

# **Chapter 7**

## **Conclusion**

It is necessary to look at the results of the investigation before reflecting on the contribution of this study to the field of South African Church history. The objectives spelled out in chapter one are used to summarise the results of the investigation.

### **7.1 The origins and underpinnings of Christian Education in South Africa**

Although the first white settlers at the Cape were Europeans, they very quickly became Africans. The climate, living conditions, isolation from the rest of the world and the wilderness surrounding them, all helped to form a new nation – the Afrikaners.

The educational system that came with the European settlers to South Africa was the trusted Protestant system that was first introduced by the Reformers and brought to the Netherlands through the work of John Calvin. The system was firmly instituted in the Netherlands by the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) where the educational system was placed under the supervision of the Church.

This system was brought to the Cape and became official in 1714 when the Governor MP De Chavonnes summarised the existing customs and principles on education into a law. The law remained the guideline for education until 1795 and in the rural areas it stayed unofficially in operation until after the Great Trek. The Voortrekkers took off into the interior of the country, taking the trusted and well-

known Biblical based educational system with them into the wilderness. After the Great Trek, the people who settled north of the Vaal River in the ZAR, used the same books and curriculum that they were used to in the Cape to educate their children.

Only a few teachers accompanied the Trek and the primary task of educating the children rested on the shoulders of the parents, who, in obedience to the promises made at baptism, gave Christian based education to their children from a very early age. Education was very elementary, religiously based and aimed at training young people to become members of the Church. The Bible was used as handbook on all subjects – from history to geography and science. The universal use of the Bible as basis together with only a few other books like the *Trap der Jeugd*, helped to form the Afrikaners into a uniform nation, thinking and acting alike.

## **7.2 The influence certain schools of thought had on the Afrikaners**

The character and worldview of Romanticism was grasped by the young Afrikaner nation of the Cape. They adopted and altered it to suit their circumstances and cherished it as their own. The outstanding characteristics of Romanticism soon became part of the character of the Afrikaners. The emphasis laid by Romanticism on history as a source of knowledge inspired the Calvinistic Afrikaners to fix their focus on the Bible. This was their source of history, knowledge and truth. It helped them to develop a strong faith and an undisputed

respect for the family unit as the small but important institution where education started and religion determined all actions and relationships.

Like everything else in Africa, Romanticism underwent certain changes at the hands of the Afrikaners. Nationalism, one of the characteristics of Romanticism, did not play a major part to unite the Afrikaner nation. Another aspect of life (and also one of the characteristics of Romanticism) – the strong-minded individuality, became one of the most influential aspects of the Afrikaner character. To this day, individualism is a strong characteristic of the Afrikaners, especially when it comes to politics or religion. Today, national participation in sport succeeds in uniting the Afrikaner nation (but only for the duration of the game).

Together with the worldview of the Romanticism, the religious influence of the Protestantism and, in particular the stern conservative Calvinism, played a major part in the development of the nation in South Africa. Some of the most outstanding characteristics of the Afrikaner nation, like their isolation from the other nations living in South Africa, their fondness of the Bible and the education of their children all had the Calvinistic heritage as basis. The influence of Pietism (especially in the spiritual songs they loved to sing) in the lives of the Afrikaner nation gave an emotional touch to their religion and, together with Calvinism, these influences directed the development of the Afrikaners.

The religious mind of the Afrikaner played a major part in the education of the children. The influence can clearly be seen in the lives of the Voortrekkers who,

despite the fact that the official Church gave them no support and guidance, still managed to practise their faith and teach their children to trust in God, read his Word, and to stay true to Biblical customs and believes.

The Afrikaners, who made the interior of the country their home, had a sense of security, a definite identity, and lived according to high moral standards due to their religious based education and training. The pioneers who established a new homeland (by creating a government, institutions, a social manner of conduct and an economic infrastructure, as well as all the other structures that build a country) backed their actions with their strong faith in the Almighty God. They ensured the country's future by educating their children by means of the Christian educational system that they themselves underwent and trusted as the only true means of education.

