reinforces the values and attitudes of the dominant cliques in society as a whole. If the purpose of religious education is to engage people in praxis (i.e. intellectually coming to grips with life's important issues through dialogue and action), then religious educators are faced with a formidable challenge in addressing the issue of racism. In effect, they have to identify and describe appropriate ways of working harmoniously within multicultural contexts and of developing the ability of people to live normal and compassionate lives within such multiracial and multicultural societies.

...Western society, including the Christian church, has been racist and sexist and imperialistic. We must understand that hegemonic domination by the socially/politically powerful is a bad thing. We must always recognize that our society is pluralistic – there is a wide diversity of persons among us who are different from us (Brelsford 95:178).

Whereas many societies expect their religious institutions to legitimise the status quo and

lull their adherents into an unquestioning acceptance of the dominant clique's values, Christian religious education (if it is understood as enculturation) is a lifelong process of sensitisation rather than a process of indoctrination. In Christian religious education, a dialectical tension is always present between the Christian message and life, and the multicultural constituency which the church serves.

The need to come to terms with North America's multicultural identity is only now beginning to make an impact in most areas of American education, including Christian religious education. Yet, even now, no common consensus appears to exist about the most appropriate methods for dealing with racism. Within Christian religious education itself, the issue is even more complex because there is no common agreement about what constitutes orthodoxy in the field, especially in a nation that is both deeply religious and that *constitutionally* guarantees the separation of church and state (i.e. religion and secular life). American history has been characterised by a ongoing didactic and dialectical relationship between church and state. That is to say, while the institutional church and its Christian religious education programmes are accepted as being important factors in American society, they cannot (for constitutional reasons) claim any position of privilege. In a multicultural society such as that of the United States, we need to keep a close watch on how church and state interact with and influence each other.

We also need to deal with the ethnocentric assumption that God works through certain people and not through others, i.e. that God works through Jews and Christians, but not through others. Are there resources in the varying philosophical and religious traditions that comprise the American tradition which will enlighten us as to how we might fulfil the task of preparing students to live and work with people of other races, ethnic groupings and cultures?

In order to educate Christians for life in a multicultural and religiously diverse plural society, the Christian churches should encourage the development of curriculum, Bible

study and worship materials that emphasize the pluralistic nature of the Christian faith (Tze Ming Ng 1993:589).

1.8 LIMITATIONS

The issues of language, as they relate to problems of race, ethnicity and culture, are always dynamic and are hardly ever without controversy. By its very nature, language is both a means of classification and also a source of division – a "us" versus "them" hierarchal, socio-political construct. What do we mean when we refer to some people as "people of colour", and to others as "whites"? Is anyone without colour? Even within individual ethnic and cultural groupings, self-identification often changes quite rapidly. In the black American community, for example, terms such as *Negro*, *black-American*, *Afro-American* and *African American* have all been used as terms of identification at various times. The researcher will attempt in this dissertation to use terms which are as inclusive as possible for the largest number of people. In spite of this, we have to regretfully accept that any and all forms of identification of human beings always fall short of being "fully inclusive."

At the same time, because of the limited scope of this dissertation, the author accepts that it is impossible to cover the depth and breath of this subject adequately. Racism is a complex and problematic phenomenon, which cannot be remedied through simple axioms or theories. Despite the best efforts of the best scholars in the field, racism continues to manifest itself in new forms all the time.

In terms of resources, this author found a limited number of resources, both books and journals, in Lesotho and South Africa, on the topics of the multicultural identity and racism from an American as well as from a Christian educational context.

This dissertation is also written from the perspective of practical theology. The researcher is a member of a Christian community which affirms both the sovereignty of Jesus Christ

as Lord and the Christian scriptures as a practical guide before dealing with contemporary societal problems. Because it is impossible to write except from a personal point of view, it is important to remember that the author will inevitably reflect some degree of personal bias as he attempts to address the questions raised in this thesis.

In this chapter, evidence was adduced to suggest that there are a growing number of multicultural, multiracial, multiethnic individuals and communities in the United States. The researcher also drew attention to the ongoing presence of racism and the use of racial categories both in society and in the institutional church. Lastly, the parameters of the study were established, i.e. the researcher stated the problem, defined various terms, and recognised the limitations inherent in this particular study.

CHAPTER 2

RACE AND RACIAL IDENTITY IN AMERICA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher will review both current and historical frames of reference with regard to race in the institutional church and in society as a whole. In addition, he will examine how the imperatives of the multiracial identity is impacting on both.

2.2 THE WHITE/NON-WHITE DICHOTOMY

The white/non-white dichotomy as a personal and institutional frame of reference that affects every aspect of American life, has always been a core component of the collective identity of the United States from the very earliest days of its inception. Americans, that is to say, have always defined their identity in terms of race. Ellis Cose writes:

The nation's first citizenship statute, passed in 1790, limited naturalization to "aliens being free white persons". That law (though amended to grant citizenship to blacks after the Civil War) stood until 1952 (Cose, in Usry & Keener 1996:48).

Since this is the case, one may assume that the terms and expressions which were used in various documents and speeches to express the country's ideology of freedom and fundamental rights (terms such as, for example, "emancipation" and "we the people") are racially exclusivist and were written by white Americans for the benefit of a white dominant class. In the construction of personal and national identity, being American automatically meant being white, and being white was synonymous with being American. Thus, for example, the 1787 Constitution of the United States counted slaves "for the purpose of taxation and representation, as only 'three-fifths of a person'". Edwards notes (1996:47) that slaves were the property, and that the men who wrote the Constitution were primarily concerned with protecting property for owners.

While the Emancipation Proclamation that President Abraham Lincoln signed during the Civil War in 1863 freed approximately four million African Americans in the South, it

failed to free all slaves. This happened because while the document addressed a specific situation in the South, it failed to address the moral issues surrounding slavery as they applied to all Americans. A consequence of this failure to come to grips with the basic immorality of slavery meant that those in servitude in the North had to wait until the ratification of the 13th Amendment of the Constitution which abolished slavery *in toto* before they were freed. In spite of the Civil War and its consequences, the social distance between white and black Americans continued to grow. The dominant class, in an effort to maintain its ascendancy and sense of superiority, affirmed its putative racial purity by pursuing an increasingly strict observance of racial segregation and taboos that became more and more deeply ingrained in American national life.

This need to know "who is white and who is black" has continued to manifest itself throughout the history of the United States from as early as the late 16th century in, for example, the dominant class's use of hypodescent legislation (the one drop rule),³ and the enactment of Jim Crow laws⁴ at all levels of government during the post-Civil War period. From its very earliest days, therefore, American society has been structured on the basis of a hierarchy that operates in terms of race and colour. This hierarchy of privilege (whether formalised in legislation or operating informally by means of tacit agreement among members of privileged classes) excludes certain designated groups of people from enjoying various privileges, rights, jobs and responsibilities. The Federal Housing Authority, for example, met the "housing shortage in the 1950s by providing loans for new homes, but blacks and other non-whites were specifically excluded" (Usry & Keener 1996: 51).

It is therefore not surprising to find that most churches in America reflect this same white/non-white dichotomy both in their theology and in their institutional structures.

³ The rule of "hypodescent" emerged in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and it defined as "black" any person who had the slightest black heritage whatsoever.

⁴ "Jim Crow" refers to the term used particularly in the American South for any intentional segregation in terms of race.

Because the majority of influential white people in American churches chose to remain silent when confronted by racist attitudes and practices or else openly defended and advocated the cause of slavery as "biblical" and therefore theologically respectable, racial segregation became a standard feature of American national life. This understanding of what it was "to be an American" entrenched a binary definition of American self-identity and the development of theologies and church praxis that were predicated on a racially divided national identity. This simplistic and opportunistic interpretation of a gospel that claimed to be authoritative (not because it was Christian but because it was tacitly underwritten by the ideological needs of the ruling classes) was not uncritically received by all Americans. Dawson notes that

When people from the civilization of Western Christianity became involved in the slave trade, they were immediately presented with a theological problem, namely that the first obligation of a faithful Christian was to convert people and serve in love, not kidnap them or own them (Dawson 1996:205-206).

In spite of the misgivings of many individual Christians in the face of the disempowerment and brutalisation of people of colour for purposes of commercial and political advantage, the dominant white ruling class urgently needed theologies that would justify their involvement in the slave trade and the radical social, economic and political discrimination against non-white people that has always – in varying degrees – characterised American society. The kind of theology that the ruling classes needed to justify their commercial and political activities had to "prove" beyond doubt that black people were fundamentally inferior as human beings and that – like animals – they were beings without souls. If this could be "proved" on biblical grounds, the ruling classes would be accorded the kind of licence they needed to discriminate against and exploit people on grounds of race and colour. Such theological attitudes (which people imbibed from popular sermons and agreed to on public and private occasions) dictated the behaviour of all classes of Americans and served to define the negative self-identity (the "slave mentality") of Americans who were not white.

Moy (1993) cites Toynbee as asserting that English-speaking colonists constructed and utilised self-serving "Christian" theologies of this kind to justify the racial theories that licensed them to enslave and dominate blacks and Native Americans. By misinterpreting the books of the Old Testament by means of a literal reading of the text that completely divorced the origin and purpose of the books of the Old Testament from the audience, time and circumstances for which they were written, the colonists were able to characterise (or mythologise) themselves as the "Israelites" (whites) who were conquering the "Canaanites" (blacks) with the blessing and active encouragement of Yahweh. The method used to construct fundamentalist theologies of this kind is well understood: carefully selected and isolated biblical passages are collated and presented as though they are a contemporary document that applies to a particular modern situation or context. Such deliberate or "creative" falsifications of various texts of the Bible is common enough even today among certain fundamentalists of all colours and stripes in the United States and in countries such as South Africa. "It was the heathenism of the Indian and blacks, not their race, which was their rationale for their enslavement" (Moy 1993:419).

One such theology of dehumanization expounded in the Christian West was known as "Polygenesis". According to its adherents, all species are exactly the same today as they were when they were created by God. They are indelibly marked and unchanging. This view, of course, raises the following question: if everyone is the same today as they were when Adam and Eve were created, why then is it the case that people vary so much in their physical appearance? The answer most often used by such advocates was: "White people are the real descendants of Adam and Eve; the rest are not really human beings – they came from different ancestors who were not specifically mentioned in the Bible" (Moore 1994/1995:14). The believers who generated these racist fantasies and sold them to their gullible constituents as "biblical" Christian theology, used their tainted reasoning to disqualify whole groups of non-white human beings from membership of the human race.

Other theologies (superficially more sophisticated and therefore more dangerous) emphasised the belief that blacks, although genuine human beings, were unfortunately the descendants of Ham according to the Judaeo-Christian Bible. Adherents of this theology constructed a special interpretation of chapters 9 and 10 of the book of Genesis. Their understanding was that Ham (symbolic of black people) was cursed by God for having seen his father Noah naked. The corollary of this curse was that Cush, Egypt, Libya and Canaan, as ancestors of the people of the African continent, transferred that particular curse to their descendants, i.e. to all people of African origin. A careful reading of the text, however, shows that neither Ham nor Cush is actually cursed. Rather it is Canaan who was cursed – the very Canaan who appears to have no ethnic ties with Africa.

Other racist theologies used to justify racial discrimination and segregation focus on passages such as that found in Genesis 11:1-9, the story of the Tower of Babel, to "prove" that it is God's will that different races should remain separate. According to this narrative, there was a time when all the people of the earth spoke the same language and lived in relative unity and amity. This idyllic situation was disrupted when the people in the plains of Shinar decided to build a tower up to heaven. Yahweh punishes their attempt to place themselves on a footing of equality with the Almighty by preventing the various peoples of the earth from understanding each other's languages. The mutual incomprehension that follows this punishment causes nations to quarrel and wage war against each other. In more recent times this same story was even used as a rationale for apartheid (McKenzie 1997:11).

In the same vein, Ezra's prohibition against Jews marrying foreigners/gentiles (Ezra 9 & 10), as well as other Old Testament passages advocating the same prohibition (Deuteronomy 7:3; Kings 11:2; Nehemiah 13:25), were used in an attempt to justify the beliefs that races should remain separate in every way and that intermarriage would cause

racial deterioration and lead nations into disaster.⁵ Popular reference books on the Bible such as *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Dake 1962:1952), used by many Pentecostals in the United States, actively reinforce the belief in racial separation and segregation. In his notes on the book of Acts, Dake adduces thirty reasons why races need to be segregated. If one analyses these reasons, the essential message that emerges is that:

1. It is God's will that each race preserve the distinctive identity with which Yahweh originally endowed them. Any violation of God's original purpose in making races distinct from each other constitutes an act of insubordination against Yahweh.
2. God's purpose is that each species (i.e. race) should reproduce after their own kind (Goings 1995:55).

One such Christian group which actively embraces this concept of the separation of the races has said:

We believe that God made the races as they are. He made black people. He made yellow people. He made white people. We believe God intends for these distinctions to remain (Pement 1997:24-26,27).

