

The role of society in addressing harmful practices in new religions in South Africa

S.P. Pretorius
Student Registration and Admissions
P.O. Box 392
UNISA 0003

pretosp@unisa.ac.za

Opsomming

Die vryheid van godsdiens en die beoefening daarvan is 'n saak wat al heelwat debat uitgelok het. Een aspek van godsdiensvryheid wat veral aandag geniet is die beskouing van sommige geleerdes dat hierdie reg deur sekere godsdiensgroepe, ook bekend as "new religious groups", misbruik word met die doel om hulle eie selfsugtige doelwitte te bereik. In pogings om hierdie vergrype aan te spreek is daar na oplossings gesoek by nasionale regerings of selfs die internasionale gemeenskap. Ongelukkig is politieke mag en jurisprudence beperk deur die grondwet en kan dit nie die interne godsdiensdienste funksionering van enige godsdiens voorskryf of reguleer nie. Hierdie artikel toon aan dat die oplossing om die misbruik van godsdiensvryheid aan te spreek, en 'n harmoniese gemeenskap te verseker, geleë is in die aktiewe rol wat die gemeenskap speel as deelnemers aan hierdie reg. Die gemeenskap moet die verantwoordelikheid aanvaar om op te tree in gevalle waar misbruik voorkom ten einde te verseker dat die vryheid van godsdiens tot sy reg kom in die gemeenskap. Die gemeenskap moet optree as waghond wat waarsku teen skadelike praktyke wat nie net individue nie, maar ook die gemeenskap, as geheel kan benadeel met die doel om die gemeenskap te suiwer van skadelike praktyke. Voorstelle word verder gemaak wat aandui hoe die gemeenskap kan verseker dat godsdiens vry beoefen word sonder dat dit inbreuk maak op ander regte.

Abstract

Religion has always been a sensitive topic, especially when it comes to the right to freedom of religion and its expression. Some scholars believe that new religions, also referred to as cults, abuse the right to freedom of religion to advance their own goals. Scholars and others are looking for solutions to address this alleged abuse in measures introduced by government or the international community. Unfortunately, political power and even legal intervention is restricted to deal with trespassing of laws and cannot address or prescribe internal religious functioning. This article points out that the solution to ensuring a harmonious religious community lies in the role that society plays as participants of this right. Society needs to accept the responsibility to act and express their religious rights within the framework of the right to freedom of religion without infringing other rights. Furthermore, society should blow the whistle on abuse or harmful practices in an attempt to rid itself of unwanted and harmful practices. Proposals are presented on how society can participate in ensuring a balanced and settled religious society.

1. Introduction

The impact of new religions¹ on society has received attention across the world in the last few decades. Societies have become accustomed to mainstream and known religions mostly as a result of their exposure to their places of worship, doctrines and practices. New religions, on the other hand, function more isolated from society. As a result, knowledge about these groups is limited. In South Africa, the government has no formal approach to the study of or in dealing with new religions. Nasty experiences of members or their families related to new religious groups have led to the labelling of such groups as cults or harmful religions. Such an umbrella approach and the stigma attached to the term cult can turn these religious groups to violence against society. New religions vary in size and doctrines and perceive the world differently. Many

1 The term “new religion” has been used in this article to refer to religious groups also known as “cults” believed to be harmful to its members and society. The term “new religions” is believed to be a more suitable replacement for the pejorative term “new religion” (Introvinge, 2001:1). Another term used in Germany is “conflict prone group” (Kropveld, 2007:3).

believe that not only are some new religions harmful to their members but also to society in general. It remains a challenge to understand the complexity of religious differences and the problems these new religious groups generate (Perlmutter, 2004).