### **7.3 The nature and character of Christian education through the analysis of the curriculum that was taught**

The law regarding education made by Governor MP De Chavonnes in 1714 formed the basis for religious education that was the trusted heritage from the past that would become the primary guideline for education for the Afrikaner nation for generations to come, despite the fact that this law was changed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century by Governor De Mist. The Voortrekkers took the known and trusted practice with them and used it years later to establish the laws and customs of the new homeland north of the Vaal River.

Church, school and education were not separated from one another. Spelling, reading, writing, and everything else were learned with one goal in mind: to be able to read the Bible – the most important requirement to become a member of the Church. Membership of the Church also opened the door to adult life. Young people could get married only after their public confession of faith.

Parents took the promises made at the baptism of their children seriously. Education of the smaller children consisted of learning the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Creed. Older children had to learn the questions and answers from the catechism and everyone was taught to sing spiritual songs and to read the Dutch Bible.

The books used for the education of the children were the same ones that were used in the Cape Colony before the Great Trek. The similarity and unity in the education and character of the people came from the books that were used. All children used the same books and all were educated and trained in the same way. These books were the *Groot ABC boek*, *Trap der Jeugd*, *Borstius-vrageboekie* and above all, the Bible.

Along with the first settlers came the Psalm book of Petrus Datheen, first printed in 1566 in the Netherlands, with the melodies of Calvin's Psalm book of 1562. The *Ordonantie van de School ordening* of Governor de Chavonnes in 1714 stipulated that children must practise the singing of Psalms during school hours. The Evangelical Hymns were introduced into the Church at the Cape in 1814 and

the early Pietistic contents inherent in it, soon became part of the faith of the Afrikaners, giving a practical side to it.

The important part spiritual songs played in the lives of the people leaving the Cape and during the existence of the ZAR, even to the very end of the Second Anglo-Boer War, must not be underestimated. All children had to learn to sing even the most difficult melodies with perfect pitch. The words, known by heart, and sung under all circumstances, influenced their behaviour and worldview.

The contents of the songs, poems and hymns learned and sang by the Afrikaners was a firm building block in the character of these people. Virtues, good manners, Biblical truths and commandments formed the basis of these works and it found its way into the worldview and character of the Afrikaner nation.

#### **7.4 Evaluation of education in the ZAR**

The educational system formed the centre piece around which the family life as well as the social life and relationships of the individuals revolved. The fundamental Christian education, firmly based on the stern Calvinism was the building block, and the practical 'living faith' of early Pietism learned in the words of the spiritual songs they sang was the cement that built a nation.

The curriculum of the education after the Great Trek was the same as during the Trek. The Bible formed the basis for all training, both formal and informal. The

final goal of the education of children was to enable them to read the Bible and do public confession of faith to become members of the Church and State.

The isolation and nomadic lifestyle of the settlers north of the Vaal River and the poverty of both the Boers and the government had a negative influence on the development of the people and the country. Other factors like the political and social unrest, the uncertain military situation, lack of teachers and the fact that the children were used as farm workers also helped to keep the educational standard at what it was during the Great Trek. The result was that the elementary Christian based education prevailed and it became the known and trusted educational system, guarded by the educational laws of the country.

After the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa, many of the above mentioned factors that influenced education changed, but because the foundation was already laid, the education system stayed the same, despite the criticism from non-Afrikaners.

After the Second Anglo-Boer War, the Afrikaners stood firmly on the heritage of Christian based education and used the guidelines and laws used in the ZAR to set Afrikaner education on track. The result was that the Christian based education formed the basis for education in South Africa for nearly a century to come.

## 7.5 The worldview of the Afrikaners

The character of the Afrikaners portrayed their worldview. The Afrikaner nation saw the world, everything around them and everything that happened to them, through religiously tinted glasses. The very existence of the nation and the lives of everyone, from the leaders to the farmers, were influenced by their Calvinistic religion. This gave the Afrikaner nation a unique outlook on life and this worldview often astonished the outside world. No science, logic or even hard evidence could change the mind of Afrikaners that was set to believe only the Bible. Judgement of all things and people was done by the laws and commandments learned from the Bible.