One of the most significant acts affirming racism in the American church took place on an institutional level just before the Civil War. The Southern Baptist Convention, reportedly the largest Protestant denomination in America today (numbering approximately 15.6 million members), was formed when Baptists met in Augusta, Georgia, in 1845 (Goings 1995:27-28). The delegates met to debate whether slave owners could become missionaries. In a split that symbolically foreshadowed the Civil War, the Northern delegates said "no" while the Southern group broke off into their own denomination. Many other Christian denominations also organised themselves along racial lines at this time. In the early 1800s, many African Americans in the Methodist Church reacted to the

⁵According to Lou DeCaro, Jr., "A first step towards accommodating interracial couples in the church is to reject the racist myths that have become tragically attached to the Biblical text. Anti-miscegenation is an example of a culture and a church that has willfully and consistently miseducated its people, and skewed its most sacred texts" (DeCaro undated:12).

prohibition that prevented them from worshipping alongside white members in the same sanctuary by forming a new denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in which blacks could worship freely. This denomination, founded by blacks on 9 April 1816, was a direct response to the provocation of being excluded from common worship with other Christians on racist grounds (Edwards 1996:46-47). In 1845, the Presbyterians declared in their General Assembly that slavery was a biblical institution (Edwards 1996:24). Thus, by the latter part of the nineteenth century, the United States witnessed both the withdrawal of black Christians from white churches and the rapid growth and expansion of black denominations (Trulear 1997:164).

In more recent times, theological debate has been superseded by the pseudo-scientific argument of various adherents of Social Darwinism, namely that certain racial groups are superior to others on evolutionary grounds. The attitude of the Nazis towards the Jews between 1933 and 1945 was intellectual justified by this kind of spurious ideological reasoning. Social Darwinists assert that the human species evolves and changes over time and that these changes, while cruel, are part of Nature's inexorable law of the survival of the fittest (Moore 1994/1995:14). It is because of this kind of perverted reasoning that one finds constant references in Nazi propaganda and rhetoric to "Fate" and "Destiny" and to the special characteristics of the so-called "Aryan" people (another mythological concept) that allegedly makes them superior to other races (even white races such as the Slavs). While this kind of philosophising is more akin to science fiction than to serious scientific or even philosophical speculation, it nevertheless provided the Nazis and all their ideological descendants with the rationale they needed to organise the mass deportation, enslavement and murder of countless millions of Jews, Slavs, gypsies, homosexuals, political dissidents, and religious dissidents such as the Jehovahs' Witnesses.

Throughout the centuries, the Bible has been used a source book for justifying slavery and propagating racism – a state of affairs ending in mass murder on a scale hitherto unknown by the human race.

2.3 RACE AS A SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSTRUCT

Although racial classification might appear to be useful for understanding human variations, its uncritical acceptance as a biological fact is not without its problems. The most common determinant of a person's race is skin colour. In spite of this, there is no one absolute and identifiable shade for each and every racial group. Furthermore, when one includes such variables as hair and facial characteristics, the categorization of people on the basis of such criteria (physical features) appears to have so many variants as to be an impossible and futile undertaking. There are simply too many variables in human appearance and characterising features for any scientifically useful conclusions to be drawn.

The most common means used to identify racial groups at the time of the country's founding was on the basis of geography. In 1758, Carolus Linnaeus developed a four race taxonomy, *Systema Naturae*, which he based on his analysis of geographical differences. However, in 1796, the naturalist and anatomist, Frederich Blumenbach, building on the prior work of Linnaeus, developed his own five race taxonomy which he based on his analysis of both geography and physical characteristics. He classified races as Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, Americans (native "Indians" of the Americas) and Malays (Gould 1994:65-69). Since he himself was European and since he based his system on a descending hierarchy of excellence, it is hardly surprising that he placed the Caucasian race (which includes Western Europeans) at the top of his hierarchy because he regarded them as being the physically the most beautiful. From this initial subjective proposition, he developed two further hypotheses that judged the characteristics of ostensible racial "types". At the opposite end of the spectrum from the Caucasian race he located "two of the most degenerative (less attractive, not least morally unworthy or mental obtuse forms of humanity), Asians on one side and Africans on the other side" (Gould 1994:65-69).

Blumenbach therefore revised Linnaeus's geographically-based typology of human beings and replaced it with a typology of human beings based on subjective judgements about

human "worth" and "beauty", with the globally dominant white European class predictably representing the ideal. Arthur de Gobineau (1853) further reinforced this subjective hierarchical ideology of racial superiority in his *Essai sur l'Ineglite des Races Humaines*, a kind of pseudo-scientific racist theory that was used in support any number of racist causes, including the justification of slavery in the United States.

Issues of race invariably involve some kind of racial taxonomy based on supposedly superior and inferior human qualities, the dangers of cross-breeding among races, and the hierarchical classification of human racial types. Thus, one cannot analyse racial classifications without examining the underlying issues of *power* that all forms of racial classification presuppose, namely the ability of one person or group to control the actions, behaviour, privileges and rights of another. Absurd racist classifications of the kind we have been examining would never be possible if those suggesting and/or implementing the classification concerned did not possess the social, military, political and economic power to intimidate others into accepting their classifications. Racist classifications that advantage certain groups at the expense of others are inherently absurd or subjective ideological statements that can only be enforced by intimidation, coercion and brute force.

Fashions in racist classification vary with changing political, economic and social circumstances and they are always (by their very nature) statements of prejudice and belief posing as serious scientific or philosophical discourse. The ideological classification of human beings according to race is always accompanied by political intolerance and the denial of fundamental human rights and privileges to those who are arbitrarily classified as "inferior" to the dominant class which defines the racist agenda. The suffering of the group that is defined as inferior ranges from the effects of xenophobia and social ostracisation to brutal mass extermination on a vast scale (such as that carried out in Europe by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945). As Moy notes, fashions in racism are sometimes so absurd that they defy analysis. "For example, in the nineteenth century, southern Europeans, Jews and Irish were classified as 'non-whites'" (Moy 1993:418).

While most serious racists tend to dignify their absurd theories with a spurious scientific gloss, no scientific construct that changes with the changing fashions of law, history, religion and politics, could ever be described as scientific – even in the widest sense of the word.

2.4 MULTIRACIAL IDENTITY

Americans are currently marrying more outside of their dominant racial grouping than at any other time in the past.

The number of interracial couples has increased by 78 percent since 1990. One in 50 marriages is now between people of different races. In addition to interracial marriages, there were over 8000 foreign and transracial adoptions in 1992 alone, according to estimates from the National Council of Adoption (Steel 1997:44-49).

These demographic realities have forced Americans to re-evaluate their traditional understanding of race and ethnicity and compel them to reflect seriously on the experiences and perceptions of the increasing number of citizens who owe their identity to cross-cultural and multiracial bonds and unions. This re-evaluation comes in the midst of the continuing and persistent Eurocentric bias that continues to remain influential in all strata of American society.

An unexpected development is that many African Americans, as well as other minorities who are sensitive to issues of race and ethnicity, have expressed the fear that attempts to move away from the traditional strong emphasis on racial and cultural uniqueness towards a more inclusive commonality will eventually lead to the elimination of the racial and cultural distinctiveness of minority groups and will therefore entrench the historical dominance of white Americans. People at both ends of the great racial divide – whites as well as people of colour – therefore appear to be troubled (for different reasons) by the implications for themselves of those people who may be described as multicultural or

multiethnic.

What is troubling to Americans of "pure" blood about people of multiracial and multicultural descent is that the latter identify themselves differently in different situations; by emphasising whatever aspects of identity they feel are most important or relevant at the time, they tend to blur all traditional understandings of racial or ethnic identity. Such people are not easily controlled or classified in a society that is obsessed with classification and placement. More and more, multicultural and multiracial people find themselves eluding all attempts to disempower them by making them feel at a disadvantage in a society traditionally dominated by white Anglo-Saxons Protestants.

This new approach to diversity and multiracial/multicultural origins is causing a fundamental epistemological shift in American society: it is causing people to disassociate themselves from the old racist "either/or" paradigms of exclusionary thinking that classifies in order to disadvantage, abuse and control. More and more influential people are embracing an inclusionary paradigm that honours diversity and incorporates concepts of *partly, mostly or both/and*. Because such people refuse to be bound by the arbitrary and subjective categories and definitions of hostile others, they appear more able to resist the oppressiveness of having to chose one group over another or accept the political or social power of hostile others to define exactly who they are or how they should behave. In spite of this hopeful outlook, the traditional American obsession with racial classification continues to manifest itself in varying degrees in contemporary moral and political life (as may be deduced, for example, by the remarkably consistent voting patterns in the 2000 presidential election).

Another issue that is affected by prejudices about race is transracial adoption.

The debate about the necessity of placing black and mixed race children with black families rages on. Some people argue that black children cannot develop a viable racial identity in the context of a white family (Wilson 1987:196).

Because the church mirrors society, it has been compelled since World War II to

increasingly question its own attitudes of institutional racial separation – as well as its attitudes towards other issues such as the unique identity of the increasing number of multicultural families who make up congregations. Since modern American churches are obliged to minister in the context of a multiethnic and multicultural society, they have to face up to the unprecedented challenge of how they should respond effectively and compassionately to the growing numbers of couples in America who are crossing racial and cultural lines to worship, socialise and live together as well as join hands in marriage and in producing of families. Such challenges to the universal church cannot simply be ignored or wished away. They are part of the changing demographic and social patterns of modern American political, social and cultural life.

While an increasing number of congregations in the United States have intentionally embraced a cross-cultural identity and *modus operandi*, local churches in America are in many ways the final frontier of segregated institutions.

"The church is segregated now because that's what we like," said (the late Spencer) Perkins. "In King's era, churches were segregated because whites didn't want to be around blacks. Now, its two-sided. Today we both choose to be separate." (Gilbreath 1998:28)

Because they experimented with racially integrated churches after the era of legalised segregation and failed or were disappointed that a non-racist utopia failed to materialise, many denominations have once again been embracing the *homogeneous unit principle*, i.e. the belief that churches work best with groups of people who are ethnically homogeneous. The advocates and implementers of this model would certainly not regard themselves as being racist; neither would they accept that the homogeneous unit principle promoted a segregated and racist church. Many ethnic *minorities* strongly support this principle [of creating a homogeneous unit] because they believe that their only chance of survival – whether in the church or in society – depends on the cultivation of a ethnic homogeneous church. Black people frankly believe that wherever racial mixing does takes place, whites always end up in control (this was one of the basic tenets of the Black Power movement).

To traditional black churches which have gained so much cultural support and identity through the cultivation of homogeneity, the challenge of becoming multicultural is very threatening indeed (Buttry 1988:126). In his book entitled *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (1996), Ortiz voices his opposition to the church's continuing dependence on the homogeneous unit principle. He regards homogeneous unit principle as a hindrance to improved race relations and racial reconciliation.

What most people apparently fear most about racial mixing in churches is the increased incidence of "miscegenation" or interracial marriage that inevitably follows when people mix naturally and normally in the activities of congregations. Churches have traditionally been places where people form friendships and find suitable marriage partners. This is a completely natural process because churches bring together people who have profound common interests in congenial and relaxed social as well as religious circumstances.

Traditionally, in American culture, it is whites, not blacks, who are most concerned about interracial marriages and mixing. (Expressions of black exclusivity such as that found in the Nation of Islam do not claim the allegiance of the majority of black Americans.)

The overwhelming majority of Christians who have these fears about interracial marriages are white...This stems from a lie devised by white bigots prior to the Civil War...claiming that black male slave were "bucks" with animal-like sexual tendencies and abilities. These racists justified these lies under the supposed necessity to protect and preserve the sanctity of white females from the exaggerated sexual prowess of black men (Goings 1995:53-54).

If the church is to be empowered to overcome its irrational fears about race and ethnicity, it may find that its greatest fear will one day become its greatest gift. Christians who embrace multiracialism and multiculturalism as an enrichment of personal, religious, social and sexual life – rather than a factor to be feared and hated – will ultimately realise that God is the author of human diversity and what God blesses should not be made into an artificial barrier that creates hurt and division among Christians and among members of society. In rejecting the immoral exclusivity of ethnocentric versions of Christianity that

have constituted one of the most shameful and scandalous features of Christian history, Christians will come to understand that in Christ there is "neither Jew nor Greek" (Galatians 3:28). If the church reaches out and embraces this vision that is as old as the Christian faith itself, it will be well prepared for whatever it encounters in this new millennium.

In this chapter, the researcher provided a brief overview of the historical roots of racism in American society as well as in the institutional church. He specifically reviewed the development of hierarchal theories of race and traced the advocacy of such theories. In closing, he addressed the issue and indications of multiracial and multicultural identity in the United States.

CHAPTER 3

FACING RACISM IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine Christian religious education that has internalised the codification and canonization of racial and ethnic constructs as a part of its institutional structure, its curriculum and its resources. This section will also examine a biblical understanding of humanness and a theology of pluralism, and Christian religious education from both a liberatory and multicultural perspective, i.e. how Christian religious education faces up to the challenges (such as prejudice and discrimination) that come with an increasingly racially and culturally mixed population.

3.2 CULTURALLY ENCAPSULATED CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION⁶

Christian religious education, as used in the church, has often reflected American racism in its curricula as well as through its resources. Wherever it is done this, it has attempted to present one culturally determined interpretation of the Gospel as though it were universal (see Augsburger 1986:22-24). This racist version of Christianity, grounded as it is in paternalistic and racial assumptions, has chiefly reflected the racist attitudes of whites and the attitudes of whites towards people of colour. When this has happened, the church has wittingly or unwittingly lent its prestige, resources and influence to prop up the white-dominated hierarchal system of oppression that has been the part of American life since its inception.

