

Chapter 4

Christian education in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek

The one outstanding characteristic of the people leaving the Cape during the Great Trek and settling in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek north of the Vaal River after 1836 was their clinging to faith and religion in all aspects of their lives and especially as far as the education of their children was concerned (Keyter 1940:31). They tamed the wilderness and went through many trials that could have broken their spirit but they pushed on to liberty and freedom to be able to live their lives and educate their children in the ways they believed to be right and true and according to the Word of God (Fuller 1908:35,36). All of this was reported in the previous chapter.

After years in the wagons and always on the road, the Voortrekkers gave birth to a new country built on the laws and morals and experience of what was dear to them: their faith in God Almighty (cf Aylward 1881:19). Issues regarding education in the ZAR, the development of the laws regarding education and the different influences on the standard and means of education in the ZAR are the focus of this chapter.

In the centre of the lives of the people living in South Africa, stood the educational system, brought from the Netherlands and upheld in Southern Africa for centuries to come (cf Stockenström sa:226). Not education *per se*, but the fundamental Christian education, firmly based in the stern Calvinism, and practically lived because of the influence of early Pietism, was all they had, and

all they used to build a nation. Their faith in God and commitment to give their children the best education they could, was the force that made the Afrikaner a unique nation, able to stand up to the world (Stockenström sa:229).

Children were taught to read and write and do mathematics but the main purpose of the education was to enable them to read the Bible and become members of the Church community (Grobelaar 1974:160). This kind of education prevailed after the Great Trek. 'For two generations more the children and grandchildren of the Voortrekkers continued to receive the education of the farm, the veld, and the Boer home. Deep into the nineteenth century they took the non-literary and non-industrial habits of the eighteenth century' (De Kiewiet 1941:56).

After 1840 the education of children was looked after by both State and Church, just as it was done in the Cape and during the long years of the Trek. Both leaders and parents were eager to establish a firm basis for education. Andries Pretorius, speaking at Derdepoort in 1849, urged parents to take full responsibility for the education of their children: 'You, fathers, teach your children to grow up in love and peace and unity, then they can expect true happiness in the life hereafter' (R178/49 – my translation).

The ZAR existed (unofficially) for more than sixty years and during this time great development and changes took place. The area developed from an uninhabited wilderness with no roads or means of communication in the 1840-

1850 period, to a highly efficient country winning the war against the British Empire in the 1880's.

There is no doubt that the foreigners coming to the ZAR in their thousands after the discovery of gold, had a great influence on the lives of the Afrikaners living in the ZAR. Even before the gold rush, the town of Zoutpansberg (later known as Schoemansdal) experienced the influence that money had on people. A few notes on its history serves to explain what happened to the ZAR when fortune seekers came in their numbers to the country.

In 1865 Zoutpansberg was a quiet town with large herds of cattle, big, well cultivated farms and an abundance of wild life (Hofmeyr 1890:25). On Sundays everyone attended sermons. Every day, both in the morning and at night you could hear singing from the homes when the families gathered for *Boekevat* (family worship). At night the children learned their lessons at the big table in the dining room. 'Adultery was not heard of amongst the Afrikaners and no one used dirty language' (Hofmeyr 1890:25 – my translation).

However, this changed when the ivory trade started to make people rich. By 1890 Hofmeyr, a missionary, saw a different picture of this town:

Even the fever that causes many deaths during the hot summer months could not stop the influx of people to the town of Zoutpansberg. Ivory is like gold! Of course, rascals from the Cape, the Netherlands and from all over the world, and all kinds of other failures come here. Even the Portuguese half-breeds that are slave traders are welcome here! All the good that the Afrikaners brought with them, is being destroyed, and all of this has an effect on religion: Some of the Boers go to

Church only once a year! (Hofmeyr 1890:24 – my translation and paraphrase).

In a nutshell, this was what happened to the towns of Transvaal during the latter half of the existence of the ZAR due to the discovery of gold and diamonds. Du Plessis warns against the evils of Johannesburg where people smoked cigarettes (Du Plessis 1900:289). He claimed that the morale of the people rapidly degenerated. People got drunk, they used foul language and even used the name of the Lord in vain (Du Plessis 1900:287,288).