Behind this rigid worldview was the fact that the Afrikaners lived isolated from foreign influences for many years. The isolation had a great influence on the religion on the one hand and stimulated conservatism and individuality on the other hand. In the interior of the country, even before but also during the Great Trek, as well as after the establishment of the ZAR, the Afrikaners lived in family units, without printing presses, big trade routes or many visitors to bring news of the latest developments and philosophies to their doors. The fact that they spoke their own language, and stubbornly refused to learn to speak English, isolated them even more.

All of these factors (religion, individualism, isolation, conservatism and the Afrikaans language, as well as the *wanderlust* and pastoral living of the Afrikaners) worked together to form the Afrikaner nation into a people who loved

to be left alone to do things their own way. They even became sceptical of everything and everyone unknown.

The family served as a social, economical and military unit. Biblical commands served as guidelines in all aspects of family life. It was even extended to guests and foreigners. Life was simple. Strict boundaries in all aspects of life guided young people to grow up with the same values and beliefs that were dear to their parents and grand parents.

Although the world around them and the circumstances they lived in, changed dramatically after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, the Afrikaners living in the ZAR did not change their worldview. The gold rush, influx of people and money, the railways, printing presses, wars and concentration camps could not alter their views on religion, education and the way they wanted to live.

The influence of the Christian based society lasted much longer than the ZAR. The ZAR came to an end with the Peace of Vereeniging that ended the Second Anglo-Boer War in 1902, but a century later, the Afrikaners were still conservative, Calvinistic Christians using Christian based education to educate their children.

## **7.6 The impact that Christian education had on the shaping of the society of the ZAR**

The lives and works of a few great South Africans were investigated and the conclusion was drawn that these people, despite the minimum formal education, became examples and even heroes to the Afrikaners because of their firm Christian education and faith that determined all aspects of their lives. Some of them even became internationally recognised leaders. Their names and deeds are still remembered because of the firm role religion played in their lives. The religious education they received as children determined their worldview, character and achievements. 'Religious education throughout history has been in the hands of the middle class and conservative people' (Malan 1985:52). It was these 'middle class' Afrikaners who shaped society and thus the nation. They educated their children using the Bible as handbook and it was those youngsters who became the Afrikaner leaders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the builders of the Christian nation. Afrikaners of all ages and on all levels of society reached great heights despite the fact they lacked modern European standard education and training. Their achievements were built on the Christian based education they received from their parents and the fact that they treasured it and used it to help and guide them in every aspect of their lives.

The real impact of Christian education cannot be seen in institutions dating from the time of the ZAR. This does not mean that there were no great achievements. Most of the results of the Christian based education in all aspects of life, be it politics, the Church, business, culture, history, education or nature conservation,

was only realised and appreciated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian based institutions like the CNE, the world famous nature conservation parks, and the influence of the Church in the worldview and politics of the nation as well as the well-known charity and women's organisations were all direct results of the input of the Christian orientated education of the 19<sup>th</sup> century which the ZAR pioneers had given to their children.

The absolute unique character of the Afrikaner nation, when put against the characters of other nations that developed at the same time in different parts of the world, underlines the Christian foundation as a key factor in the shaping of the Afrikaners. The stern Calvinistic religion and the indispensable Christian education that was non-negotiable, become the outstanding and ultimate formation factors in the lives of the Afrikaners living in the ZAR.

## **7.7 Reflection**

The last step to conclude the study regarding the impact of Christian based education on the ZAR is to reflect on the information gathered in the investigation.

The religious seeds brought from the Netherlands to South Africa in the 17<sup>th</sup> century found rich soil where it sprouted and gave dimension to all aspects of the character of the Afrikaner nation. By the time Britain took over the Cape at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the roots were already firmly established and the young nation formed. During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of the Afrikaners,

not willing to stand under the British rule and no longer satisfied with living conditions at the Cape, took their particular way of living with them into the interior of the country where they again planted a nation. Here the fruits of the religious foundations that were imbedded into all aspects of life paid off. The religious education given to the children influenced every aspect of their lives: their character, their behaviour and their worldview. This resulted in the development of the Afrikaners as a unique nation, bound together by their religion and educational system (and not by nationalism, politics, race or major national symbols).