When it comes to the topic of new religious movements and the harm they cause, the question is mostly; what measures have governments put in place to address this issue? People tend to look for measures instituted by the international community to address or minimise the harm that is caused by these religious groups, if no satisfactory answer or resolution is found on governmental level. The Bill of Rights, based on international provisions, is a measure of ensuring that governments and the international community adhere to the right of freedom of religion for all world citizens. However, the Bill of Rights does not provide for governments to interfere in the internal religious matters or prescribe to religion. The legal system of the country can also only deal with acts of religious expressions when such actions are breaking the law. Society, on the other hand, is represented in religious communities and its important role in guarding over and ensuring smooth functioning of the internal affairs of religion must not be underestimated.

This article will focus on indicating the role society and religious communities play in ensuring that new religions function according to the provisions of the right to freedom of religion. It will also propose practical measures on the side of society to ensure a harmonious functioning of religions.

2. Overview of the role of religion in the history of South Africa

2.1 Introduction

Each country regulates its own relationship with religious groups. According to the South African Policy on Religion and Education (see NPRE, 2003), interaction between the state and religion is believed to be inevitable in improving the quality of life of all the people in South Africa. According to most sources, South Africa is a very religious country and the church is the strongest non-governmental organisation (NGO), reaching approximately 63% of the Christian population weekly (see Erasmus & Hendriks, 2003).

The effectiveness of the Christian population in aiding political goals is confirmed by the reach of the infrastructure of the Christian tradition. In 1999, approximately 43 000 Christian faith communities were accounted for in South Africa with infrastructures that reach to every corner of the country (Froise & Hendriks, 1999:37). According to the Human Science Research Council' (HSRC, 2000), the church enjoys the highest percentage of trust, 74%, among social institutions. The sustainability of faith communities is ensured by the contributions of their faith citizens not only emotionally, but also physically and materially. It stands to reason that religion in general and churches or religious groups in particular are important role players and instrumental in bringing about positive changes in society. Religion also plays an important role in balancing civil society by either settling or unsettling the society. Not only do religious institutions give direction and shape to group ideologies (Mitchell, 2005), but they also order or control lives of the public. (Fulton, 1991). Religion and the church will continue to play an important role in many spheres of society and politics, as indicated by Hendriks and Erasmus (2001) and therefore remains an important stabiliser in ensuring a harmonious civil society in any country.

2.2 Religion in the apartheid era

The value of religion in providing direction and shaping ideologies is evident also in the history of South Africa. Many label the apartheid era as a Christian dominated era. A Christian national ideology was developed that was supported by the Bible, the Dutch Reformed, the Reformed and "Hervormde" Church, who all embraced this ideology as the right path (Verkuyl s.a.; De Grunchy & De Grunchy, 2005:31-33; Hexham, 1981:59-60). This ideology was supported by various Afrikaans newspapers and Afrikaner cultural movements such as the *Afrikaner Broederbond* and *Ossewabrandwag* (Boddy-Evans s.a.; De Grunchy & De Grunchy, 2005:33; Dunbar-Moodie, 1975:1). The influence of these movements became evident when the victory in the white minority elections of the Reunited National Party, in 1910, was seen as a miracle and a clear proof that God was watching over his people – the white people (Anon, 2007:1). Stemming from this view was the belief that the white race has been chosen and appointed by God to play a dominant role in South

Africa (Gerstner, 1997:17). As a result, the Afrikaner churches would react against any form of modernisation and even attempted to ward it off. The link between apartheid and the Afrikaner Nationalist Movement was also confirmed later when *Die Burger* reported on the term “apartheid” in 1943, as the accepted Afrikaner viewpoint to deal with the different new cultures in South Africa (Giliomee, 2003:374).

These Afrikaner churches differed from one another but shared two important features, namely (a) they distinguished themselves from all other churches in South Africa through their historical roots from European Protestant theology and piety, influenced by German missiology and (b) their histories were bound with the history of the Afrikaners and Afrikaner Nationalist Movement (Giliomee, 2003:373), who were the dominant political forces for the first seven decades of the twentieth century. The apartheid idea also functioned strongly in the midst of the Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God (AOG), Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) and the Full Gospel Church (FGC). At different occasions from 1908, the plan of white people functioning separately from coloured people and blacks was confirmed (Anderson & Pillay, 1997:238).