Church curricula for children from the 1920s to the 1960s routinely depicted Jesus with northern European features such as light-coloured hair. While people of Anglo-Saxon descent helped the children of other European immigrants to assimilate into society and

⁶ The author has based his description of the culturally encapsulated Christian religious educator from Augsburger's description of the culturally encapsulated counsellor (see Augsburger 1986:22-24).

become "good Americans", non-white children (the descendants of many generations of African Americans) were by definition regarded as ineligible for membership in American society (except in the demeaning and humiliating roles that were defined for them by the dominant classes) and so were always accorded the status of outsiders (Moy 1993:423).

Whether such acts were consciously racist or unconsciously ethnocentric (the consequence of many generations of propaganda and conditioning), the end result was always the same. It gave the false impression that Christianity was being a white man's religion (Bellis 1998:161-165).

Even when minorities were incorporated into the church's curricula and invested with positions of leadership, as happened in the aftermath of the Civil Rights era, the primary purpose of their inclusion was tokenism. While people of colour were statistically represented or coopted, they were rarely empowered as were many other ethnic or cultural groups that comprised the church's membership. While, on the one hand, the unique cultural talents and gifts of service to the church were discouraged, the process of assimilation was actively encouraged. The implicit logic behind this attitude was that it was necessary and desirable for minorities to adopt the values of the dominant ethnic group and their understanding of the American way of life (Banks 1988:59).

Children from different backgrounds were pictured in family and school contexts without wearing culturally distinctive clothing. The participation of groups previously excluded from church life was desired, yet their cultural contribution to a new sense of church identity was neglected (Moy 1993:423-424).

A common practice among certain urban white congregations with a dwindling membership was to attempt recruiting potential members from the ethnically changing neighbourhoods from which their churches were rooted. Although they invited people of colour – African, Asian, Hispanic as well as other minority groupings – to join their congregations in the hope of repopulating their pews, they continued to preserve the ascendancy and visibility of their Anglo-Saxon socio-cultural traditions, values and religious beliefs unchanged. There was no attempt to practise the kind of enculturation that would have made non-Anglo-Saxon Christians feel more at home. Such churches only

understood people of colour in terms of their numerical value and what this would do for the status of the church.

If the goal of churches is merely to have a token representative ethnic presence and no more than that, one can measure "success" in terms of how many different ethnic groups are represented in each church. One might have forty different ethnic groups attending a church but not contributing in any way or participating to the formation and distribution of the power and authority of the church (Ortiz 1996:90).

One finds that Christian religious education in such churches often fails to acknowledge the pluralistic and multicultural dynamics of the environment and context in which the church finds itself. They also usually fail to recognize or appreciate the unique contributions that might occur as a result of exchanges between equal partners. They became "fused to the culture of origin, with no distinct boundary between self and society" (Augsburger 1986:23).

Any kind of Christian religious education that promotes uncritical and mindless conformity may help to indoctrinate its members so that they become harmonious with the dominant American culture which values conformity and homogeneity above diversity, critical reflection and obvious cultural differences. But since cultural pluralism is becoming a more and more influential factor in the contemporary world in general and in the United States in particular, mindless conformity is not likely to be the characteristic that will be highly valued in the 21st century. Because the demographics of the American population as a whole are increasingly ethnically diverse and because gender-role identities are in a state of flux, the myth of America as the great melting pot in which all diversity is flattened out and in which even the most exotic ambitious immigrant aspires to become as much like the traditional WASP as possible, no longer accurately describes what is actually happening in the United States (Siejk 1993:446).

The kind of culturally homogeneous Christian religious education described above tends to be found in those churches which attempt to "reduce the complexity of the world and simplify its confusing and contradictory variety" (Augsburger 1986:22) into one assimilated whole. Thus, for example, there are various religious groups today who actively promote and call upon the church to embrace particularistic values and beliefs that they believe were practised at some earlier period in the nation's history: such insular values are inevitably predicated on the interests of white Anglo Saxons – the most persistently prestigious ruling class in American society. (If one doubts such a proposition, one need only scrutinise a composite profile of the kind of person (overwhelmingly male) who is elected to the presidency, the House of Representatives, and the Senate of United States.)

These attempts to cast Christianity in an ethnocentric and monocultural mould are not unique to the church in the United States. One may find state-sponsored uniformity imposed on the church from very early on in its history. Thus, in the fourth century C.E., Christianity became a dominant religion of the Roman Empire under Constantine the Great because it was imposed by force upon the empire and because other religions (even types of Christianity such as Gnosticism and various pagan religions) were actively suppressed and persecuted in terms of imperial edicts issued by the Emperor. Under Constantine's authority, Christianity was officially accorded a favoured and dominant position among the religions of the empire when it became the official religion of Roman Empire. (Thus ended many centuries of pagan Rome's tolerance of the enormous diversity of religions found within the borders of the Empire.) When Christianity achieved this ascendancy under Constantine, it quickly became identified with particular *cultural* approaches – namely that of the late Roman Empire and (centuries later) that of the Western European culture that developed out of an amalgamation of the cultures of the Empire and those that were

imported into Europe by the various conquering tribes who crossed the Danube⁷ (Cartwright 1997:103).

This kind of early Roman monoculturalism was widely imposed by the church. The cultural particularities of the Roman Church were assumed to be an integral part of Christianity. No distinction was made between the cultural garb in which the gospel was presented, and gospel itself. There was an assumption among Roman Christians that the gospel had to be proclaimed everywhere in a single, "perfect, cultural form. Any variation was deemed to be either a deviation or a stage of development towards an, as yet, unrealized ideal" (Shorter 1995:18).

Mbiti notes that the identification of Christianity with Western culture in particular became so entrenched that it often overshadowed the importance of the church's presence in Africa and the contribution it has made to Christendom from the very beginning:

Christianity in Africa is so old that it can rightly be described as indigenous, traditional and African religion...It was a dynamic form of Christianity, producing great scholars and theologians like Tertullian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria and Augustine. African Christianity made a great contribution to Christendom through scholarship, participation in a church councils, defence of the Faith, movements like monasticism, theology, translation and preservation of the Scriptures, martyrdom, the famous Catechetical School of Alexandria, liturgy and even heresies and controversies (Mbiti 1976: 229-230).

Christian religious education in the United States is currently at a crossroads. It must decide as to whether it will continue to support the dominant ethnocentric white American

⁷ Michael G. Cartwright speaks of this development as the "Constantinian image of a community of faith" as a nation-state.

culture or chose to broaden its scope by becoming both multicultural and inclusive.⁸ Christian religious education, in preparing itself to meet the challenges of this new millennium, needs to develop opportunities of dialogue among the varying and diverse groups and subgroups of the church in an atmosphere which they are all treated as equally empowered partners.

A truly multicultural society would surely actively promote an understanding of cultural diversity by allowing the fullest possible exploration of pluralism in both the theory and practice of education (Hulmes 1988:87). The church is surely called to make a conscious effort to discard all and any models of cultural exclusivity if it is to be true to the gospel and do God's work in the world.⁹ The church (and Christian religious education as a vital function of the church) is called to embrace, honour and empower all its members across the cultural and ethnic spectrum of American society.

3.3 BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMANNES

Even though there are countless definitions as to what it means to be *human*, the Hebrew Scriptures presents their own definition in the opening chapter of Genesis in the story about the creation of humankind: "Male and female he created them" (Genesis 1.27) (RSV). In the Judaeo-Christian understanding of what it means to be human, human beings are always linked to or connected with God.

⁸ Carl Ellis, an African American with a ministry to African American Muslims called Project Joseph, puts forward a similar complaint, namely: "The African American church forgot its own history; we withdrew from a position of social and theological leadership and adopted the theology of the dominant culture, which tended to have a Eurocentric slant" (Ellis 2000:52-53).

⁹ Villa-Vicencio, in discussing the plight of Christianity in the West, has said, "The church often failed to express any ideas significantly different to those of the dominant classes and certainly failed in praxis to show itself to have an identity readily distinguishable from that of the dominant society" (Villa-Vicencio 1992:4).

From a Christian point of view, the whole human race forms a unity because is an integral part of God's creation. Thus, despite all the efforts of human beings to separate themselves from others in some fundamental way or to make themselves believe that they are not really like certain other people (i.e. they are superior or inferior), all people share a common humanity in unity that is inconvertible (Rhoads 1996:159).

Battle's book, entitled *Reconciliation* (1997), introduces the reader to Desmond Tutu's African *ubuntu* theology.¹⁰ This theology emphasises this same idea of the interconnectedness of humankind as a collective body as well as in humankind's relationship with God. Battle writes:

The biblical understanding of human beings derives from God's covenant with human communities. God created us, Tutu believes, to live in community with other human beings. We must work for reconciliation and peace among creation, because this is our covenant with God (Battle 1997:69).

Nonetheless, although we can extract an understanding from the Bible of what it means to be human and although Christian religious educators may make certain deductions about human nature and its potential, such knowledge alone does not guarantee that all people will be treated as equals (Gittins 1989:36). It is therefore important for Christian religious education to make the development of those strategies that heightened conscientisation and increase empathy as a central part of its agenda. The researcher defines *conscientisation* as an increased awareness of the problems, pain, suffering and concerns of other human beings. The researcher defines *empathy* as the ability to understand another person's point of view and the thoughts and experiences that are derived from that point of view by imaginatively seeing the world through that person's eyes without ever being critical or judgemental about their perceptions. It also means coming to terms what it means to be human from God's

¹⁰ *Ubuntu* refers to the African concept of community. According to Tutu it is manifested in every human act which has community building as its objective; it is a call to be cooperative as opposed to competitive (see Battle 1997:79-80)

perspective.¹¹ That is to say, any attempt to become more empathetic in understanding human beings from God's point of view would most likely require a lifetime of dedicated contemplation, prayer and meditation.

(Christian education)...is thus concerned with human beings, "whole and entire", catering for their moral, as well as their intellectual needs at each succeeding stage of life (Hulmes 1988:88).

Christ's self-sacrificial act of being crucified and resurrected for all people of every culture and language in the world provides Christian religious educators with a non-oppressional paradigm for dealing with race and racism. Christ as a model for humanity is needed by both those who oppress as well as those who are victims of oppression. It was Paulo Freire who noted that the erstwhile oppressed often themselves become oppressors. When Freire speaks of the oppressed needing to resist the temptation to become "sub-oppressors", he means that the oppressed have only the pattern of oppression before them as a way of being in a position other than the one they are in (Weiler 1994:16). All human beings are desperately need of a for model for humanity that is untainted by oppressional approaches.

Men and women, by virtue of being human, contain within themselves both the very best and the very worst potentials of humanity in their interaction with one another. That is to say, they have the ability to either help to preserve, nurture and foster humankind or utterly destroy what has been created; to be compassionate or hateful; to be instruments of peace or to use their minds to build weapons of mass destruction. God has placed a tremendous responsibility in the hands of the human race. The Christian church has the special responsibility of mediating God's vision for humanity to humankind. It is called to the prophetic ministry of

¹¹ Trulear believes that a limited understanding of God's perspective is achieved through the development of cognitive, affective and behavioral goals in Christian religious education, i.e. "...Bible study of the Old Testament and New Testament passages that stress God's regard for beings in God's image, reflection on and critique of contemporary society's narcissistic focus on the self, and active service on behalf of others" (Trulear 1997:175).

announcing to the world God's passion for justice, peace and goodwill for *all* human beings are not just for the privileged few. In addition, the church is called to participate actively in helping to shape the world in which we as human beings live. Russell writes:

It is clear that to be human involves: first, the ability to participate in understanding and shaping the world in which a person lives; second, being accepted as a subject and not as a thing or object of someone else's manipulation (Russell, cited in Augsburg 1986:239).

Thus while human beings cannot help but feel dwarfed by the immensity of the universe, they are still called to play a significant role in the world. This recognition of humankind and the role it is called to play is clearly outlined in Psalm 8, which deals with how human beings experience their self-worth and the responsibility they have in caring for God's creation; men and women made in the image of God.

When I look at the heaven, the work of thy fingers,
the moon, and the stars which thou has established,
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
Yet, thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honour,
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands
thou has put all things under his feet
(Psalm 8:3-6) (RSV).

Jesus is shown in the gospels as reflecting on the value of humanity. The implication of what he says is that the worth of each individual is not at all dependent on the estimation of society. "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?" asked Jesus. "And not one of them is forgotten by God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Luke 12:6-7) (RSV).

Paul's writes in his letter to the church at Corinth: "If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26) (RSV). The concept of *shared responsibility* is vitally important for all members of God's family. As individual Christians, we may attend church regularly and know the Scriptures well, especially those portions of the

Bible that affirm that all humans beings are equal in the eyes of God, and that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or master, male or female (Gal 3:28). But our real responsibility becomes evident when we attempt to put into practice what we have read in the Scriptures. God calls all Christians to "reconciliation" as one who call us to be reconciled to Thee. As Paul writes in 2 Cor 5:18-19, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (RSV). In other words, God through Christ has given us the ministry of reconciliation – the ministry that requires us to bring people together as brothers and sisters into one united family.

3.4 LIBERATION OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Because the word "liberation" evokes so many different ideas and responses, any discussion of liberation and Christian religious education should include a definition of the word *liberation*. According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1995:784), *liberation* may be defined as "that act or instance of liberating; the state of being liberated". Gutierrez speaks of liberation as expressing "the aspirations of oppressed people and social classes, emphasizing the conflictual aspects of the economic, social and political process which puts them at odds with wealthy nations and oppressed classes" (Gutierrez 1973:36). Villa-Vicencio refers to liberation in *A Theology of Reconstruction* as that which involves "human restlessness". He adds that, in terms of the Christian tradition, liberation is "primarily concerned with the interpretation of this restlessness, the quest for the wholeness and the cry for emancipation from captivity (both at a communal and an individual level), in terms of what it identifies as a liberatory reality located within history and attributable to the presence of God" (Villa-Vicencio 1992:24).