The Voortrekkers and their children built a modern country in the northern part of South Africa within 25 years. They stood firmly on the necessity to educate their children and did so by using Christian based, Bible centred education. Those youngsters grew up to become the people who shaped a Christian country with Christian based practices and customs and successfully formed the Afrikaner nation into a unique, Christian nation that firmly instituted Christian based education for all Afrikaner children.

The strength of the Afrikaner nation was tested by the onslaught of the British Empire and the fortune seekers of the world that flooded the ZAR during the gold rush and the era of industrial development. The Afrikaners were exploited by foreigners and laughed at because of their faith and conservative worldview based on the Bible. They were scorned because of their lack of progress and unwillingness to adapt to new ideas. Despite all of this, they stayed true to their

faith and traditional education. They believed that the Word of God is the only trusted guideline to measure life and circumstances, development as well as the words and deeds of other people. Their faith and commitment to the Lord was the force that made and kept the Afrikaner a unique nation with a strong character and influence on the coming generations. Their faith and religion was the one thing that kept them from being swept away by the imperial aspirations of Great Britain.

The religious education shielded the people from losing their identity, language, spirit and uniqueness. It guarded them from mixing with other nations and cultures. Most of all it safeguarded them against being adopted into the English way of living. The British money, power and manners could not devour the Afrikaner spirit. Afrikaners, who refused to conform, refused to forget their past, and stayed true to their upbringing, shattered the visions of a British South Africa.

The basic Christian education given to the children in the ZAR, not only formed their spiritual lives, but it also had a major influence on their character, worldview, jobs and the impression they made on other people and the rest of the world. This led to the fact that not only the people but also the institutions like the Church, government, educational system, politics, culture and social life was affected by the religious outlook on life. It was the religion of the Afrikaners, made part of their existence from the very early childhood years through education and training that shaped the ZAR and influenced its history as well as the future of the Afrikaner nation.

The fundamental Christian education that the people living in the ZAR, gave to their children, was the backbone of the building of the Afrikaner nation in both the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Neither political skills nor feelings of unity and nationalism brought them together. It was the faith and education they shared that formed them into a nation.

The influence of Christian based education and training on the ZAR must thus not be overlooked or taken for granted. It did not only influence the Afrikaners of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it also formed a platform and foundation for the coming generations to build upon, shaping their lives around the pillar of faith.

The importance of the small piece of history and its consequences looked at in the thesis must be understood by the Church of today in order to help the seeking Christians in their quest for answers. Due to the ‘fighting’ spirit that clouded South African Church history for so many years and generations, the utmost importance of the issue regarding the Christian based educational system was either overlooked or under-estimated. Perhaps because of the fact that Christian centred education shaped our society for more than a century, there had been no need to vocalize the importance of this issue before. People took education and Christian based education for granted and focused on issues that were more controversial.

The impact of the Christian based educational system on the ZAR can be used as an example to the believers of today that anything is possible with the help of the

Lord. Even in the present situation regarding Christian education, there is a light still shining – the light of the lessons that can be learned from history. The people who lived in the ZAR did not have resources; they did not have an abundance of Churches and preachers, schools and bookstores around them. There were no Christian universities, libraries filled with books, literature and information to educate them. All they had was the Bible and the examples of their parents practising their faith in every aspect of life.

The way people managed to give their children a Christian education under difficult circumstances can be used as a powerful encouragement for the Christians of today. It will help them to realise that all is not lost if the schools and Churches no longer provide the Christian education they want for their children. The people living in the ZAR educated their children with only the Bible in their hands and faith in their hearts.

The unique Afrikaner nation that developed, wrapped in Christianity, is in danger of being led astray by the worldviews and influences of the modern world. The present question on the lips and in the minds of South Africans concerns the education of their children. After the 1994 shift in government and politics in South Africa, '[a] strong push to give all religions equal say has given high profile to the ethnic African religions, Islam, Hinduism, Humanism and the interfaith movements at the expense of Christianity' (Johnstone, Johnstone, Mandryk 2000:577).

People who never gave a thought to Christian based education, because they took it for granted, are confronted with the fact that if Christian based education is taken away from the school system, the responsibility of religious education would fall back on their shoulders and they are frightened by the prospect.