All the English speaking churches including the Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists Presbyterians and Roman Catholics were caught up between Afrikaner and Afrikaner nationalism and endeavoured to have good relationships with the Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) but the support of the NGK to Afrikaner nationalism in 1920 and 1930 complicated this relationship. Some of the leaders of English speaking churches took steps to bring about a multiracial society instead of the segregationist vision of the Afrikanerdom and NGK. They were against apartheid in principle and passed resolution against related legislation (Gruchy, 1997:157-159).

A change in the religious scene was ignited when Mr FW de Klerk announced the release of Mr Nelson Mandela in February 1990. This was one of the first steps in the dismantling of the *apartheid* system. A reform process was approved through the 1992 whites-only referendum. The first democratic elections were held in South Africa on 27 April 1994 and on 7 February 1997, the new Constitution came into force and replaced the interim Constitution of 27 April 1994. The new Constitution guaranteed and announced

equality and dignity in different spheres of life in South Africa, specifically religion. All religions were now afforded equal status (Pretorius, 2007:603). This development would stimulate a growth in the freedom of religious expression and also greater liberty for religious communication and conversion. It would also mean visibility and audibility for minority or new religions (Hackett, 2011:857).

The new Constitution in the post-apartheid era was not without challenges. As in the time of apartheid, religion will now play an important role in many spheres of society and politics (Hendriks & Erasmus, 2001). Bombani (2006:1138) indicates the different roles of the church in the apartheid and post-apartheid eras, first as enforcer of the political ideologies and policies of government and now as actor supporting and collaborating with the African National Congress in establishing the project of nation-building.

The influence and role of religion on society in the political history of South Africa, weighed heavily on the minds of the drafters of the new Constitution. As a result, a Constitution that ensures the freedom of religion with particular provisions came about. In the light of the relationship between state and religion in the past, it is understandable that government view this issue as very sensitive and tread cautiously around it. As Bombani (2006:1139) explains; racial and ethnic identities were strongly defined by the apartheid policies and as a result, denied room for flexibility and pluralism. The apartheid era has produced "frozen identities".

2.3 South Africa's approach to religion under the new Constitution

In order to address the dominance of religion that occurred in the previous era, the new Constitution of South Africa guarantees the right to worship freely and belonging to the religion of your choice (section 15 of the Bill of Rights). This means that all religions are regarded as equal and no religion is favoured above another. It will also ensure that no religious doctrine dominates another and that the state cannot prescribe to or interfere in the internal affairs of religion. The new dispensation did not only create an environment for the Christian tradition but also for a wide variety of indigenous religious traditions and major religions of the world. It signalled a time during which the so-called frozen identities could be unfrozen

and participate in free expression. The diversity and complexity of religion necessitates an understanding of each of these traditions in its own right, as conveyed by the National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE, 2003):

Each of these religions is itself a diverse category, encompassing many different understandings and practices. At the same time, many South Africans draw their understanding of the world, ethical principles, and human values from sources independent of religious institutions. In the most profound matters of life orientation, therefore, diversity is a fact of our national life (see NPRE, 2003).

The role of government afforded by the Constitution in upholding the freedom, specifically the right to freedom of religion, is also present in this approach. According to the NPRE (2003) four different approaches in this regard are evident, namely the *theocratic model* that refers to an identification of state with one particular religion, thus the state religion; the *repression model*, that refers to the state suppressing religion through marginalising or eliminating religion from public life; the *separationist model* befitting a modern secular state where the state is neither religious nor anti-religious and the *co-operative model* that refers to the principle of legal separation and possibility of creative interaction. The *co-operative model* was adopted by government and not only does the Constitution ensure separate spheres for religion and the state but it also allows for interaction between the two while, at the same time, guarding over religious discrimination and coercion. An advantage of this approach is that it provides opportunities for dialogue between the state and religious groups in areas of common interest and concern (NPRE, 2003). The state also acknowledges that separation between state and religion is difficult because of the considerable interchange between religion and public life. The need for engagement between state and religion is also emphasised to improve quality of life (see NPRE, 2003).