In the context of this dissertation, the author is proposing that liberation in Christian religious education is a two-fold enterprise. The first involves the liberation or freeing of Christian religious education from any and all shackles that keep it from becoming a fully empowered pedagogy – an enabler, an encourager, a guide for helping people to understand and live out

their Christian faith.¹² It calls for the development of a critical consciousness¹³ capable of drawing the line between that which oppresses and that which enables. It also calls into question one's very understanding of theology and its function in Christian religious education. It involves coming to terms with a particular understanding of history.

The battle lines are drawn between two conflicting interpretations of historical reality, two competing principles of social organizations. The first values efficiency and social control above all else, the second social justice and the creation a new man (Jameson & Wilber 1996:546).

In such a historical atmosphere, the institutional church is compelled to examine the social dimension of faith and the role of Jesus as well as the role that members of the church play in the community of faith and in society.

In particular, for far too long, Christian religious education has been associated with a pedagogy of indoctrination and rigidity, i.e. educational approaches and methodologies that promoted the interests of a particularistic and Western Anglo-Saxon Christianity: an ethnocentric orthodoxy etched in stone, which was upheld as the prototype for all others in the Christian faith. Since its earliest days, the church has allowed itself to inherit ethnocentric norms and approaches that no longer serve the interests of the pluralistic environment in which it operates. Thus, many Christian religious educators in the United States remain

¹² Villa-Vicencio emphasizes the point that the church's primary role is not one of imposing theological interpretation on the liberation process. It must rather assist and encourage people to understand and respond positively to the liberatory struggle (Villa-Vicencio 1992:24).

¹³ Freire emphasizes the absolute need for developing a critical consciousness in the pursuit of liberation. "Not even the best intentioned leadership can bestow independence as a gift. The liberation of the oppressed is a liberation of men [and women] not things. Accordingly, while no one can liberate himself [or herself] by his [or her] own efforts alone, neither is he [or she] liberated by others...The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by their revolutionary leadership, but is a result of their own conscientizacao [conscientisation]" (Freire 1982:53-54).

handicapped by their limited understanding of the role and function of Christian religious education as well as the role that stakeholders (i.e. the congregation, its leaders and the Christian community at large) should play in the development of that endeavour.

Dogmatic, inflexible and unattractive programmes, poor teaching methods as well as the continued usage of ethnocentric approaches and materials has rendered Christian religious education almost entirely irrelevant and impotent in the life of church today in the United States. By making religious education impotent, the church prevents its members from being nourished and enriched by the unique history, wisdom and experience that the number of diverse minority groups (including the marginalized, the persecuted, the dispossessed, the poor, the terminally ill, and people of colour) bring to the Christian faith. That is to say, Christians of such backgrounds and experiences are often able to provide a unique perspective that has been purified and strengthened by a long struggle for human dignity- the right to make choices, exercise religious freedom, and the right to be treated as first-class human beings. It is the author's belief that Christian religious education needs to be freed from all approaches that exclusively promote the interests and ascendancy of a single ethnic and cultural group.

The major difficulty with ethnocentrism for those who presume to take an active role in the lives of others, is that when one casts oneself as "right" and "better", and "rational", one will inevitably find oneself judging others as "wrong", "worse" and "irrational". Ethnocentrism is incompatible with the Christian value of humility. Whenever one assumes that one is better than another (however that "other" may appear in the world), one has reverted to a position of defensive arrogance in which one has forgotten one's own utter helplessness to be justified (whether "right", "good" or "better") in the eyes of a perfectly righteous God. In the humility of repentance, one sees oneself as equal (if not inferior) to the "other". When one loses touch with humility and compassion, it is all too easy to assume that one is "better" or "right". There is no end to the amount of damage that ethnocentric attitudes can give rise. The arrogance of ethnocentricity arouses prejudice and hostility in others and diminishes the impact of the

gospel of hope and reconciliation. Ethnocentrism has been well described as acting in accordance with one's own values in a situation to which they are not relevant (Gittens 1988:2-3).

One of the more commonly cited reasons by people of colour for scepticism about calls from the majority population in American society to assimilate, is the belief that such invitations are nothing more than oblique calls to embrace a parody of white culture and obliterate their own unique identities.¹⁴ People of colour are quite understandably offended by the arrogant assumption that white culture is somehow better, superior or more civilised than any other culture - when even the most superficial scrutiny of so-called Western civilisation reveals that Western culture is characterised (with a few notable exceptions) by two millennia of barbarism, intolerance, arrogance, hostility, stupidity, brutality, hypocrisy and insensitivity to the needs of the whole spectrum of human beings who suffer or who are dispossessed by societies in which they live. Western civilisation is notable for its aggressive consumerism and its insatiable greed and materialism: the true gospel of Western culture may be more easily identified in Western business norms and practices rather than in the gospel of Jesus Christ. People of colour have also expressed the belief that many well-intentioned whites ignore all but the most cosmetic aspects of cultural diversity when they talk about multiculturalism. Thus, while many white people show empathy towards people of colour and honestly want them to become empowered, they seem either unwilling or unable to surrender or even show the benefits of their positions of privilege and power when the cost of empowering the disempowered is calculated. Whether their manipulation is conscious or unconscious, it is difficult to tell, but people of colour perceive such people as maintaining the status quo

¹⁴ Kim Uyedi-Hai has described the following encounter with a member of the majority population in Canada and their call for assimilation: "A high-profile minister preached in a Japanese-Canadian congregation. He told a second-generation Japanese Canadian, English-speaking couple that their ethnic church should be a 'stepping stone' to a 'regular' congregation. With language no longer a barrier, he assumed they no longer had need of their ethnic congregation. He encouraged them to join a majority congregation since nothing was preventing them from being one of 'us'" (Uyede-Hai 1999:150).

through their actions and (ultimately hollow) rhetoric.

Any form of manipulation or indoctrination (no matter how high-minded or well intended) is poor educational policy and likely to prove counterproductive to the purpose of Christian religious education. The educational process we use must itself reflect the dynamics of human emancipation and use emancipatory techniques. Any approach that is designed to control or indoctrinate people or rob them of their right to self-determination, is unfit for our purpose as Christian religious educators (Groome 1980:98). Our educational purpose and methods must affirm the radical freedom of the individual to choose his or her own destiny without any pressure or coercion.

It is only when Christian religious education is freed from vested and limited interests that it become a potent and empowering arm of the church that can be effectively involved in issues of conversion, Christian growth, community upliftment and justice. (Groome, in Schipani 1988:140). Liberation of this kind rejects all form and manner of elitism. Instead it focuses on empowering all people.

A second directive of Christian liberation and Christian religious education involves freeing Christian religious educators from a need to utilise any educational pedagogies that fail actively to work towards the removal of racism in society or that covertly support the premises on which a racist and supremacist church is founded.¹⁵ A liberational Christian religious education cannot *not* be involved in political activism because Christian religious educators (and all Christians) live in a political world.

Each of us is a member of a political community and politics exert either a negative or a positive influence upon all other structures in modern societies because all aspects of social

¹⁵ Harris, in addressing the issue of Christian religious education has said: "Nothing will change unless people directly concerned with the subject are motivated and inspired to make changes" (Harris 1994/1995:5).

and political life are inextricably related to one another. What people therefore call "politics" can never be an insignificant activity: it is always an essential and constitutive part of life in society. Because Christians are human beings, they are obliged to be concerned with politics. This does not mean that the gospel should be "politicised". A gospel that concerns itself with every aspect of human life, can never ignore politics because politics is concerned with a full range of issues including human rights and justice. Furthermore, because all Christians participate in relationships in the everyday world, they also participate in those activities that incorporate the concern of politics. Christians have political obligations whenever they concern themselves with basic issues such as human rights and justice (Davies 1976:37).

Paulo Freire, a leading Third World educator, identified certain key factors that are needed by any educator who is involved in the struggle for liberation. These factors are "the ability to perceive and clarify reality critically in an oppressive and dehumanizing situation...[and] the ability to arrive at an effective action to change the situation as part of a pedagogical praxis" (Goba 1988:16).

Religious educators are called to action.¹⁶ This call to action by Christian religious education is explained by Schipani in his book *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*:

Religious education for justice and peace necessitates the action-reflection paradigm as a overarching dialectical process of learning, teaching and transformation. More than a pedagogical strategy, the action-reflection paradigm encompasses a wide variety of activities in tune with the very mission of the church in the world. "Believing" and "doing" must be brought together in mutually influencing dynamic relationship (Schipani 1996:140).

¹⁶ Villa-Vicencio has indicated that when whenever religion cannot be translated into programmes of action, it soon becomes nothing more than an opium of the people. He therefore calls for a theology of reconstruction that is "pre-eminently a contextual theology. It explicitly addresses the present needs of a particular society" (Villa-Vicencio 1992:41).

Schipani makes it clear that Christian religious educators are called do something more than to write philosophical treatises on the evils of racism or disseminate information about the same. Crow states that salvation can only come about when racism ceases to be deplored as an abstract concept. He states that "racism ruins human lives. And we must realize that more than doctrinal agreements will be required if that broken fellowship is to be restored" (Crow 1982:71). Guiterrez issued a similar warning when he said that "we should not fall into the trap of thinking about history on two levels - the supernatural and the temporal. There is but one history" (Marangos 1996:194). That is to say, the church and religion in general cannot separate itself from the other elements that make up the whole of human society. In human society, the social, political and economic dimensions of society are all connected.¹⁷ Groome writes:

Educational activity with pilgrims in time is a political activity...[as is] any deliberate and structural intervention in people's lives which attempts to influence how they live their lives in society (Groome 1980:15)

Christian religious educators are called to communicate a gospel that dynamically interacts with society because they live and work in an ethnically diverse world that is filled with people who find ethnic and other forms of diversity threatening and problematic. Christian religious educators are called to make the Bible relevant to the sometimes painful circumstances of everyday human life. The Bible, if properly interpreted, is relevant to every circumstance of the human condition. Politicized Christian religious educators, working from such a premise, affirm their unity with others in the struggle to actualise divine and human justice in all the institutions of society. Astley (1994) warns, however, that the mere calling for politicised Christian religious education is not sufficient in itself to bring about a just outcome. According to him, Christian religious education if not properly guided can find itself as easily

¹⁷ Harris has commented that "social justice is no longer secondary to the spiritual dimensions of faith. Theory is no longer divorced from action. The emphasis on commitment to the poor and oppressed is now seen as the first act of doing theology (Harris 1994/1995:5).

wedded to a reactionary outcome as that which is liberal, reformist or revolutionary. Thus, he presses for the development of a particularistic political criteria for evaluating the past, present and future and which, at the same time is distinctly Christian in orientation. Astley calls for a model which incorporates critical theology (as also called by Groome), i.e.

...a broad movement incorporating so-called theologies of hope, political theologies, feminist theology and other liberation theologies: theologies that make particular claims about the political and social implications of the Christian gospel (Astley 1994:94).

He warns that whenever Christian religious education is disenfranchised from both its politicised and Christian identity, it runs the risk of becoming an instrument for domestication.

If Christian religious educators see themselves as facilitators of social change, then they are obliged to work towards the removal of those artificial barriers which have been erected as a result of racial, social ethnic and political prejudice: racism, classism, sexism and any other "isms" that keeps people from living empowered and meaningful lives. Christian religious educators also need to re-examine the Bible until they discern in it God's radical concern about the varied forms of suffering and oppression that afflict the human race: the face of a God who offers each of us our full liberation. The Bible and the gospels in particular emphasise the need of religious people to be intimately concerned with empowerment and social witness.¹⁸ One such passage in the Bible is Luke's narration of the story of Jesus's encounter with those attending the synagogue at Nazareth. Jesus reads a passage from the Book of Isaiah in which he sets forth the primary responsibilities of the Messiah. This is the passage that Jesus read.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me

¹⁸ Villa-Vicencio writes: "The church which is faithful to the prophetic biblical tradition can never allow itself to become trapped within the limits of what the dominant forces in any society insist is realistically possible" (Villa-Vicencio 1992:30).

because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.
(Luke 4:18-19) (RSV)

When all eyes are fixed on Jesus, Jesus concludes by saying that in him this scripture has been fulfilled that day. What is remarkable about this passage that Jesus chooses to announce the beginning of his ministry, is its powerful emphasis on what we would today characterise as social, political and economic issues, including a call for justice (the liberation of the "oppressed"). Jesus is emphasising that the Christian message cannot be separated from all aspects of its social context. The Christian community, as his agents in the world, are called to be actively involved in all situations of human need, suffering and injustice – in every situation where people have no food to eat or where they have had to leave their homes and take refuge in refugee camps, wherever pogroms and persecution take place, and in any situation where human beings suffer because others have abandoned their responsibility as stewards of God's compassion, justice and mercy.

As noted above, Christian religious education and liberation are inseparable. Because God is alive and at work in the world, we need constantly to remind ourselves that simply hearing God's Word in church and then forgetting it or neglecting to implement it in every aspect of our lives, does not give us the licence to call ourselves Christians. True (as opposed nominal) Christians of those who have taken heed of Jesus's words when he said, "Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27) (RSV).