Should the worst case scenario become reality and Christian based education is banned from schools, the faithful must be capable and ready to take on the task to be educators to prevent the next generation forgetting their roots and destiny, and become citizens of this doomed world. Not only does the education of children become problematic in the light of the change in government policy, but other issues like abortion and HIV/AIDS, crime and violence with all its consequences suddenly become giant issues that the Church and Christians are confronted with and have to cope with in everyday life. The pioneers living in the ZAR faced problems that were unique to their situation but they coped with this by using the guidelines of the Bible. There are, to my mind, no problems that cannot be solved by Christian faith and the Word of God.

In my opinion, the average Afrikaners do not understand why Christian education is not negotiable. They only have a 'feeling' about it and know instinctively or maybe traditionally, that this is what they want for their children because this is the way they grew up. When the guidelines are drawn from the past, the reasons for this 'instinctive' reaction become clear and people are able to identify with the struggle that previous generations had with similar issues, and their answers to it. It is not only the mistakes of the past that can be used to help and guide us but

also the success stories. However, to be able to learn from the past, the facts must be known.

The only way Afrikaners can stay true to their uniqueness as a nation is to stay true to those things and values that made them a unique nation in the first place. We know that nationalism is not very strong amongst Afrikaners and that politics easily divides them. Even the division between the different Churches and denominations cut deep into the nation, sometimes dividing them in fanatical groups. It is only the fundamental Christian based education that, through the years, managed to bind the Afrikaners together. This was the one thing most Afrikaners agreed upon and most Afrikaners wanted for their children. Looking at the present situation in the country and speculating about the future of it, we must realise that the Christian education of the youth is still the only weapon Christians have to face the world with.

Sadly, the words of Preller are true: 'In the history of every nation, you will find the same tragedy that is found in the history and life of individuals. This happens because, like the individual, nations also fail to learn from past experience (Du Plessis 1956:157 – my translation). If taken to heart, these words can prevent modern day Afrikaners from underestimating the value and impact of Christian based education not only on individuals but on the entire nation. The example of the Afrikaner pioneers can help the Afrikaners of today to understand their past, and motivate them to take a stand for the legacies they cherish. The guidelines

given by previous generations can help them find their way through the contemporary jungle regarding Christian based education and training.

Preller's words need not be true of this generation should the Christians be informed about their heritage, their rights and their privileges regarding the education of their children. One of the big obstacles in the lives of Christians today is the fact that they do not realise that they have the one tool that is needed for life and lives of their children in their own hands – the Bible.

The responsibility of parents as educators needs to be emphasised and made clear to all Christians. The fulfilment of the promises made at the baptism of the children can no longer be passed on to the school and the Sunday school classes. Parents need to take it upon themselves to see to it that even the infants receive proper religious education just like their forefathers did during the founding years of the nation. Francis Xavier said: 'Give me a child for the first seven years, and you may do what you like with him afterwards' (Castle 1983:32). History (Communism and the Roman Catholic Church) proved these words true, but still the Afrikaners cannot believe their ears when they are told that the future of the country and the nation is in their own hands – the hands that are holding their babies and Bibles.

I think that Geyser is right when he says that the answers to the enormous crisis that Afrikaners are facing, is sought in the wrong place.

New leaders are groping in all directions for "solutions" to our "problems" and on the whole the dictates of the greatest and

most effective mind forming force of all time, the Bible, is sadly passed by. This time proven book on change, the change of man, his heart and his relationships, should serve as the basis of our approach and in Religious Education the Bible should occupy a decisive position both at home and at school (Geyser 1980:22).

The absolute necessity of the Biblical based education (especially at home) has been neglected in the last years under pressure of the modern worldview that had a great influence in South Africa. The emancipation of women, financial needs and the social influences of the modern technological world all contributed to the fact that the pillar of faith in the homes of Christians started to crumble and eventually fell down. To make things worse, Church leaders and other community leaders no longer realised that their faith was the only centrepiece of their lives. They started to depend on their own abilities, education and power or money, with disastrous effects. Malan quotes Du Plessis's reasons for this alarming situation.

I share the view with many others that the young people are taught religion but they do not see it in action and do not experience it themselves – hence their lack of interest in what seems to them an irrelevant activity...If we want people to accept an ultimate authority of right and wrong, good and evil, we must demonstrate goodness in our daily lives, we must demonstrate our beliefs by our actions and involve the young in such activities – designed to inculcate a concern for mankind – a love of which transcends the individual self-interest (Malan 1985:50).

