

NZA/009/0028/1

## NATION BUILDING AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

### Interim report on 'Mirror Function' Seminar between South African and Netherlands participants in Johannesburg. 11-14 May 2000

**Venue:** Technikon SA Conference Centre, Johannesburg

**Present:**

Prof dr Alis Koekoek	Tilburg
Theo Brinkel	Den Haag
Prof dr Paul Cliteur	Amsterdam
Prof dr Gerard Dekker	Es Baarn
Herman Noordegraaf	Schiedam
Rev Harris Majeke	Kokstad
Ashwin Mohanlall	Durban
Nhlakamipho Ntombela	Durban
Mohammed Dangor	Johannesburg
Pastor Vuyani Victor Mtini	Cape Town
Sheik Abdulhamied Gabier	Cape Town
Belinda Westcott	Johannesburg
Nancy Masheso	Nelspruit
Rev Thami Mvambo	Mafikeng
Pastor Sipoho Tshelane	Pretoria
Rev Ivan Abrahams	Johannesburg
Mr Moss Nthla	Johannesburg
Rev Cedric Mayson	Johannesburg

**Note:** When this seminar was planned it was decided on the South African side to invite persons involved in political and religious work on the ground, rather than concentrate upon an academic approach. A change of programme resulted in sudden pressure of business in Parliament in Cape Town which prevented a number of members of our Commission for Religious Affairs from attending the Seminar. At the last moment, no less than five other participants had to attend other activities in Johannesburg, Cape Town and overseas. This affected the anticipated numbers.

**Final Report:** A full report on the question of Nation Building and Religious Pluralism is in the course of preparation, which includes the full texts of the inputs made from the Netherlands. The notes of the discussions with the inputs from South Africa are included. To increase the value of the report, and to give an opportunity to those who were prevented at the last moment from attending, several have been invited to comment and add to the discussion in writing. These documents will be brought together in the final report.



**Summary.** The Seminar covered the following topics:

**Session 1. Living in a Secular World**

'The changing position and meaning of Religion and Church in Western Europe - a sociological analysis' by Gerard Dekker.

**Session 2 Values.**

'The meaning of religion, values, national unity and their promotion' by Alis Koekkoek.

**Session 3 Poverty and Affluence.**

A general discussion.

**Session 4 The inter faith experience.**

Led by Mohammed Dangor and Sipho Tshelane

**Session 5 The Religious and Political Industries**

Introduced by Herman Noordegraaf.  
"What went wrong?" by Cedric Mayson.

**Session 6 Methodology**

'A liberal humanist approach' by Paul Cliteur.

**Session 7 The prophetic vision.**

'The need of the prophetic vision' by Cedric Mayson.

**Major factors which arose in the discussions and are developed in the final document, in addition to those in the formal papers above, were:**

The individualistic religion of Europe - need of a collective communal approach to religion and politics.

Is secularism anti-religious.

Young people who are not church educated are asking – what is religion?

Rise of fundamentalism wanting to end the freedom of others.

Religion is revealed by God through the prophet – goes beyond the cultural aspect.

Is religion necessary for an ethical foundation?

Traditional African spirituality and ethics did not have or need religion as such: there were no priests and no temples and no books. People do not need religion to believe in ethics and morals.

But religion can motivate and empower a person.

The African concept of land, and ubuntu, are religious, theological matters and crucial to nation building.



The correct reason for adopting right values is humanist not religious.  
Need of an inter national civil society to pressurise the accountability of those who control wealth, and of governments.  
Globalisation is the most sophisticated form of imperialism.  
Owners are afraid of consumer awareness.  
Criticisms are true, but the Market currently exists and needs a framework.  
Religions should attend to these matters: ethics is essential.  
Religion should de-mythologize the market.  
CRA should reflect on globalisation in terms of the destabilisation of countries debate in the struggle era.  
The proper and necessary emphases of religion.  
The conflict of those who say faith is private and those who see faith as a necessary point of relationship with society.  
Religion and politics want to coopt one another – should be to cooperate.  
What is the role of the inter-national inter-faith community ? Re nation states, and re uni-religions?  
Separation is inherently un-equal. Freedom has enabled us to become more tribal, racist, and denominational.  
Is there a divine or a human imperative in inter-faith work?  
During the oppression people saw religion as a place to hide, but when liberation came the fear faded, and people became less religious. How is this related to the decline in moral fibre?  
After 1994 many religious people abdicated.  
What happened to the prophets, and to the authority of the SACC? Must arise out of the context, and the context is poverty linked to globalisation.  
Building the prophetic vision round the RDP.  
Many are finding the church return to rituals and traditions is unacceptable, meaningless, irrelevant, and have withdrawn, or are going back to traditional religions. People are trying to discover something.  
Governments need the frame work of a social climate to enable things to happen, and people/communities of faith can be vital here.  
People find themselves overwhelmed by the need for change: they need one factor to focus on i.e. poverty.  
Small vanguard groups are essential. CRA should be active here.

Cedric Mayson. ANC – CRA June 2000.



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