That to continue speaking of salvation only in otherworldly and "spiritual" terms will not meet the challenge. In fact, such an understanding of the redemptive work of Christ can lend itself to the legitimation of sinful social structures within history, if only by silence and inaction in the face of them. An otherworldly kind of salvation can and has, to some extent, caused people to tolerate situations of injustice and acquiesce in conditions of bondage (Groome 1980:89)

Liberation is therefore a central concept in valid Christian religious education. Among other meanings, *liberation* also means freeing Christian religious education from whatever keeps it from being a renewing and relevant force in every aspect of modern life. Thus, the Christian religious educator should not promote the vested interests of the privileged classes; neither should he or she present a form of Christianity that demonstrates all the contours of the historically traditional white, Western European image. It is also not conducive for Christian religious educators to promote a particular party political line or approach. Christian religious educators should rather sensitise their audience to the fundamental issues of justice, compassion and social responsibility that underlie all political action that is compatible with the requirements of the gospel. It is the responsibility of the Christian educator to be

educating in ways that are consciousness-raising, teaching people to read critically their own reality and to think for themselves, informing them about traditions and perspectives, and forming in values that encourage them to fulfill their social/political responsibilities, to claim their own human rights and promote the rights of others (Groome 1991:99).

The purpose of Christian religious education is to encourage people to play a more active role in church and society as agents of change. It should equip people with practical methods to effect social change and implementation of justice – especially wherever societies are afflicted by racism and other forms of intolerance and persecution of minorities. Christian religious educators should also strive to propagate a more inclusive understanding of the Christian faith and should not assume that any one person or party embodies definitive or ultimate conclusions about political and economic systems that are compatible with the gospel's requirements for justice and defence of the oppressed and disadvantaged.

Wherever Christian religious education has been allowed to become too closely identified with a single ethnic or cultural tradition, and wherever that identification has caused Christian religious education to become rigid and dogmatic in defence of the ethnic or cultural tradition out of which it has arisen, it fails to become an all-inclusive and participatory process which honours and takes into account the diversity of interests and needs that are represented by its

constituents. Historically, this exclusivity is what has characterised Christian religious education in the United States. If the church is to remain a relevant and powerful force in American society and in the world in general, it needs to honour and respect the individual and collective point of view and cultural differences of all of its members - whether they be white, Latin, Native, Indian, African, biracial or multiracial.¹⁹ Chris Rice, a white European who formerly served on the staff of the John M. Perkins Foundation for Reconciliation and Development, made the following observation about white European exclusivity and the need of the church to broaden its vision of itself and the role that minorities have to play in making that vision a reality:

Given the fact that white European culture is dominant in this country, given the legacy of racial discrimination that puts whites at an advantage in our society, even in the church, unless we make an intentional effort to affirm black leadership, culture and style, whiteness will always dominate (Perkins & Rice 1993:54).

Christian religious educators need to make an especial and conscious effort to encourage all stakeholders (especially those who are not traditional WASPS) to play a more active role in the church and to allow themselves to be open to both the possibility of being changed and enriched by an inclusive understanding and praxis of the Christian faith.²⁰ In the first instance, this means that we have to reject any attempt to stratify people according to some or other hierarchal system of value defined by a dominant ruling class (racist classification has been the

¹⁹ According to William M. Ramsay, one of the most distinctive characteristics of liberation theology “is not a certain set of doctrinal propositions but its perspective. Liberation theology is theology done from the point of view of the oppressed. Its content may vary depending on which group of oppressed are doing it – the poor of the third world, blacks in the United States, women or other victims of oppression – but the various liberation theologies are linked by that perspective. They grow out of an involvement of people on the bottom side of life” (Ramsay 1986:56).

²⁰ E.G. Gaudio and Alicia de Alba propose that in order to embrace the diversity and plurality offered by cultural contact, it is important to foster dialogic relationships, inclusive of all groups: there is “a need for dialogic education not only among the oppressed but among and between classes, groups, and nations of oppressed and oppressors alike” (Gaudio & de Alba 1994:137).

most conspicuous and widespread mechanism of exclusion in the American church). Christians have to accept that change never comes about without exacting a price from all who are affected by its implementation. In other words, profound changes can never be effected without some kind of trouble, dissatisfaction, upheaval and tensions over a long period of time.

Martin Luther King, Jr. reminded us that the

white liberal must rid himself of the notion that there can be a tensionless transition from the old order of justice. Two things are clear to me, and I hope they are clear to white liberals. One is that the negro cannot achieve emancipation through violent rebellion. The other is that the negro cannot achieve emancipation by passively waiting for the white race voluntarily to grant it to him (Matsuoka 1998:123).

If we belong to a church that accepts the liberatory paradigm, we have to accept that political, racial and religious change all involve struggle – and that struggle is never comfortable nor pleasant.²¹ This kind of transformational racial is the way of the Cross.

3.5 MULTICULTURALISM AND CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Multiculturalism and other multicultural issues have often been viewed from an assimilationist point of view – i.e. from the point of view of the values and norms of the white, English-speaking Protestant ruling class in American society. In this dissertation, the author defines

²¹ Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* addresses the issue of being in transition on much broader terms when he describes humankind itself as being in the process of becoming “in contrast to other animals who are unfinished, but not historical, men [people] know themselves to be unfinished; they are aware of their incompleteness...men [and women] as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represent a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future” (Freire 1982:72).

multiculturalism according to the 1980 publication on the "aims of universal education" by the Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra, Australia. In terms of the description found in this document, multiculturalism strives to understand and implement a vision of identities, relationships and institutions that "acknowledge the plural, multicultural nature of our society and seeks a form of cultural social integration which values interaction and free communication amongst diverse groups and subcultures, i.e. the common multiculturalism" (Lynch 1984:153). Multiculturalism therefore is a movement that seeks to empower different ethnic, cultural and religious groups of society as equal partners through defining them as equally influential, valuable, viable and acceptable. The kind of pedagogy that multiculturalism promotes would naturally therefore honour diversity and rights of all human beings to equal freedom, dignity and respect.

Christian religious educators who are committed to multicultural approaches need consciously to select epistemologies or ways of knowing that recognize the interdependent nature of the world and society and which promote the importance of appreciating how "others" (who are radically different from ourselves) see and understand the world.²² Christian religious educators need to make a special effort to enable both themselves and others to understand life from the perspective of all those who are oppressed, persecuted, exploited, devalued and marginalized. All these people (the "neighbour" in the parable of the Good Samaritan) are the "others" on which Christian religious education focuses very strongly. In his article entitled "Called to Be Messengers of Reconciliation: Our Role in a Multireligious Society", Poulse shows deep insight into how Jesus perceives oppressed minorities: "a minority is not those who were small in number, but those who were powerless and voiceless" (Poulse 1996:83-95).

²² Charles and Marguerite Kraft writes: "We need to understand that there is a difference between God's absolute reality and the cultural relative reality around us. God is absolute, beyond relativity, and he has absolute standards that all people, everywhere, are accountable for. He is, therefore, beyond and outside of any culture neither endorsing nor condemning any cultural system in its totality" (Kraft 1993:6-8).

A careful examination of the dominant themes of both the Jewish and Christian scriptures makes one aware of how God embraces human diversity, pluralism and the inclusion of the "other" - especially when the "other" is unattractive, marginalized, helpless, persecuted and rejected.²³ In the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis, we read of God's creation of the diversity of male and female. The same application and acceptance of diversity as *normal* is evident in other places in the Hebrew Scriptures. We see it when Moses and the Israelites spend time amongst the Egyptians and Moses marries a Medianite, when Ruth, a righteous Moabite woman, marries an Israelite man named Boaz (thereby ensuring her place amongst the Jewish people as an ancestor of both David and Jesus), when Jonah is concerned for the people of Nineveh, and when Isaiah has an overwhelming vision of the Temple as a place of prayer for all nations (Isaiah 56.7).

We find the same emphasis on honouring diversity and *including* rather than excluding the "other" in the Christian New Testament. While the four Gospels relate the Good News in distinctively different ways, they collectively transmit the message which is greater and more authoritative than the sum of all their individual parts. The Gospels make a point of showing how Jesus goes out of his way to transcend the cultural and social taboos of his society by embracing the whole of humanity. Familiarity with the gospel narrative might have made us somewhat insensitive to how truly shocking Jesus's behaviour is when he publicly and openly welcomes and embraces the marginalized people of society such as tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, notorious sinners, etc. Even though Jesus was raised in a multiracial country and grew up in close proximity to people of other races, he could just as well have chosen the option of exclusion based on traditional religious taboos and customs. But he went out of his way to show that he honoured and respected racial, sexual and class differences. The gospel

²³ Marty indicates that Christians interested in developing a theology relating to the "other" in a multicultural society should examine Christian scripture: "Theology is an interpretation of the life of a people or of persons in the light of a transcendent reference: *theos*, God, the real Other, who is disclosed in the Christian scriptures and testified to in the Christian tradition and community" (Marty 1993:24).

show that he interacted with women (Luke 7:36-50; John 4:1-45)²⁴, the poor (Luke 14:12-14), Gentiles (Luke 7:1-10), and lepers (Luke 5:12-14). If Jesus had wanted to ingratiate himself with the ruling elite of its own time and society, he would have been well advised to reject the very people whom he openly embraced (thereby scandalising his contemporaries in the ruling classes). Because Jesus emphatically embraced a multicultural approach to all other human beings, Christians have been provided with a clear model for how to be reconciled with Him and with their fellow human beings.

It is worth noting at this point that Jesus's compassion for the poor was not some idiosyncratic personal quirk or fad. He extended the same compassion and love to the rich and powerful that he extended to the poor, the marginalized and the dispossessed. In other words, the love of Jesus is a universal love that disqualifies no human being on any grounds whatsoever.

The multicultural dimension of the Christian faith in the New Testament is also reflected beyond the Gospels. In the Book of Acts we read the story of Peter and Cornelius and how God makes use of a visionary dream to affirm God's care and compassion for the people of every nation (Acts 10) and the need of the church therefore to be both *inclusive* and *universal*. Again, familiarity with the Scriptures may have dulled our appreciation of how truly shocking God's revelation was for Peter. Peter, as a Jewish Christian, had been careful to comply with the religious observances of his people throughout his whole life. One of the prohibitions that he observed most carefully was direct spiritual contact with Gentiles. But after God has spoken to Peter in that vision, he becomes radically transformed and empowered in his relations with all other human beings – including those who are not Jews. Scriptural references such as these remind Christians that pluralism and diversity are an

²⁴ Herrera cites this particular passage about the Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus at the well as providing the church with a model for formulating "interracial/-cultural/-gender styles of interaction that differ from the European male/white norms that have left a trail of broken promises and resentment, conquests and defeats" (Herrera 1992:173-180).

inescapable part of God's divine plan for his church and that honouring differences and diversity in people is as important to God now as it was two thousand years ago. Because the historical church has frequently been disobedient to this revelation of the will of God, it is especially important for educational ministries to re-emphasise that it is God's will that the church be both culturally diverse and open to all and that God is "no respecter of persons".

Since the founding of the United States, the opponents of multiculturalism have used every possible argument against the acceptance and implementation of multicultural approaches in the various social and political structures and institutions of America. Some have argued that multiculturalism ultimately leads to the "disintegration" of society as well as to cultural and ethnic anarchy. Others have proposed a modified version of multiculturalism that emphasises the a strong common culture or "melting pot" identity - an approach that appears to be tolerant but that covertly reinforces and entrenches the values and beliefs of the traditionally dominant WASP culture. There are also those in the church who envision a kind of multiculturalism and, in particular, a multicultural Christian religious education that advocates a "laissez faire" approach. Those who hold this point of view advocate a style of tolerance that permits (even encourages) individual ethnic groups to "do their own thing" - provided that they don't undermine or threaten the political and cultural supremacy of the white European elites. Sadly, the history of the struggle for black rights in America (especially in the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century) has proved that the kind of tolerance that encourages people to remain in their cultural ghettos by cultivating indifference and supposedly apolitical attitudes, only entrench racism, discrimination and elitism even more deeply.

A kind of tolerance for different racial and ethnic groups proposed by some white liberals often masks their own racism and cultural and social paternalism. While calling for "racial tolerance", they often openly or covertly maintain the social, cultural, political and economic structures that ensure their own privilege. While deploring racism, they support the dominant ideology. While many white liberals willingly call for and work for cultural tolerance, they are

reluctant to confront issues of inequality, power, ethics, race and ethnicity in a way that could actually lead to social transformation that would make society more democratic and humane, and less racist and discriminatory (Bartolome & Macedo 1997:232).

Tolerance in the church should never be equated with indifference or being non-committal towards racial or ethnic groupings other than one's own. Tolerance requires Christian religious educators to make a conscious effort to incorporate and embrace truth, justice and compassion in all their interactions with all members of the body of Christ. Christian religious education, as a part of a multicultural process, should not allow itself to become co-opted to serve the interests of the dominant and ruling classes. It should rather become a means for affirming the equality *in a visible way* of all ethnic, racial, cultural and gender groups in society and in the eyes of God. Christian religious educators should strive to reconcile all strata of society on a basis of equality and mutual respect and love. Paul in his letter to the churches at Galatia speaks of the church's need to be *universal* and to accept people of every language and nation. He also writes of his conviction that Christians are one in Christ: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28) (RSV). In this letter Paul is responding to those Jewish Christians who were unhappy because their church's explosive growth was bringing in an unacceptably large number of Gentiles. Paul's attitude is uncompromising: he reaffirms to all who will listen, the conviction that all humankind, whether Jews or Gentiles, are entitled to become the recipients of salvation in Christ because Christ has died for without exception.