However, the religious education to the children prevailed. During the last years of the existence of the ZAR, with the majority of people living in the concentration camps, religious education was given in Afrikaans while all other education was done in English (Patterson 1957:222).

In November 1900, EB Sargant was appointed Acting Director of Education in the Orange Free State and the Transvaal (Barnard 1935:58). His words show that religious education formed part of the day-to-day lives of the Afrikaners: ‘Apart from admitting catechisms and other dogmatic teachings into the school, you should do all in your power to assist the parents and the preachers to prepare the children to become full members of the Church to which their parents belong’ (Imperial Bluebooks Cd 549,71 – my translation).

The fall of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek did not change the beliefs and character of the Afrikaner nation. In 1914 Schonken wrote that parents still expect their children to do confession of faith and be able to write a letter, just like in

1683 (Schonken 1914:29). They still used the Bible and *Trap der Jeugd* book as basis for all education. Their religion was still according to Calvinism with the Bible serving as guideline in all aspects of life, be it politics, religion, education, justice or anything else (Schonken 1914:31).

4.1 The curriculum of education in the ZAR

The curriculum of the education after the Great Trek was the same as during the Trek (see chapter three). ‘The Boer of the Transvaal presents a remarkable instance of a population that has been almost stationary for two centuries in manners, customs and education’ (Garrett-Fisher 1900:34).

Lessons from the Bible were transmitted into daily life. Like the patriarchs, they were travelling into unknown country with only God as their Protector (cf Rompel-Koopman 1916:63). They could not debate or have theological discussions about their faith or theological issues because they were taught in the spirit of the Reformation (*sola scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia*), that the Bible was the Word of God, not to be questioned by any man. Most of them could recite large portions of Scripture by heart (Van der Walt 1938:95). Scripture was often quoted to reprimand and to teach. Proverbs, idioms and sayings from the Bible (and hymn book) were part of the language and vocabulary used both in speech and written language (see also chapter five).

The Bible formed the basis for all training, both formal and informal. The moral formation of the children was done exclusively from the Bible with the stern

Calvinistic outlook on life. The final goal of the education of children was to enable them to read the Bible. Therefore the children had to learn to read and write. Usually the *Groot ABC boek* and the *Trap der Jeugd* were used to help the children to master the basics, but when not available, only the Bible was used. Other books were simply called ‘antichrist’ and not even looked at (Weilbach, Du Plessis 1882:24). The outcome of this type of training will be discussed in the following chapter where the focus will fall on the character and worldview of the Afrikaners.

Children encounter, in their day-to-day life, all the experience they needed to become farmers and farmers’ wives. Their fathers learned the trade from their fathers and the secrets of the trade were passed on from one generation to the other by a living example. ‘Their society was rebellious, but not revolutionary. Fundamental innovations in the use of land or in social practices were not easily made in their minds’ (De Kiewiet 1941:58).

4.2 Summary of the Christian centred laws regarding education in the ZAR

During the Great Trek and especially in the early years after the settlement north of the Vaal River, Church and State were ‘dangerously mixed’ and this led to a unique government system with elders playing a major part in all aspects of life (Spoelstra 1988:47). Even before the official independence of the ZAR, the high priority on education was embedded in the first constitution. Article 24 of the constitution that was accepted by the *Volksraad* in Potchefstroom on April 9th,

1844, stated that the nation wanted religious schoolmasters to teach their children (Vereniging van onderwijzers en onderwijzeressen in Zuid-Afrika 1918:45).

In 1851 three schoolmasters arrived from the Netherlands to start State schools (Barnard 1935:8). H Van der Linden was appointed schoolmaster of Potchefstroom, JW Spruyt went to Rustenburg and WJ Poen went to Lydenburg where each of them started schools (Barnard 1935:8).