Religions in South Africa are not regulated and religious communities do not need to register at the Department of Home Affairs as was required in the past. Under the new Constitution, any group may gather together, worship and practice their faith without informing government or seeking permission from government (see SACC).

The engagement between government and religion, as proposed in the co-operative model, is evident from the following fragments from speeches delivered.

Mandela's speech at the annual conference of the Methodist Church in 1994:

One cannot over-emphasise the contribution that the religious community made, particularly in ensuring that our transition achieves the desired result. The spirit of reconciliation and the goodwill within the nation can, to a great measure, be attributed to the moral and spiritual interventions of the religious community (Mandela, 1994).

Nelson Mandela continued and made the following call on Regina Mundi Day in 1997:

We need religious institutions to continue to be the conscience of society, a moral custodian and a fearless champion of the interests of the weak and down-trodden. We need religious organisations to be part of a civil society mobilised to campaign for justice and the protection of basic human rights.

Religious institutions have a critical role to play in uniting and reconciling our people, as we journey together away from the heresy that was apartheid (Mandela, 1997a).

This sentiment was again echoed at the International Pentecostal Church Youth meeting in 1997:

Religious institutions can help restore the culture of moral responsibility and a respect for human dignity. This means each individual taking responsibility for building our country and forging our nationhood. The International Pentecostal Church is setting an outstanding example in the reconstruction and development of our country. Your economic initiatives are providing jobs and creating opportunities for many young and destitute people (Mandela, 1997b).

At the Moral Summit of the National Religious Leaders Forum in 1999, both religious and political parties agreed to commit as partners, as is evident in the following statement:

The transformation of our country requires the greatest possible cooperation between religions and political parties, critically and wisely serving our people together. Neither political nor religious

objectives can be achieved in isolation. We are partners in the building of our society (Mayson, 1997:14).

The following important aspects are clear from the above speeches namely; the church and religion must be part of civil society to *campaign for justice* and the *protection of basic human rights*, are the *conscience of society* and must *unite and reconcile* our people. The newly established right to freedom of religion needs to take on the moral obligation and responsibility in order to establish a moral and just civil society. However, the relationship promoted in all of the statements above, is indicating a general approach of religion and society as partners of government. What is needed is that the general approach indicated above be dissected into workable solutions in order to address different aspects of society covered by this approach.

3. New religions with cultic nature

New religions form part of the bigger religious community that will, in future, fulfil a role in the quality of life of civil society through their practices or belief systems that will either ensure a harmonised or disharmonised society. An aspect that raises concerns with regards to new religions is the belief that some new religions exploit the right to freedom of religion and use it for something it was not intended (see United Nations General Assembly Human Rights Council, 2006:par.44). The justification for this exploitation seems to be imbedded in the belief and dynamics of these groups that other basic human rights are inferior to the obligations of the group as is evident from the following; *These religious groups seem to disregard adherence to the other basic human rights of their followers because they believe that membership of these religious groups signifies submission to a "Godly" institution that grants exemption from the provisions of an earthly (evil) institution/system* (Pretorius, 2007:604).

The debate around new religions focuses mostly on the belief that some new religions make use of excessive psychological techniques not only to proselyte potential members but also to maintain them (see Langone (s.a.:1), West & Langone 1986:119-120 and Lalich & Tobias 2006). Further members of some new religions are believed to have been coerced into participating in practices that are illegal or harmful to the members and society.