Living in a pluralistic society is a challenge because an unconditional acceptance of pluralism and multiculturalism frequently engenders fear, hostility and paternalism.²⁵ But we cannot simply ignore or wish away the social reality of pluralism and diversity in the world. Christian religious educators need to resist the deeply entrenched Northern American attitude that one particular group of Americans have special rights, influence, privileges and entitlement. Christian religious education in American society should not attempt to flatten the differences between people and groups. It should call North Americans and the church in particular to publicly acknowledge the plural and multicultural nature of both society and the Christian faith. Christians should be joyously celebrating this reality in all their ecclesiastical structures and programmes. Christian educators should also a call for interaction and communication amongst the many diverse groups and cultures that make up the church. Nothing less than this should be ideal for which we should strive.

²⁵ Since the author and his wife are from two different cultures and ethnic backgrounds, they have often been forced to deal in practice with the painful issues and problems engendered by race and "miscegenation". Just prior to our marriage, a church friend came up to this author and warned him about the potential dangers of being involved in a relationship with someone who was both non-white and a foreigner. According to this person, it was his belief that such women often marry in order to obtain American citizenship. My wife's family, on the other hand, weren't happy for other reasons. From their point of view, the fact that their daughter was about to marry outside of their culture transgressed one of the primary mores of their society. Yet other people weren't happy because although, in their opinion, it was indeed acceptable to converse and fraternise with people from other races in the workplace, actual *marriage* between two people of different races transgressed the kind of tokenistic racial mixing which they did not find problematic (because it was essentially superficial). This author can never forget one person who came up to us a short time after our marriage. He wished God's warmest blessings upon our union but then went on to express his concern about the children that might be born as a result of our union. He said: "They'll be mixed up children, half-breeds, unable to live completely in one culture or the other." In spite of this prediction, the reality which the author and his wife have experienced cannot be more different than the concerns of the man whose words are quoted above. What we, as husband and wife, have found is that although we come from different worlds, cultures and ethnic identities, God in Jesus has enabled us to be one in Him.

The racially dominant churches have often excluded people of colour from the dialectics of freedom. Whether people of colour will have the patience to wait for churches to repent of the incongruity of their deeply held values of equality and freedom with the actuality of the negation of these very values in practice, remains to be seen. But one thing is clear: this incongruity between rhetoric and action that is deeply ingrained in the history of churches in the United States continues to erode the credibility of these churches in society as a whole and within the communities in which they operate (Matsuoka 1998:107).

Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus reminds us of the sharp division that arose in the Christian community with regard to the protocols of conversion to Christianity. The disagreement within the leadership of the church centred firstly on whether it was necessary for a Gentile first to become a Jew before he or she could become a Christian. Secondly, they speculated about how much of the Mosaic law a new convert would have to observe if he or she converted to a Christianity that required them to make a prior conversion to Judaism. The debate was very intense because the viewpoint that ultimately prevailed would affect the whole subsequent course of the Christian faith as an institution. The greatest of the Apostles, Peter and Paul, found themselves holding diametrically opposite views.

The point at issue was symbolized by the dividing wall in the Temple at Jerusalem that separated the Court of the Gentiles from the Court of the Jews. Although this division was not based on skin colour as such, the dynamics of separation that is effected is directly mirrors the kind of prejudice that we still find in the church today. Racism, much like the dividing wall referred to in Ephesians 2:14, is still the most serious cause of church disunity in the contemporary American church. It is for this reason that Christian religious education programmes are called upon to do everything in their power to remove all the barriers that are created by subtle or overt racism and hatred. As Christian religious educators, we need to identify the kind of social practices that help to create and foster racial oppression as well as the kind of racist ideas that reinforce and legitimatise the unequal distribution of power amongst different ethnic groups. We also clearly need a programme of action that does more

than merely present information about different ethnic and cultural groupings in Sunday School classrooms.²⁶ In particular, Bainer and Peck call for the creation of a culturally responsible pedagogy which accommodates varied learners in multicultural educational contexts.

Culturally responsible pedagogy involves preparing a relevant curriculum and conducting it in such a way that minority learners are more comfortable in the learning environments. In addition, the religious educator utilizes strategies that research and experience have shown to be effective in bringing about learning for minority group members (Bainer & Peck 1997:303).

In this chapter, the author noted the extent and influence of the historical presence of racism in Christian religious education in the United States. He then proposed a biblical understanding of what it means to be human being along with the possible implications that might result from such an interpretation, namely the liberation of Christian religious education from racist and supremacist paradigms and the absolute necessity to encourage the acceptance of multiculturalism and multiracialism at all levels of society in general and in the church in particular.

²⁶ Moodley (1984) warns of the inherent dangers of attempting to promote multiculturalism by merely providing information to students about varying ethnic/racial/cultural groups. Moodley writes: "Expecting teachers to communicate cultural content from highly complex cultures, without reifying, fragmenting and trivializing them to the ridiculous is not unproblematic" (Moodley 1984:5-7).

CHAPTER 4

INCLUSIVE APPROACHES IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the author will examine specific Christian religious education approaches that are based on liberatory and multicultural pedagogical paradigms. In particular, he will examine both critical pluralism and proactive approaches.

4.2 CRITICAL PLURALISM

Johnson defines "critical pluralism" as a

strategy or a posture of practice and theory, that situates itself in critical dialogue among or between different hermeneutical, cultural, religious or theological options. It celebrates diversity and plurality while it also pursues a sense of particularity....it seeks depth and breath of dialogue, rather than the breadth of consensus (Johnson 1993:340)

Johnson is saying quite clearly that, as far as Christian religious education is concerned, all dialogue within the church should *celebrate* the fact that we are living in a pluralist world. It has been said that the fundamental difference between a "discussion" and "dialogue" is that in a discussion, one person attempts to persuade the other person to embrace his or her point of view. In contrast of this, the primary purpose of dialogue is to give each person the opportunity to hear and understand every other person's point of view. The essential nature of dialogue requires a willingness on the part of participants to treat other participants as equal partners in the process of communication. It requires each participant to regard the contribution of every other participant as having an equal weight and importance as his or own contribution. Dialogue requires participants to listen attentively and sympathetically without necessarily feeling the need for rebuttal or even for reply. The English word

"dialogue" is derived from the Greek word "dialogos" which means "to speak across." Thus dialogue of this kind involves a sharing of feelings, experiences and beliefs about racial and ethnic traditions on any given issue.

Dialogue is not possible if any partners enter it with the claim that they possess the final, definitive, irreformable truth. Claims of finality set up a roadblock to any real growth in experience and understanding (Knitter 1985:211)

If parties to the dialogue remember these rules, dialogue may foster trust and empathy in intercultural situations in which understanding and social solidarity are sought.

Dialogue is based on people sharing their own perceptions of a problem, offering their opinions and ideas and having the opportunities to make decisions or recommendations (Hope & Timmel 1984a:3).

If Christian religious education is to be an effective agent for the promotion of pluralism in multicultural societies such as the United States and elsewhere, it must be very clear about what it understands by pluralism and how it intends to use the pluralist paradigm to identify, appreciate and positively promote human differences. It should also be very clear about exactly how pluralism can be applied in the real world where ethnic, racial, cultural and orientational differences manifest in so many different forms. If Christian religious education is based squarely on dialogue (i.e. on respectful exchanges of information and appreciation of differences), there will be no need to institutionalise a particular ethnocentric cultural identity as a standard by means of which to judge and criticise other cultural identities or ethnic traditions. Since the founding of the United States, a very specific form of white European Puritan Protestant Anglo-Saxon cultural identity has been the norm by which other ethnic and multicultural identities have been marginalized and disempowered.

In a dialogical religious education culture, there is no one ethical cultural identity that is accorded primacy and ascendancy over others. In a dialogical culture of mutual respect, each cultural identity (whether personal or collective) is accorded equal respect and rights. In such

an atmosphere, each separate identity is enriched (and not threatened) by the spiritual, moral and aesthetic values of every other identity. Shorter writes "that a universally true religion cannot be identified exclusively with any one culture or group of cultures" (Shorter 1995:27). In a pluralistic environment in which human differences are appreciated and valued, Christian religious education is called upon to utilise inclusive and participatory approaches in which there are no predetermined answers and in which both educators and learners participate on an equal footing to maximise their appreciation of differences rather than to find definitive "answers".

In such an atmosphere, differences and diversity are never regarded as threatening or as "problems" that need to be resolved in any kind of "melting pot". Dialogical Christian religious education welcomes variety as a means of teaching tolerance, open-mindedness, compassion and sensitivity. Variety and diversity enrich human experience and ultimately condition participants in dialogue to welcome difference and diversity as elements which strengthen rather than weaken the cohesion of society and individual personal relationships. Christian religious education of this kind refrains from defining the church in a particular way and recognizes the co-dependence of all ethnic identities within society as a whole. On a practical level this means

embracing the diversity and plurality offered by cultural contact. Cultural contact presents possibilities for rethinking education from an historical and structural perspective that fosters pursuit of liberation as a social function of education. Within this a dialogical relationship assumes a central and privileged place, encouraging us to listen to, hear and affirm multiple voices (Gaudiano & de Alba 1994:137)

Further evidence for an inclusive and participatory approach may be found in the book of Ecclesiastes where the writer recommends the ideals of cooperation and social solidarity that were the norm in ancient Middle Eastern cultures. It is precisely this norm of cooperation and solidarity it has been undermined and eroded by modern technological civilisation since the onset of the Industrial Revolution. Isolation undermines the viability of individual as a social

and personal entity – especially in times of adversity, as the writer of Ecclesiastes notes. One of the underlying premises of the book seems to be that mutual assistance, understanding and toleration of diversity within the bonds of cooperative endeavour create a stable society, especially during times of accident, inadequacy and adversity (which is a lot of all human beings at some or the time in life).

Two are better than one,
because they have a good reward for their toil;
For if they fall,
one will lift up his fellow;
but woe to him who is alone when he falls
and has not another to lift him up (Ecclesiastes 4.9) (RSV)

Critical pluralism and dialogue and cooperation cannot immediately cure the negative emotions and dissolve the prejudices that give rise to racism and other social ills. One might even adduce the pessimistic view that most people prefer to nurture their prejudices uncritically rather than enter into the kind of dialogue that requires us to abandon our negativity, preconceptions, hatred, spiritual laziness and delusions about who "the other" really are. In order to come to terms with our own (conscious or unconscious) racism, bigotry and prejudice, we need to exert ourselves in ways that challenge our habitual spiritual sloth. What is really needed in society is for racial tolerance to be replaced with the conditioned response of the truly loving heart that simply does not respond negatively to skin colour (for example) as a factor in human relationships. Tolerance and a passion for racial justice are but stepping stones to those more desirable attitudes which *welcome* differences in skin colour, ethnicity, or whatever, as enriching the already complex matrix of social variables.

Because racism in its raw form is still a part of the thinking of many people (and the unfortunate heritage of European colonialism), one has to begin to educate people in tolerance at some point or another. This process of welcoming and valuing diversity and differences, needs to be a fundamental part of the curriculum of Christian religious education. It is for this reason that we need to educate people in the difficult process of dialogue about

spiritual values and the negation of spiritual values that we find in racism, intolerance and bigotry (whoever the victims of these forces may be). The church is an ideal place in which to challenge human beings to examine whether their Christian faith is compatible with their attitudes to people of other colours, Jews, homosexuals, foreigners, the poor, the homeless, the elderly, orphans, people of other faiths (to mention but a few of the groups that have been victims of personal, social and political intolerance and persecution throughout the centuries). The process of dialogue (as envisaged by this dissertation) helps us each to arrive at the realization that whenever groups with different social and cultural characteristics interact, it is possible to celebrate – rather than be antagonised or angered by - points of difference.

While this writer is aware that it may take centuries for racial prejudice, hatred, negativity and bigotry to disappear among the great mass of human beings on this planet, it is necessary for Christians (and especially for Christian religious educators, the subject of this dissertation) to take positive steps to realise this seemingly utopian ideal. In tackling such a huge endeavour, one may take comfort in the popular dictum that one person of faith together with Christ constitute a majority. It is in the very nature of faith to visualise *what may be the case*. Unless Christians (and all people of goodwill from other faiths and none at all) join hands to plan and articulate in some detail *what may be the case*, i.e. their blueprint for a world in which racism, intolerance and bigotry no longer motivate the influential majority of people, such a future will never be actualised. Faith requires vision - not vague and pious hopes or generalisations, but the kind of well-considered specifics that constitute a battle plan for changing human hearts and minds, beginning in the House of God (because that is where our responsibility as Christian religious educators lies). It is in the *specifics* of the curriculum and methodology of Christian religious education that one may discern the contours of a future which will only be actualised if we have sufficient faith in God to begin planning and working now for a harvest that is not yet reaped, and, in many cases, not yet sown.

We need not delude ourselves about the extent of racism in the United States and in other countries. But unless we enter the fray now and plan for a future United States of America

that is not characterised by overt and subliminal racism, violence, fear and intimidation, neither the United States nor the world will ever be at peace. We may find courage for the fight in the psalmist's vision (Psalm 139) that, amidst all of life's afflictions, there is still "light enough" in God's sight (Matsuoka 1998:108).