In 1852, 13 articles regarding education written by Hendrik Van der Linden, the first fulltime schoolmaster in Potchefstroom, were accepted by the State (Wessels 1954:14). The basic Christian character and the influence of the Church on education was made clear:

- The congregation is responsible to provide a school and house for the schoolmaster (art 1).
- The congregation or the parents are responsible for paying the schoolmaster's salary (art 4).
- The schoolmaster gives a Christian perspective on everything that he teaches the children. (art 5) (Lugtenburg 1925:261-262).

Pelzer notes that the Church mistakenly got its influence on education (Pelzer 1950:196,197) He says that Van der Linden wanted the supervision over the education to be in the hands of the State, and he used the word 'congregation' which denoted 'district' or 'town council' in the Netherlands. In South Africa, however, the word 'congregation' had a different and specific religious meaning.

The members of the *Volksraad* were glad to give the responsibility of the education to the Church.

Shortly after this, in 1853, the first preacher in Potchefstroom, Dirk Van der Hoff, wrote a new educational law. The influence of the Church on the education was expanded:

- No one was to act as schoolmaster if not approved by the local pastor first (art 1).
- Each town was allowed only one schoolmaster and he had to be approved by the Church council (art 2).
- The Church council had authority over all schools (art 3) and even schoolmasters working privately on farms had to pass examination by the local pastor in order to continue their work (art 4) (Lugtenburg 1925:262).

In 1858 the government of the ZAR, including the former republics of Zoutpansberg and Lydenburg, spelled out the supervision of the Church over educational matters in the constitution:

- The people wished to emphasise its Reformed faith, just as it was spelled out by the Synod of Dordt in 1618 and 1619, and the Dutch Reformed Church would remain the official and only Church acknowledged by the State (art 20, 21).
- All members of the government had to be members of the Dutch Reformed Church (art 31) (Greyling 1946:70).

A committee regarding education in the ZAR was appointed in 1859, and this committee was to report to the Executive Council (Wessels 1954:37). Children were taught to read, write, do mathematics and study language, geography, history, Bible history as well as the singing of spiritual songs (Greyling 1946:71). In 1868 the *Volksraad* decided that this committee was of no use and the responsibility regarding education was put on the shoulders of the Executive Council and the Local School Committees (Wessels 1954:57).

The law of 1866 regarding education differed only in one aspect from the former laws. It stated that schoolmasters had to be members of a Protestant Church. This law made it possible to include the members of the Reformed Church (*Gereformeerde Kerk*) that was founded in 1859 in Rustenburg (Lugtenburg 1925:266-276).

When Burgers became President of the ZAR on July 1st, 1872, the education policy took a turn. Burgers became 'infected with Liberalism' during his studies in Holland (Patterson 1957:186). His governing was met with great resistance from the people accusing the president of 'unreligious' behaviour and later they openly called him 'the antichrist' (Jooste 1974:17). Their dislike of the President and the laws regarding labour and education was part of the reason why some people packed their wagons and started the Thirstland Trek (Jooste 1974:17). In May 1874 the first wagons were already gathering on the border of Transvaal (Jooste 1974:28).

President Burgers was responsible for the first systematic education in the ZAR (Barnard 1935:22). The *Volksraad* was worried about education and a commission was appointed to look into the matter. The 'Report of the Pretorian Committee appointed 18th February 1873 to prepare a scheme of education for the South African Republic' put emphasis on the previously stated laws of Van der Linden, Van der Hoff and the laws of 1866 (Barnard 1935:22). The scheme was criticised for 'not being religious enough' and too modern, and for taking away the local authority (Barnard 1935:25). But this was exactly what Burgers had in mind – a more modern, liberal educational system (Barnard 1935:25). The report was disregarded and in its place the 'Burger's law' of 1874 came into being (Barnard 1935:25).

The concept law was met with severe resistance and had to be changed before the *Volksraad* accepted it as law nr 4 of 1874 (Barnard 1935:26):

- A Department of Education was formed, headed by a Superintendent of Education that had to report annually to the *Volksraad* (Barnard 1935:26).
- All white children would be accepted in schools, regardless of their religious beliefs (art 25) (Greyling 1946:73).
- No religious education would be given to children during school hours. The school building could be used for this purpose after hours (art 26) (Greyling 1946:73). '...the Bible did not belong in school since school was the place where science had to be taught' (Giliomee 2003:188).
- All teachers had to be members of a Protestant Church (art 41) (Greyling 1946:73).