Some of the actions that members of such groups have participated in and are likely to still do in the future as a result of the excessive psychological techniques these groups utilise, include assisted suicide as in the case of Jim Jones, where more than 900 followers committed suicide in 1979, Heaven's Gate, where 39 members committed suicide on 27 March 1997 (CI, 2005:2) and child abuse as in the case of Javon Thompson, a one year-old child, whose mother, who belonged to a religious group known as 1 Mind Ministries, refused to give him food because he could not say "Amen" after meals. The twenty one year-old mother only carried out the will of the group's leader (Nuckols, 2008:1). Another crime is sex crime. Tony Alamo of Alamo Christian Ministries took children from the group as "brides" and had sex with them. He was sentenced for 175 years after being convicted on ten counts of sex crimes (Carroll, 2009:1). David Koresh also took young girls to be his wives out of the harem of 19 women called "house of David" some were as young as 10 years old (Varma, *anno*:1). Illegal weapon transactions, arson and poisoning are also other crimes, as in the case of the Aum group in Japan that carried out a gas attack in the subway in 1995, which led to the deaths of a number of civilians (SGAPSI, 1995:1). In South Africa, the recent Lotter case indicates the danger of cult-like programming. Nicolette and Hardus Lotter were tried for murdering their parents, Johan and Ricky Lotter, at their Westville home in July 2008. According to the psychologist Professor Lourens Schlebusch, they were the victims of religious programming and coercive persuasion, which at times reached cult-like dimensions. According to Schlebusch, they killed their parents because they believed it to be God's will (Broughton, 2012:1). Some scholars even refer to these crimes as religious terrorism. Actions required by some religions can also be interpreted in contrasting terms as is clear from the following quote, "One man's God is another man's devil" and "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" (Perlmutter, 2004:1).

The issue raised above with regard to new religions is related to the internal functioning of these groups. It refers to the dynamics and practices of these groups justified by their belief system. In this regard government is limited according to the Bill of Rights, governments role is restricted to ensuring that (a) each citizen enjoys the right to freedom of religion, (b) it acts in such a way that

it does not interfere with the internal functioning of religion nor prescribe to religion and (c) it only acts when acts of religious expression are against the law of the country. The aspect of the smooth internal functioning of religion need to be ensured by religion and society who are the partakers of this right.

Two aspects are evident in the role that religion and society needs to play. Firstly; an *individual responsibility* that refers to the responsibility of each individual of society that forms part of a religious community to ensure that his or her expression does not violate the rights of others, secondly; a *corporate responsibility* that refers to the role of religious communities and religious leaders or leadership that need to accept responsibility to ensure that their belief system and practices do not conflict with their patrons' rights or are used to coerce patrons into doing things that they would not normally do. As members of the bigger religious family, channels must be created for dialogue in order to address accusations of the violation of basic human rights. Society made up of patrons from different religions must take responsibility almost as a last line of defence to raise its voice in an attempt to address violations that occur. In this regard society act as custodian for its own peaceful and harmonious functioning

3.1 Approach towards new religions in other countries

Globally, governments have adopted different approaches towards religious groups, guilty of practices that are believed to be harmful or in violation of the basic human rights of members and of society in general. These approaches vary from actions to address violations and the trespassing of laws, as in France, to no official reactions, as in the United Kingdom and Denmark (Kropveld, 2007:3-4). Interference in religious matters by government is complicated by the very nature of the Bill of Rights. Legal intervention in the area of the expression of religion is challenging in the light of religious differences and the underlying transcendental nature of religion that allows for a freedom immeasurable in concrete political or legal terms.

Kropveld (2007:1) points out the importance of considering the approaches of other countries in the study of new religions for a two-fold reason, namely to understand the unknown factors that motivate particular reaction in countries and also to find a frame-

work that can assist in taking appropriate and informed action. When considering the approaches of countries in Western Europe and the United States of America, two basic approaches are evident. The first approach is found in France and Belgium, where the government's response is that of actively dealing with new religions. The second approach is demonstrated by the United States, where government's involvement in religious affairs is strongly opposed. The first approach is normally associated with specific procedures/policies for recognising religious groups. The second approach believes in the freedom of religion and citizens may practice the religion of their choice without any interference (see Juergensmeyer, 1994).