It is fundamentally important to realise that dialogue in critical pluralism and the resultant positive changes in race relations that such dialogue can effect, will not happen overnight. The whole project will be a slow and pain-staking endeavour that will require long-term commitment on the part of Christians and other people of goodwill to the improvement of race relations. Such a long-term project also requires each Christian religious education specialist to realign his or her own racial constructs and perceptions of differences and diversity so that he or she is familiar with the vision and skilled in the methodology of changing *individual* human perceptions.²⁷ Each Christian religious educator needs to become personally committed to using inclusive and pluralistic approaches and methodologies to educate *individuals* because changes in society of large can only be effected as *individuals* change. Paulo Freire wrote: "Dialogue is a kind of necessary posture to the extent that humans have become and are more critically communicative beings" (Shor & Freire 1987:98).

4.3 PROACTIVE APPROACHES

Covey defines the quality of being "proactive" as being responsible for one's own life. "Our behavior is a function of our decisions not our conditions... We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen" (Covey 1989:71).

²⁷Mary C. Boys issues the following warning about dialogue or conversation: "Conversation like argumentation has limits. It is educative only when people already know something and are thinking carefully about it. The mere sharing of ignorance should not be confused with conversation. Discussion for which participants are not prepared does not constitute conversation in the sense I intend the term. Moreover, those convinced of the rightness of their judgements or entranced by their own intelligence will find conversation beneath them; they pronounce rather than converse" (Boys 1999:129-136).

At the other end of the spectrum, according to Covey, is the reactive approach. In being reactive, people surrender (for whatever reason) to a deterministic paradigm that expresses their feelings of helplessness and hopelessness and so reinforces these very attitudes. People who feel that they have no control over their lives and no ability to own or influence their future become prone to negativity, despair and the kind of self-destructive impulses that are all too obvious in society at large, impulses that destroy human lives and hopes, and that prevent human beings from engaging in mutually rewarding and affirming relationships. The expression of Christian faith in the world is compelled to be either being proactive or reactive in its interaction with society. Those who are reactive tend to spread alarm, despondency, negativity, fear, despair and hopelessness. The extent to which an alleged Christian *complains* and *blames* is the extent to which his or her Christian faith has not yet comprehended that in Christ "all things are possible" and that Christ is the omega point in which all things will have their culmination.

Christian religious educators who are serious about counteracting the sins of bigotry, intolerance and discrimination need to make a serious attempt to understand the underlying premises of bigotry, intolerance and discrimination that are the hidden foundation stones of the traditionally dominant cultural and ethnic group in United States. American culture and society is saturated with implicit assumptions about class, race, gender, sexual orientation, language and economic status that are obvious if one analyses the profile of the kind of people who rule America, whether in the corporate boardroom or in Washington DC. Christian religious educators need to make a radical choice to fight for the poor and dispossessed (however that poverty and disposition may manifest itself).

Quite clearly, a radical choice of this kind characterises the person who makes it as a *revolutionary* in the eyes of the establishment. It is not in the nature of an establishment to surrender its comforts, privileges, wealth, status and political and social control without a tremendous struggle and without the generation of an enormous amount of anger, resistance

and obstruction. In spite of these difficulties, serious Christian religious educators need to make a commitment to uplift all people as full and equal stakeholders in the body of Christ.

As Christian religious educators, we should also not allow ourselves (as was mentioned above) to regard racism as something that can only be addressed at an institutional level, a phenomenon which is amenable to change by ordinary individuals. If we work only at an institutional level, we shall neglect to focus on changing the hearts and minds of individuals who are committed to our care as educators. Society can only be transformed when those who engage in transformation have a clear, overall vision of their goals and purposes and when they apply their vision on the level of the individual. Major changes in society are the product of a multitude of individual personal realisations, changes, clarifications and repentances (to translate the jargon of social change into Christian terms). In terms of such an agenda, Christian religious education could include any number of varied initiatives that support an anti-racist agenda and that enhance those conditions that promote social solidarity and improve the quality of life of all people.

By empowering human beings to become agents of history rather than passive recipients of events, we acquire a new vision of God that empowers the "mystical" component of the mystical-political option by giving us a new understanding of God as love - a love so boundless that it is ultimately incomprehensible (Tracy 1994:57).

As Christians, we are all called not only to envision an inclusive church, but also to identify those historical barriers that have been constructed as a result of centuries of ingrained and unchallenged prejudices and assumptions about class, race, gender, sexual orientation, economics, and class that are the foundations of the systems of oppression that operate overtly and subliminally in the United States and countries and religions all over the world. As we involve individuals and groups in positive action to confront and combat racism, we should link hands with all those people and groups (of whatever persuasion) that sincerely and earnestly espouse the same agenda. Such groups would include minority and ethnic groups

who demand restitution and compensation for historical crimes, abuses and atrocities.

Christian religious educators are the natural allies of all those who struggle for the recognition and empowerment of the abused and disempowered, regardless of the numerical size or importance of such groups in society. As I have already mentioned above, we need to be very clear about prioritising the goals and vision, as well as the kind of "collective action" and strategies for change in explicitly political terms that we need for challenging existing power structures.

Classroom practices that limit culture to an appreciation of artefacts (such as the holidays, heroes, foods, festivals and customs of a particular ethnic group or sub-culture) might very well reinforce rather than challenge the oppressive relations of power and domination that often undergird the oppression of the individuals who belong to such groups (Duesterberg 1998:508).

It is so easy to fall into the trap (however sincere and well-meaning one may be) of isolating individual cultural, ethnic or other differences as quaint or interesting instead of contextualising them in the larger whole of a society in which tolerance and appreciation of diversity are foundational values. We need to help people to understand that the implementation of these foundational values and strategies requires both structural change as it exists on the organizational level as well as personal, individual change (repentance and re-visioning).

One reads in the book of Exodus (Exodus 14:58) that the Israelites had become trapped between the Red Sea and the pursuing Egyptian army. Fearing death at the hands of the Egyptian, the Israelites pray to God for help. "The Lord said to Moses, 'Why do you cry for me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward.'"(Exodus 14:15) (RSV). In the New Testament, this same theme of proactivity is evident. In the gospels, we read how Jesus looked around at the religious leaders with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart (or indifference to human

suffering and need). In front of them was a person with a paralysed hand and the scribes and the Pharisees were far more concerned with catching Jesus in some petty violation of the law than with helping this suffering human being (Mark 3:1-6).

If we are to be proactive with regard to the race issue, we should try to divide our attention equally between changing personal attitudes and engaging in the kind of political and social action that results in fundamental change (such as changes in discriminatory legislation). Even as we engage in political and social action of this kind (which is the product of deliberate, incremental action), we have to be constantly aware that we may fail in our efforts as human beings or that our actions will only bear modest fruit. At other times, we may be surprised by enthusiastic and miraculous changes in human hearts. We can never know beforehand what the consequences of our actions may be, and, as Christians, we should not be unduly concerned if we have done everything that (in terms of our conscience, which often functions as the *vox Dei* within) the Lord requires us to do. Our dedicated and devoted activities, often carried out at considerable personal expense over a number of years, are good examples of what a *proactive approach* to the issue of racism is.

We should question any situation in which we find Christians are having beautiful and authentic experiences of worship when they never so much as lift a finger to oppose the injustice that systematically oppresses whole groups of people. It would stand to reason that if *worship* does not lead us to confront the evils that plague our communities, we are deceiving ourselves if we think that we are into spending time with the same God who has revealed Godself in the pages of the Bible. A world that is confused and deeply compromised about issues of race needs to see Christians with enough courage and commitment to break down the idols of race, not only by means of our words but also by means of our deeds.

Being proactive within the church cannot merely mean hoping and praying that all will be well if we practise positive thinking. Covey contrasts *positive thinking* with *proactive approaches* when he says:

We faced the reality of the current circumstances and of future projections. But we also faced the reality that we had the power to choose a positive response to those circumstances and projections. Not facing reality would have been to accept the idea that what's happening in our environment had to determine us (Covey 1989:77).

As a church (and more specifically as Christian religious educators) committed to a proactive approach on the race issue, we might have to accept that a proactive approach might mean inviting various ethnic organizations and leaders in the community to participate in a significant way in the life of the church and its Christian religious education programmes. In those cases where churches are racially segregated, a proactive approach might mean organising and developing exchange activities and programmes with churches whose populations are predominately of another race/ethnic identity. Such hands-on involvement with people who live in an environment where the effects of racism are not so apparent will increase their awareness of racism. Action of this kind might also help them to enlist actively in the struggle against racism and work towards creating programmes that actively seek to nullify or mitigate the pain and anguish experienced by those who are the victims of racism and all other kinds of discrimination. Rhoads writes:

Genuine mutual relationships between parishes are especially difficult to achieve when one group comes from the dominant culture" and the other from an oppressed or marginalised community. Nevertheless, such opportunities may enable us to deal with the oppressions and victimizations that have occurred between different Christian denominations, racial groups, and social classes. Unless we use these opportunities to overcome oppression, diversity will only be a superficial pastime of comfortable people (Rhoads 1996:146).

In a interracial and multiethnic church, a proactive approach might mean making a conscious effort to examine the racial profile of the church's leadership. How representative is the church's leadership in terms of race, gender and sexual orientation? It is not enough merely to say "We have a good mix of people in our local church" if that mix does not provide for new ways of worshipping, calling diverse leaders and engaging in reconciliatory ministries. An inclusive church is one in which power is equally distributed amongst all its members, one

in which all the various ethnic and cultural groupings, lobbies and constituencies have a equal chance of controlling and modifying (or at least questioning) the attitudes and actions of the all the others. In an inclusive church, every single individual and group has the right *to be heard*.

In the development of an effective multicultural Christian religious education, the following checklist (obtained from Siejk (1993:444), itself adapted from Code's epistemological approach) might be used as to create guidelines and programmes for fostering inclusive and proactive approaches.

Siejk suggests that an authentic church will take action:

1. to acquire a reliable knowledge about the cultural and religious diversity of one's social environment
2. to develop and cultivate a proper understanding of the different cultures and belief systems within one's society
3. to develop attitudes that will enable one to cope with real problems and issues of cultural diversity and to live harmoniously with people of different cultures and religious faiths
4. to articulate and affirm one's own cultural heritage within a multicultural context
5. to communicate by listening to stories from people from varied cultural heritages and belief systems
6. to dialogue with people of other cultures and belief systems for the sake of mutual benefit and spiritual nourishment
7. to be open to meeting and making friends with people of other cultures and faiths
8. to encourage a spirit of inclusiveness which enables all human beings to be respectful of themselves and their traditions and hopes
9. to learn from others by acknowledging the uniqueness of cultural and religious differences as an opportunity for learning and individual and social enrichment

The easiest way to escape the challenge of pluralism, diversity and multiculturalism is to confine oneself to a homogeneous and segregated environment, surrounded by friends and acquaintances of similar background, colour, class, and faith tradition. While, in so doing, we might create a secure, unchallenging and apparently problem-free environment, we would nevertheless be living in a fool's paradise. We would also miss the opportunity of being enriched by confronting and engaging the realities of fundamental problems like racism and other kinds of discrimination. There is no one single, simple solution to all problems of racial or other discrimination. In accepting this reality, we will recognise how complex the problems of discrimination, prejudice and bigotry have become and we will not use the complexity of these problems as an excuse for inaction. If we hope ultimately to win the fight against racial discrimination and every other form of bigotry and prejudice in United States, we need continuously to attack the enemy on many fronts (Cose 1997:242).

The basis of proactive pedagogy should be tolerance, respect and solidarity. Our pedagogy should reject the de-humanization of the "other" and emphasize the need for people to make a conscious choice about whether they are or are not racists. Our pedagogy should act as a mirror in which people should see their own image. A proactive pedagogy of this kind teaches us that by humanizing the other we become humanized ourselves. A proactive pedagogy guides us into truth by introducing us to the method of *active introspection and analytical reflection* which enables us to understand our own virtues and failings, as well as those of our families, our brothers and sisters in the faith, our community, our environment and our country.

In this chapter, the writer examined specific features of anti-racist pedagogies. These features included critical pluralism and proactive approaches. He paid special attention to the necessity for promoting dialogue and activism in the church and in Christian religious education.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one dealt with the background information, the statement of the problem, and the significance of the study. Terms used in this paper were defined and described. The research questions and the limitations of the study were also stated in that chapter. Chapter two focused on racial frames of reference and the impact that multicultural identity is having on society and the institutional church. Chapter three concerned itself with culturally encapsulated Christian religious education and the emergence of liberatory and multicultural paradigms in the fight against racism. That chapter also briefly examined a biblical understanding of humanness and a theology of pluralism. Chapter four dealt specifically with anti-racist pedagogies, i.e. critical pluralism and proactive approaches. This final chapter focuses on the author's summary and conclusion.

5.2 SUMMARY

Racism is still a major problem in American society. Although there are an increasing number of interracial/cross-cultural/multiethnic couples, families and individuals in American society, one may not deduce from this fact that racism is proportionately decreasing. This study has examined selected trends and issues as they relate to the institutional church and Christian religious education in particular in its attempts to respond effectively to the dynamics of the changing racial demographics of American society.