- Teachers were not allowed to do or say things that could offend pupils with different religious beliefs (art 51) (Greyling 1946:73).

This law was not implemented until 1876 (Barnard 1935:30) and was replaced by the law of Lyle (Barnard 1935:35).

On April 12th, 1877 Sir Theophilus Shepstone annexed the ZAR and Van Gorkom, the Superintendent of Education as well as Doctor Lyle, Shepstone's physician, received instructions to compile a report on education (Prinsloo 1972:10). Van Gorkom resigned. The report of Lyle states that the population had a firm faith in God and all of them wished for basic education for their children (Prinsloo 1972:10).

Lyle asked, amongst other things, for the expansion of the schools at Pretoria and Potchefstroom to include primary education departments and for the building of boarding schools in these two towns (Prinsloo 1972:13,14).

After the death of Lyle in 1879, the Rev Bosman of Pretoria was appointed acting Superintendent of Education (Keyter 1968:226). The new law regarding education that was implemented on June 8th, 1880 did not come into practice because of the re-proclamation of the ZAR (Prinsloo 1972:15).

After the First Anglo-Boer War, Rev SJ Du Toit was appointed Superintendent of Education and a 'system of State subsidised schools founded on the Christian and

Biblical concepts with Dutch as official language' was approved by the *Volksraad* (Barnard 1935:36 – my translation).

- The Christian influence was re-established. Every school day would begin and end with devotion.
- Biblical history was again part of the curriculum and the Church councils played a leading role in the founding of schools and appointing school committees (Greyling 1946:76).
- Education was not the responsibility of the State, but rested upon the shoulders of the parents and the Church. The State's involvement ended with financial contributions and supervision to ensure that their money was well spent to form good citizens and to take care that the children received pure Christian National Education (Act 1 of 1882 - *Staatskoerant* nr 63, May 18, 1882).

Du Toit, like other people involved with education, was distracted by political issues. When he joined President Kruger and NJ Smit on a journey to England, he lost contact with his work (Prinsloo 1972:18). The result was that the *Volksraad* was not satisfied with his report regarding education in 1883. The number of schools increased from 53 to 72 and the number of pupils from 1012 to 1410. Subsidies were paid to English medium schools (Prinsloo 1972:19). This was against the law and although the report of 1885 showed that Du Toit by then showed more interest in educational matters, his neo-Calvinistic ideas brought him into conflict with the more orthodox Afrikaners (Giliomee 2003:177). He resigned on January 14th, 1888 (Prinsloo 1972:20). The history of education in the

ZAR during the period 1888 to 1891 was determined by religious conflicts (cf Prinsloo 1972:21-26).

The Christian National Education system that was promoted by Van der Hoff, Goddefroy and others, was set and named properly by the work of Mansvelt, who succeeded Du Toit as Superintendent of Education in 1891 (*Vereniging van onderwijzers en onderwijzeressen in Zuid-Afrika* 1918:151). Mansvelt wanted to see to it that ‘the education of the children of the nation should be up to standard in the changed circumstances of the time in which they lived and that the upcoming generation would develop into Christian men and women whom could keep, build upon and direct the heritage from their fathers’ (Prinsloo 1972:28,29 – my translation).

The 1892 Education Act of Mansvelt was designed to foster Christian National Education. It was the task of parents to take responsibility for the education of their children. The State would provide help, guidance and money (Prinsloo 1972:32,33). All teachers had to be members of a Protestant Church and all schoolbooks had to be in Dutch (Patterson 1957:221). This law also brought back the teaching of the catechism during school hours (Greyling 1946:78). This system would form the educational focus in South Africa for more than a century to come.