Social, cultural and historical factors play an important role in the approach of governments in dealing with new religions. If a government has experience of groups with totalitarian dynamics as in the case of many European countries which experienced "Nazism" during World War II, and which had an impact on the psyche of many of those countries, it will in turn produce a lower tolerance to groups that are viewed as totalitarian. If a country has been exposed to violent acts such as mass suicide or terrorist attacks executed by new religion leaders, such as the assisted suicides of the members of the Order of the Solar Temples that affected France, Switzerland and Canada, a particular reactive approach is evident. Countries react differently to tragedies. In the case of France, the government set up a parliamentary commission to address the issue and Switzerland set up a commission of inquiry. However, no commission was set up in Canada (see Gest & Guyard, 1995).

A further factor according to Kropveld (2007:3) is to be found in the government's position towards religious groups. In most democratic countries, the roles of government and religion are clearly defined. The different approaches of governments are evident in the United States and Western Europe which in turn has an impact on new religions. In the United States, an Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was introduced during the office of George Bush in 2001. The aim of the office was to create the opportunity for religion to compete with secular agencies for public funding (see Davis, 2001). In Canada, new religion groups such as the Raelians and Scientology, enjoy religious status in the state of Quebec

(Kropveld, 2007:2). In Belgium, Denmark and Germany, religious organisations that enjoy recognition by the government are afforded public funding. In Germany, churches that are recognised by government according to article 1376 of the Weimar Constitution receive “worship taxes”. These funds are obtained from baptised tax payers. In Netherlands, religious groups are funded by public donations which are tax deductible. France is clear on its policy and approach towards religion, namely that “republic does not recognise, pay and subsidise any worship” (SENAT, 2012). Switzerland consists of 26 cantons (provinces) and each canton has its own relationship with religion, ranging from complete separation between the state and the church (Geneva and Neuchatel) to a state religion (Zurich). Laws legislate the use of public funds.

A general proposal that stemmed from parliamentary reports from countries most affected by new religion groups propose that the public must be informed about new religions and how they function, how they recruit, what methods they apply and about their philosophies in order for the public to make informed choices (Kropveld, 2007:4).

3.2 The position with regard to new religions in South Africa

Different media reports under the headings “sects” and “cults” featured over the three decades, indicating the existence and functioning of alternative or new religious groups. Different groups were reported from the 1980s onwards. These religious groups include *The Mission Church of Christ* of the “prophet” Lester Bloomberg and the group of *Eugene Houy* at Volksrust, which received a lot of media attention together with the *Delmas* group in the 1990s. In Umtata, the public was informed about a religious group known as *The Ark* in 2000. Reports had it that children were in the grip of the group. Approximately 100 followers gathered in the Mandela squatter camp in April 2000. It was believed that *The Ark* leader, Nokulunga Fiphaza, indoctrinated her followers and predicted the end of the world on 31 July 2000. After eight corpses of followers of the group were allegedly found in shallow graves close to the premises of the group, it was feared that these followers could follow the route of the group known as *The Restoration of the Ten Commandments* in Uganda, where more than 300 people

died.² The South African Broadcasting Corporation featured a documentary on the group known as the *Emmanuel Fellowship* on the programme *Special Assignment* in 2004. This group was also suspected of influencing people and exploiting members under the banner of religion. *You* magazine reported about a group called *Alon International* in 2009 and described the life of pain of some former members of this group, describing their experiences as “years spent in the grip of a fanatic cult”.³ Another group known as *Grace Gospel Church* that allegedly controlled followers and alienated them from their families, recently received coverage on the programme *Carte Blanche*.⁴ A generic remark by parents and family members of people belonging to these groups was the radical change in the behaviour of these people and the fact that parents believed that these groups have, in some manner, alienated the children from their families.

South Africa has its own new religions some of whom may be harmful and no specific approach in dealing with them exist. An approach is needed to research these groups in terms of how they function, how they recruit, what methods they apply and about their philosophies. This information must be made available to the public to make informed choices. If no information is provided, the general public is likely to come to immature conclusions based on insufficient information that can lead to unnecessary tension between these groups and society. It is important to act in a proactive manner in addressing this issue in an attempt to ensure the harmonious functioning of religion in South Africa and, at the same time, addressing possible harmful actions.