If the Afrikaners of today realise that they have allowed themselves and their children to drift away from the Bible as the only guideline in their lives, and make an active choice to once again centre their lives around God alone, Afrikaners will once again be able to stand up to and shine a light to the world.

Staples claims '[t]hat the Church, the State and the home are partners in the task of proclaiming and extending the kingdom of God no soundly Christian theology will deny' (Staples 1980:36). Most Afrikaners will agree on this, but what they fail to realise is the enormous impact that the home has on the State and the Church. It is true that '[a] Christian family, as well as the reproduction and expansion of the Christian civilisation has to have a Christian school. Just like the Christian Church and the Christian state, the Christian school is also part of the earthly manifestations of the body of Christ' (Van der Walt, Dekker, Van der Walt 1983:265 – my translation). It is also true that the school need not be the same place or space where children learn history and mathematics. The school of religious instruction functions at its best if living faith is practised by those who preach it and religion is part of every aspect of life. Therefore, the question raised by Engelbrecht is relevant and must be answered.

The view of life and of the world held by the rising generation will depend on both its own choices and attitudes, and on what we are handing over to it. Education is a matter of tradition; it is the faithful and responsible handing over to a new generation of the accumulated wealth of knowledge and insight, which was built up through the ages and is enriched by each new generation. The most momentous question that people living in any age can ask themselves is: is the tradition which we hand over to our children a firm foundation on which they can gratefully, joyously and responsibly continue to build? (Engelbrecht 1980:9,10).

The tradition and history of Christianity in South Africa (with fair recognition of all its faults and mistakes taken into account and honestly and openly confessed) can be used as a firm foundation on which the future of the Afrikaner nation can be built. South African Christians have a tradition and history from which they

can learn and it can be handed over to our children for them to continue to build on ‘gratefully, joyously and responsibly.’

We do live in a changing, global world where religion and religious education will have to change in order to stay relevant for the children living in this new world. The pioneers living in the ZAR also had to face a changing world. Like them, we have to accept that certain things will change and others will only change if we want/let/allow them to. This gives us an exciting opportunity to open new paths where the Gospel and faith stand in the centre of all denominations and Churches – a time when Christians take hands and reach out to one another, standing together against the onslaught of other religions – thus fulfilling our task and calling to preach to the whole world. The Afrikaner nation has always been known as a Christian nation. Like our forefathers who stood firm on their beliefs, the modern South African Christians can continue to be a shining light to the nations because of their faith and obedience to the Lord, our God.

It is crucial for the Church of today to remember that the ‘living faith,’ practised by the people living in the ZAR, must once again come to life in the religion and religious education of the youth in order for the Christian faith to be ‘a way of life and not merely as a doctrine’ (Malan 1985:50).

The legacy of the Christian educational system was transferred into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and it became part of the South African CNE structure that formed the basis of education for nearly a century in South Africa. Today it is still part of the

Afrikaner's frame of reference. Although the political scene and social status of the Afrikaner changed dramatically during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the basic Christian values that formed part of the education of all Afrikaners nearly to the end of the century stayed the backbone of the Afrikaner society, binding them together. Biblical based education was accepted as the norm and rule and not challenged by anyone until the democratic government took over in 1994 and the constitution that was based on the Christian religion, the heritage of the old pioneers (cf Kistner 1985), was changed.

There is no need for the modern day Christians to flee the country or to panic about their desire to give their children a sound Christian based education. The history of the ZAR shows clearly that Afrikaners (in more or less the same situation that their countrymen are today) were able to form and shape the country and the nation with such impact that the results of their efforts were felt for more than a century in all aspects of life, forming and building a Christian nation by using Christian based education.

I conclude with the words of Malan:

Let us then, in South Africa and elsewhere, regardless of drawbacks and disappointments, constantly put ourselves at God's disposal, each to play his or her modest part in communicating the Christian message to the next generation. Our individual parts may vary between studying, praying, teaching, writing, and organizing, but shall definitely include the joy of living with renewed minds (Malan 1985:55).