4.3 Factors that influenced education in the ZAR

In the young country, many factors had an influence on the quality of education. In many instances it was the 'straining' factors that kept the education pure and focused. There were no roads – ox-wagons and horses were the only means of transport. There were no printing presses or postal networks to spread news and new ideas quickly and efficiently. The people living in the interior of the country did not have much knowledge of what was going on in the Cape or the rest of the world. They lived their lives according to the laws of the Bible as the eternal source of truth from which virtues for everyday living were learned and practised.

A few of the most important factors that influenced education in the ZAR are listed below. These factors changed after the discovery of gold and diamonds when the economical platform of the country changed from agricultural to industrial.

4.3.1 Factors that influenced education in the early years of the ZAR

4.3.1.1 Isolation and nomadic lifestyle

The first thing one needs to remember regarding the quality of education, especially in the early years of the ZAR, is that the conditions did not differ very much from what the people experienced in the Cape prior to or during the Trek. Most of the people who joined the Trek came from the eastern border districts of the Cape where they lived isolated on farms and had to fend for themselves. This was also the situation when they settled in the ZAR. By 1850 about 2 000 families lived between Mooirivier in the southwest, Ohrigstad in the east and

Schoemansdal in the north (Barnard 1971:43). They were isolated on farms, great distances from one another and from the nearest towns. Every family provided for itself. During the cold winter months, everyone went to the warmer bushveld or lowveld to hunt and during these months, no attention was given to education (Barnard 1971:43).

4.3.1.2 Poverty

The economic development of the Afrikaner nation is very complex. Although many of the Trekkers were quite wealthy when they left the Cape, the Trek took its toll with fires, flooding rivers, cattle theft and diseases, breakdowns, accidents, war, illness and death. This left them poor. Others had to leave everything behind when they trekked because they could not sell their property (Pelzer 1941:123). Traditional sheep farming had to change in Natal as well as the Transvaal and after a few years the pioneers were cattle farmers (Pelzer 1941:125). Even the discovery of gold did not immediately change the economic position of the Afrikaners (Pelzer 1941:126). Those of them who thought that they would become rich in the big city, soon became so poor that the State had to provide housing and food for them (Pelzer 1941:190).

Many families could not afford temporary teachers like those that they had in the Cape or during the Trek. Even paper and ink became luxury items (Rompel-Koopman 1916:13). In most cases, the help of teachers could only be afforded for short periods – between three and six months and usually when one or more children were old enough to do public confession of faith (cf Barnard 1971:44).

This problem in education could have been overcome if the government had been able to help and support them, but due to the lack of revenue, there was no money to spend on schools and education (Barnard 1971:44). Every family was left to provide as much as it could to get the children through basic education. The advice of the *Volksraad* to parents was to focus on the ‘necessary’ writing, reading and mathematics (Barnard 1971:44).

4.3.1.3 Lack of farm labour

Similarly to the conditions on the farms in the Cape, the lack of trustworthy farm workers forced the farmers to use their children as labourers (Barnard 1971:45). The farm work took up a great deal of time and education was done after dark (Stockenström sa:225). Intensive religious education was done on Sundays (Du Plessis 1900:312).

4.3.1.4 Political and social unrest

Even before the start of the Great Trek people were divided in political groups, every one with its own leaders and ideas. During and after the Trek these divisions got worse and at one stage the Transvaal was divided into four regions, each with its own leaders and laws, mounting into a civil war between 1861-1864 (Van Jaarsveld 1971a:156).

Teachers and clergymen took part in the struggles, not focussing on the educational or spiritual needs of the children (Barnard 1971:44). The small number of preachers, as well as the disunity between them and their different

congregations and Churches, also had a negative influence on education (Barnard 1971:44).

These struggles and divisions must, however, not be blown out of proportion. It is true that the different leaders of the Great Trek were strong-minded individuals who had great influence on the people. It is also true that in other aspects of life, the Afrikaners showed remarkable unity despite their differences. After the initial political differences were settled, and the ZAR was united, the one false note was blown by President Burgers who was, according to the majority of the Afrikaners, liberal and not fit to lead the country (Jooste 1974:17).