Five research questions guided this study and identified selected trends and issues in Christian religious education in the United States. These questions (which provided a framework for subsequent discussion) were the following: How can the institutional church use its Christian religious education programme as an effective means of witness in American society on issues of race and racism? Does the institutional church currently operate from a position of exclusivism or inclusion and cultural plurality in the context and culture in which it finds

itself? What kind of Christian religious education pedagogies will be most appropriate and effective in a pluralistic society afflicted by problems of racism and other kinds of discrimination? How can Christian religious educators help to re-educate people who have been damaged by the historical and social conditioning caused by centuries of racism in American society? What recommendations can we as Christian religious educators suggest for improving Christian religious education in a society that is ever more multiracial and multiethnic?

The significance of this study lies in its potential for offering some suggestions for improving Christian religious education, its curriculum and methods of instruction as a service to the institutional church in the context of a multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural population.

The review of literature revealed that interracial relationships, marriages and families are on the increase and that the general demographic landscape of the United States is changing from that of being a monocultural or bicultural society to being a multiracial or multiethnic and multicultural society (Root 1992; 1996). The researcher also noted that the changing demographic patterns of the United States as a whole are being reflected in patterns of church membership (however those churches may be constituted). The literature also indicated that racism and discrimination against other disempowered and minority groups is still a major problem in society (West 1992) – as well as in the institutional church (Edwards 1996; Ustry & Keener 1996).

A review of literature further indicated that if Christian religious education is to make any significant difference in American society, it needs decisively to reject a curriculum that implicitly supports the culturally dominant ruling classes in America in favour of one that embraces one that teaches, sponsors and embraces multiculturalism (Ortiz 1996; Tze Ming Ng 1993), liberation (Moore, B 1994/1995; Schipani 1988; Groome 1980; Harris 1994/1995) and a definition of what it means to be human being and first-class American citizen that welcomes and includes *every kind of person* – no matter what his or her race, gender, age,

social or economic status, language, sexual orientation, religion or cultural traditions may be (Battle 1997; Augsburg 1986). The literature also showed that pedagogies that incorporate proactive approaches (Covey 1989; Tracy 1994) and critical pluralism (Johnson 1993; Gaudiano & de Alba 1994) are increasingly being used as a part of their anti-racist strategies by the institutional church and by Christian religious educators in this new millennium.

One may summarise some of the more recent trends in the institutional church and Christian religious education as follows. Firstly, we find that the increasing number of interracial, multiracial and multiethnic families and members of the church are having a profound impact both on the church and on society as a whole. Secondly, Christian religious education runs the risk of becoming irrelevant and totally without influence if it continues (whether consciously or unconsciously) to advance the agenda of the ruling cultural, racial, social and political classes in America. If the institutional church hopes to exercise an effective ministry and be a witness to the salvific dimensions of the gospel in the lives of individuals and society as a whole, it needs to empower each and every one of its members.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

Even though he was reflecting on the turbulent events that were generated by protest against racism in the 1960s, Eldridge Cleaver, a former member of the Black Panther Party, identified a fundamental paradigm shift that he saw happening at that time and that continues to unfold even now. This paradigm shift not only encompasses the black or African American population, but also impacts on all Americans. It is a moment that is slowly empowering hitherto powerless and disadvantaged groups and individuals or kinds and races. Cleaver writes:

This is the last act of the show. We are living in a time when the people of the world are making their final bid for full and complete freedom. Never before in history has the condition prevailed. Always before there have been more or less articulate and aware pockets of people, portions of classes, etc., but today's is an era of mass

awareness, when the smallest man on the street is in rebellion against the system which has denied him life and respect. Yet he is being told that it will take time to get programs started, to pass legislation, to educate white people into accepting the idea that black people want and deserve freedom. But it is physically impossible to move as fast as the black man would like to move. Black men are deadly serious when they say freedom now (Cleaver 1968:124).

This paradigm shift has also had a profound effect on the context and the interpretation of the Christian faith and Christian religious education in our time in particular. It is helping to educate ordinary Christians to incorporate a more inclusive world view and concepts of universal justice and human dignity that would have been regarded as revolutionary half a century ago. Any part of the institutional church that hesitates or fails to move from a position of Christian and ethnic exclusivism to one of inclusiveness and diversity risks becoming rapidly obsolete, irrelevant and marginalized from the mainstream of American culture as it has developed since the protest and liberation movements of the 1960s. What Cleaver discerned, and what the present writer confirms, is that there is a great groundswell of popular opinion in favour of human rights and justice for minorities in the United States and in many countries throughout the world. Whereas the rhetoric of freedom, liberation and justice were, prior to the 1960s, often just that (i.e. empty rhetoric), we are privileged to live in a post-colonial and postmodern society where many of the ideals that were the preserve of an idealistic few, are to a large extent now accepted by many people.

Even as one affirms these realities which have gripped the collective unconscious in many countries since the Second World War, one remains painfully aware of a profound underlying currents of neo-fascism that are still the stock in trade of many groups and individuals in American society. But the eradication of racism, prejudiced and discrimination against minority groups of all kinds is a struggle that will last for centuries and one which the Christian Church is compelled to embrace fervently and unequivocally for as long as it is necessary.

In light of the constantly changing diversity of the political and social landscape, the church

is challenged to maintain both its *equilibrium* and its *relevance* in its attitude towards and action on contemporary issues. In the writer's view, the church has no option but to struggle continuously for clarity and resolution on all such issues relating to race and racism and the rights of persecuted minority groups of whatever kind. This struggle is the only viable option for those parts of the church that wish to remain relevant and influential in modern society because the church is comprised of an increasing number of ethnically and culturally diverse people. Pluralism is no longer an option: it is a social and demographic reality of modern American society.

If Christian religious education specifically is to remain relevant to modern society, it should make every effort to modernise its understanding of the dynamics of contemporary American society. In practical terms, this means (as we have already stated above) that Christian religious educators will have to become a lot more adventurous in exploring new methods, techniques and curricula that reflect the realities of society at the beginning of the 21st century. As much as it might have suited the ruling classes in the past to accord first-class status and all the privileges of citizenship only to Americans who were fortunate enough to belong to a ruling class elite characterised by its homogeneous WASP identity, this convenient fiction that enabled one class of people to achieve and maintain ascendancy in American society, no longer commands the allegiance of the majority of the American people. Proof of this fact may be found in the pronouncements of traditionally right-wing constituencies in the American elections of 2000. What was noticeable about these elections is that people who one might have expected to ignore cultural, ethnic, racial and lifestyle minorities went out of a way to court the vote of these very minorities. In the same way, the church, if it hopes to remain relevant in society at large, needs to create and implement Christian religious education programmes and strategies that will reflect the social and political realities of contemporary American society. As the author attempted to prove in an earlier chapter, the very nature of the gospel gives us no choice as Christians but to champion the underdog, to foster diversity, to encourage individuality, and welcome dissident voices and differing opinions

Reality is itself always in a process of coming into being and disappearing. We need to understand the reality in which we find ourselves in terms of how it really is *today* – and not how it was in the various historical epochs since the founding of the American Republic (Doll 1993:145).

As noted above, it is necessary to recommend that if Christian religious education is to become effective in this new millennium, it will have to use methods and techniques that foster solidarity and interaction among people of different cultural backgrounds and reject any attempt to reinstate the historical fiction that American identity can be defined in terms of one privileged universal standard that in fact is particularistic in the extreme. Christian religious education also needs to advance the vision of a universal Christ who honours and values the cultural and ethnic uniqueness of all people and who unites them as one together with himself, the Father and the Holy Spirit in the unity of Godself.

The modern church needs to reject historical modes of defining people in terms of their particular racial or ethnic identity, gender, language, lifestyle or culture (i.e. in terms of the ways in which we are different from one another). The modern reality is that Christian faith communities are communities that do NOT possess a common language or racial and ethnic identity. What binds us together as Christians is not the alleged homogeneity of our blood but the salvific power of Christ's redeeming blood (Matsuoka 1998:103).

In an environment characterised by a much greater availability of choices than was the case even a few decades ago,²⁸ people feel free to explore alternative lifestyles and celebrate (rather than be ashamed of) their differences. Inevitably, the expanded range of choices

¹Fowler, in his book entitled *Weaving The New Creation*, warns us about the dangers of living in an environment which offers so many choices. "Our era has been characterized as one of 'overchoice'. From automobiles to vinegar, from TV channels to religious denominations and groups, from life-styles to leisure-time travel, we have opportunities and choices to make an unprecedented in history...The peril that goes with expanding choice may be characterized as homeless minds and hearts" (Fowler 1991:8).

available to people in the First World affect every aspect of modern life - including such institutions as the church. In a truly relevant church, Christians from the historically dominant racial and ethnic group might increase their empathy and moral intelligence by becoming *learners* rather than *rulers*. They could expand the range of their moral understanding by making a sincere effort to understand history, social life and political and religious issues from the perspective of people of colour and the large number of people from various minority groups who have been traditionally disadvantaged by the American establishment.

People of colour in turn might benefit from sharing the story of *their* struggle in a historically racist society and the insights and wisdom that they have achieved from being compelled to be part of such a struggle. If Christian religious education were approached from this angle, it could develop into a revolutionary force and power that would give it the moral authority to set the agenda for the future of America. Hesselgrave suggests an insightful analogy that highlights Christendom's need to recognize both the uniqueness as well as the interconnectedness of the individual pieces of one collective racial mosaic:

Have you ever put together a really complex jigsaw puzzle with perhaps hundreds of pieces? If so, what helped you most in deciding where each piece fit? Not primarily the colouring, lines and contours of the individual pieces. What was most helpful was the picture of the final product on the cover of the box. It was the "big picture" that was most helpful in the placing of each individual piece (Hesselgrave 1991:205).

The promotion of a multiethnic and multicultural mosaic in the church means moving away from any kind of hierarchal ordering of people in terms of value or worth. It also means meeting the challenge of finding ways to connect people and discovering common ground among groups of people who are *prima facie* outwardly incongruent. If it can do this, the church will empower people to become partners in a greater cause, that of promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ.

There is a Mali expression that says, "Even if a log remains in a river for a hundred years it will never become a crocodile" (Elmer 1993:105). In terms of this understanding, racism can

never be *reformed*, no matter how long people may wait for such a change to occur. Racism is basically sinful and evil, and sin cannot never be reformed; it can only be repented of and rejected. Racism will only disappear when human beings reject racism and adopt new standards and approaches to issues of race, racism and prejudice. What this means for Christian religious education is that we as Christians cannot amend our pedagogy until we have transformed our epistemology. Reformation of epistemology means a fundamental revolution in the way that we think.

If Christian religious teaching is reformed in our time, it will not be because of superficial adjustments in teaching techniques and the modernisation of methods of teaching so that they become more attractive to people. Christian religious teaching will only be transformed because of a radical intellectual and spiritual revisioning of reality as we know it (Palmer 1993:xvii).

Because racism, bigotry and prejudice reappear in each new generation, they have to be confronted in whatever new guises they appear. Responsible citizens everywhere, and especially Christians and all other people of goodwill, are required to be eternally vigilant about the new forms in which racism, prejudice or discrimination, as well as the beliefs and ideologies which they foster, make their appearance.

Racism has been a constant factor in the history of humanity for a very long time. Racial reconciliation will only become possible when the majority of people become willing to appreciate what they have in common rather than what separates them and when they base their solidarity as human beings on a common denominator more exalted than skin colour. Calling people to embrace ideals of justice and compassion as well as to unity in the midst of diversity will need to be part of all Christian religious education programmes and strategies in the present millennium. According to Frederick Buechner: "Part of what binds us closest together as human beings and makes it true that no one is an island is the knowledge that in another way every one is an island alone" (Beuchner, cited by by Matsuoka 1998:126).

The Christian witness to unity in diversity stands at the very heart of the Christian message. Christians need the transforming message of power that comes through Christ Jesus. Ashcroft writes:

In the realm of physical science, energy is the ability/capacity to do work. A distinction is made between potential energy, which is stored and latent, and kinetic energy, which is in use and active. The transformed kinetic energy science calls "power". To the physicist, energy is never powerless. It is either latent or active (Ashcroft, cited in Sleeter (ed) 1991:15).

In the same way, the power of Jesus is always present although he constantly reveals himself in different ways to those who call on him in faith.

Christian religious education is but one avenue (although a potent one) for resisting and combatting the growth of racism. It is, however, not a single-issue discipline. It does not focus solely on race. If utilised correctly, it provides a means for creating connections between racism and many of the other problems that beset society today. If Christians of whatever colour or persuasion deny people of different cultures and races the opportunity of worshipping with them and being made welcome in their churches, they forgo a unique opportunity for making multiracialism and multiculturalism a *normal* part of the life of every church. The author emphatically agrees with Buttry when he states that "racism and obedience to Christ are mutually exclusive" (Buttry 1988:128).

If we incorporate multiculturalism and multiracialism into the dynamics of church life, we will be blessed with a new understanding of race, ethnicity and human diversity and a more critical understanding of our blighted history. When Christian religious education accepts the richness of its heritage by honouring the differences and diversity that make up the church, whether those differences be European, African, Native American or Asian, it will transcend its past sin of uncritically supporting the dominant classes of American society and become what it was meant to be - an instrument of national reconciliation. Christian religious education which is faithful to the spirit of the gospel and the message of Jesus and the prophetic voice of the

Old Testament prophets, celebrates differences and diversity because they strengthen and enrich the body of Christ. By honouring diversity, we enrich ourselves and strengthen the fabric of the entire society in which we live.

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