Not all Afrikaners agreed with the politics and conservative worldview of President Kruger, but the fact that he was President for four terms proved that the majority trusted him. Wormser says that even those Afrikaners who initially opposed President Kruger, had to admit that he was right when the Second Anglo Boer War brought them to other convictions (Wormser 1900:62).

The main body of critique against the educational system during the time of President Kruger came from the English-speaking residents of the ZAR. After the Second Anglo Boer War, even the few Afrikaners who did not previously agree with the way educational matters were handled by the State, had to admit that the 'Mansvelt system of CNE proved to be successful and victorious' (Wormser 1900:62 – my translation).

Although there were three different Afrikaans speaking Churches, the differences were relatively small. All of them used the same Bible (the *Statenvertaling*) and their interpretation of it was fundamentalistic and conservative. They accused each other of being liberal in terms of theology, but when one looks at the facts, these accusations were merely based on the different Hymn books the Churches used. All three Churches were Calvinistic and they all put great emphasis on the Christian based education of the youth.

It is true that the Afrikaners living in the ZAR were not uniform in all aspects of life, but the bottom line is that they all had the same basic characteristics, worldview, Calvinistic religion and perspective regarding education.

4.3.1.5 Few genuine teachers

Old soldiers, broken-down masons, discharged consumptive clerks, any one who claimed some acquaintance with the three R's found a living and a sphere of usefulness in the task of acting as teacher to the Afrikaner children. Often these teachers were not people to inspire respect; but nevertheless their services, such as they were, were keenly competed for (Jeppe 1906:77).

In most cases these 'teachers' were not trusted to give religious instruction – this task still fell on the shoulders of the parents who instructed their children on a daily basis on the fundamental truths of the Word of God (Van Rooyen 1940:56).

4.3.2 The changing of the influences on education in the later years of the ZAR

In the second half of the existence of the ZAR, a number of the above-mentioned factors changed. A steady flow of people into the country brought with them an infrastructure like roads and better means of communication.

The census of September and October 1852 showed that 6 000 white families lived within the borders of the ZAR (Stuart 1854:211). In 1867 there were 25 teachers in the ZAR, 13 of them in rural areas (Patterson 1957:20). By 1873 there were only 10 *buitenscholen* or ward schools on the payroll of the government (Vereniging van onderwijzers en onderwijzeressen in Zuid-Afrika 1918:63). Three years later about 8 percent of the total number of children of school age (442) were taught at 15 State schools (Patterson 1957:20).

In 1881, when the new Superintendent of Education, Rev Du Toit, reaffirmed the Christian basis of education, there was a record rise in school attendance. By 1883 the number of schools grew to 64 with 1 090 pupils attending them (Vereniging van onderwijzers en onderwijzeressen in Zuid-Afrika 1918:63). 7 000 pupils were attending 300 State-subsidised schools in 1888, only 34 of these schools being in towns. By 1898 there were 14 702 pupils in 578 schools and 507 of the 830 teachers were Afrikaners (Wormser 1900:65).

After the watershed years of the discovery of gold, the ZAR, the once isolated poor, unheard of country in the wilderness of Africa, became a focus point on the

world map and a very attractive piece of land to the British Empire. By 1873, 17 000 people lived in the ZAR, with no more than 300 white settlers in a single town (Hattersley 1969:227). In 1878, after gold was discovered in the Eastern Transvaal, the population grew to nearly 40 000, with approximately 16% of them being foreigners (Preston 1989:63). By 1880 the population stood at 50 000, and by 1895 it was more than 250 000, with about 50 000 living in Johannesburg alone.

Development came overnight. Within 12 years the ZAR became the world's largest producer of gold, earning a mighty 27,5% of the State revenue (Preston 1989:82). The number of schools increased. 427 ward schools were operational during 1890 and 5 725 children attended these schools (Vereniging van onderwijzers en onderwijzeressen in Zuid-Afrika 1918:64).

Isolation was no longer a problem. The first printing press arrived in the Transvaal in 1857 (Nienaber 1943b:95). A weekly newspaper, *De Oude Emigrant*, was printed in Potchefstroom. The first daily newspaper was the bilingual folded sheet called *The Transvaal Argus*, first printed in Potchefstroom in 1866 (Tingay, Johnson 1978:75). In the next year newspapers like *De Republikein*, *Digger News*, *Witwatersrand Advertiser* and *Mining Argus* were all published in Johannesburg (Nienaber 1943b:102).

Journalism has now everywhere become in point of quantity, the most important part of literature. The South African newspapers impress a visitor favourably. Several of them are written with great ability, and they are comparatively free from that violence of invective, that tawdriness of rhetoric, and that proneness to fill their columns with criminal intelligence,

which are apt to be charged against the press in some other new countries. As might be expected, the press is chiefly English, that language having sixty-one papers, against seventeen printed in Dutch and twenty three in both languages (Bryce 1900:402).

The gold rush advanced communications and helped to lift part of the poverty problem. Suddenly the farmers had a market place to sell crops and livestock. Transport and furniture, clothes and much more was needed and the Afrikaners could provide these. Better financial status brought opportunities of education and training for the youth.

Political and social unrest was part of the existence of the ZAR from its first years until its end after the second Anglo-Boer War. However, some good came from the threat of the British Empire, for when the British troops gathered, most of the Afrikaners set their personal differences aside, and for once fought together.

It is clear that the problems facing the people living in the ZAR, constantly changed. During all the difficulties, the people stayed true to their religion and educated their children in the Word of God, being the one and only unchangeable truth.

The words of Bekker and Lubbe are sufficient to give a summary of the religion-based education that formed part of the ZAR from the early years after the Great Trek until the very last days of the Second Anglo-Boer War. Lubbe says: 'The cultural influence of the education cannot be underestimated. It ensured that the people, all of them, could read and write' (Lubbe 1942:38). Bekker remarks:

‘Practically no one was illiterate and every one had a strong faith built on the foundation of the Bible. The Bible was accepted without questioning it or its authority. Strong ethical values were part of every one’s life. The laws of the Bible were kept although there were no laws yet in the new country’ (Bekker 1954:34).

4.4 An evaluation of education in the ZAR

Theal stresses the fact that the main source of education for the migrating Afrikaners was the Bible.

During these years [of the Great Trek] it had not been possible to have schools, and the most that parents could do for their children was to teach them to spell out with difficulty the easier passages of the Bible. That was the only sole volume from which all the history, the geography and the science known to the generation that grew up in the wandering was derived. And the simple language of the Old Testament, much of it applying to a people, leading a similar life to their own, moving about in a wilderness, depending upon flocks and herds, fighting with heathen tribes for existence, had a meaning for them which it cannot have for dwellers in the towns of Europe. The very skies and landscapes, the storms and the droughts, the animals and the plants, of the ancient scriptures, were the same that they were familiar with. Thus they came to regard themselves as God’s peculiar people and to consider all education beyond that of the Bible as superfluous, and all that was not in accord with its science dangerous and sinful (Theal: 1893 Vol IV:446).

On the quality and efficiency of the education that was given to the children living in the ZAR, the following can be noted: The same emphasis was put on the building of faith and the acquiring of knowledge of the Bible, as was done since coming to the Cape, two centuries earlier. When trying to evaluate the educational standards and contents of the people living in the ZAR, one has to rely on the opinions of people who saw things from their own perspective and circumstances.

It is therefore not surprising to have opinions regarding this matter stretching from one extremity to the other.

Most people saw the Afrikaners as backward and under-developed. 'Many parents have no idea of the real value of education. They only expect their children to be able to become members of the Church and to be able to write a letter. This is exactly how people saw education in 1683! Even the handbooks used, are the age-old Dutch books like the *Trap der Jeugd* and next to it, the Bible' (Schonken 1914:29 – my translation).

Dirk van der Hoff, the first permanent preacher of the Dutch Reformed Church (*Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk*) in Transvaal, was disgusted and surprised by what he found in Potchefstroom. He wrote: 'Every one who can read, write and do a little maths is seen as an educated fellow and may become a schoolmaster if he wants to' (LK nr 1292 – my translation).

Only a few people can write and do maths, even magistrates and members of the Heemraad cannot write their own names. When one has to listen to them reading, you need the patience of Job. Most of them can read, but they do not understand a word of what they are reading. The greater part of their memory is not working, their judgement is blunt and sometimes I wonder if they can think at all, at least, that is in religious concepts (LK nr 249 – my translation).

It is interesting to note that he later also noted that the Afrikaners' knowledge of the Bible was very good although they cannot reason about theological matters (Bekker 1954:34).

By the time the Second Anglo-Boer War broke out, the English press established a very negative view of the Afrikaner and the educational standards of the country, but even with the war clouds hanging over the ZAR, people had to admit that the Afrikaners did well in teaching true values to their children:

When we come to consider education, it has to be admitted that the average Boer is, like the average peasant of most countries, frankly ignorant. This is not altogether his fault. When the Boers left Cape Colony, no example of the need of education had been shown to them. The State of public instruction at the Cape in 1837 was scandalous (Garrett-Fisher 1900:44).

Most of the Cape Boers could read and write and a huge family Bible was to be found in every house, however poor. When the Great Trek occurred, it found and left the emigrants at this stage of instruction. This fact accounts for much in their history that would otherwise be inexplicable – their disregard of foreign opinion, their confidence in their own superiority to the entire world, their remarkable ideas of history and geography. Their views on most subjects, except the Bible and farming, were equally simple (Garrett-Fisher 1900:45,46).

The Boer's thirst for education has already been referred to. Every child was taught at all events the rudiments of reading and writing at its mother's knee. More it could not get, for more she could not give. But whenever opportunity offered, the Boer endeavoured to provide his children with what he had himself missed. No chance of obtaining tuition was ever neglected; in every ward you would find a peripatetic teacher, whom four or five families had engaged, for a year or so, to keep a joint school...and it can be safely asserted that the Tansvaal Republic spent more per capita on education than any other country in the world (Jeppe 1906:77).

The Afrikaner educational ideal was treasured and promoted during the years of storm and turmoil by desperately clinging to education and the practical living of Christian faith (Lubbe 1942:116). This brings Bryce to the conclusion that although the dispersion of the small European population over an exceedingly wide area makes it difficult to provide elementary schools everywhere, 'education is, among the whites, well cared for' (Bryce 1900:402).

4.5 Conclusion

The one outstanding characteristic of the people leaving the Cape during the Great Trek and settling in the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek north of the Vaal River after 1836 was their clinging to faith and religion especially where it came to the education of their children.

The Bible formed the basis for all training, both formal and informal. The moral formation of the children was done exclusively from the Bible. The final goal of the education of children was to enable them to read the Bible. Therefore the children had to learn to read and write. The curriculum of the education after the Great Trek was the same as during the Trek.

The education was looked after by both State and Church. Both leaders and parents were eager to establish a firm basis for education. Laws were made and constantly reviewed to ensure the quality and standard of education. Both preachers and teachers eagerly helped to write and implement laws regarding education. The 'liberal' educational law of President Burgers was met with severe resistance and very soon Christian based education was once again part of the curriculum.

The ZAR developed from an uninhabited wilderness with no roads or means of communication to a highly efficient country within a few short years. During the early years of the existence of the ZAR, things like the isolation and nomadic lifestyle of the Afrikaners as well as the fact that both the farmers and the

government were poor, all worked together to keep education on the same level that it was during the Great Trek.

After the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa, many of these factors changed dramatically, but because the foundation was already laid, the education system stayed the same, despite the critique from non-Afrikaners.

The system of Christian based education was upheld during the years of war and even after the fall of the ZAR. The Afrikaners stood firmly on the trusted educational system and this resulted in the CNE system that dominated the educational history in South Africa for the next century to come. The result of the firm clinging to religion and religious education resulted in the Afrikaner nation's development of a unique character and worldview. This will be the focus point of the next chapter.