3.3 Society as an essential thespian in composing new religions

Although the South African government as was indicated before has adopted an approach of partnership with religion in an attempt to

-
- 2 Jackson, N. 2000. Sekte wag weer op Jesus. *Beeld*, 21 Julie, bl. 16.
Stiemie, M. 2000. Gemeenskap wil met sekte praat. *Die Burger*, 3 Mei, bl. 5.
Preller, C. 2000. Polisie vat kinders weg van sekte wat verwaarloos, indoktrineer. *Beeld*, 8 Oktober, bl. 5. Preller, C. 2003. Grusame vonds: agt lyke reeds uitgeken. Ark-sektelede draai in hof. *Die Burger*, 27 Junie, bl. 5.
 - 3 Moses, A. 2009. Painful years in Paradise. *You* magazine, 12 March, pp 16-17.
 - 4 Grace Gospel Church, M-Net, 2010. *Carte Blanche*. Broadcast on 7 February.

ensure a moral civil society it also holds the view similar to the approach of the United States of America not to interfere in any religious functioning. Therefore no specific approach in dealing with new religions exists. As indicated before the adequate internal functioning of religious communities is the responsibility of religious communities and society. Religious communities and society can participate and contribute as follows:

- *Religious communities need to communicate and protect the appropriate application and expression of religion as members of the bigger religious community.* Religious communities need to steer away from coercive or harmful practices in the religious realm. According to the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms (2010), religious institutions must enjoy the right to institutional freedom of religion. This generally refers to the right to determine and order their internal functioning (section 9). What is important in this regard is that each religious group needs to take responsibility to ensure that its dynamics and practices are free from coercive devices as prescribed in section 15 of the South African Constitution. This is also in conjunction with section 31(2), which states that religion may not be exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights. Religious communities and religious leaders further need to ensure that the actions motivated as a result of their belief system are not unreasonable or promoting participation in illegal activities.
- *A study and information centre as a nongovernmental organisation (NGO), must be established in order to give a structured voice to society and religious groups.* The centre will provide the community with guidance based on research by scholars in this field. The purpose of this centre is to focus on the study and gathering of information on new religions with the purpose of serving as informative education, adding to the quest to facilitate a harmonious multi-religious community and to minimise tension in society. It will also create awareness for religious groups that exploit patrons under the banner of freedom of religion and distinguish between harmful and harmless religions. The information provided will assist in strengthening the voice of the community in the matters of religion and act as an instrument to protect the right to freedom of religion but also to rid society from unwanted and harmful practices.

- *A category for new religions in South Africa.* In Western Europe, Australia and the United States of America religions not part of mainstream religions are classified as “new religions” or “sects”. In South Africa a category for new religions should be established and included in the census as a method to identify the religious scenery in greater detail. It will also provide a record of the number of religious groups that function or are classified as new religions. The current and 2001 census indicate religions other than mainstream religions under the heading “other religions”. These religions can be classified as new religions to bring South Africa on par with the rest of the world. It is also important to describe new religions comparatively to mainstream religion, how they differ and what dynamics they function by in order to make them more inclusive in the religious arena.
- *Education.* Awareness of the functioning of new religions must be launched in schools. Point 8 of the National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE, 2003) indicates the importance of educating learners about new religions in schools: “*Teaching about religion, religions and religious diversity needs to be facilitated by trained professionals and programmes in Religion Education must be supported by appropriate and credible teaching and learning materials and objective assessment criteria.*”
- Experts of society can deal with information about new religions. Information about the dynamics, philosophies and practices of these religious groups must be included in order to make informed choices about religion. This information should not only be informative but also point out possible dangers associated with religion and new religious groups. Information obtained from the SAPS to indicate possible harm that can be caused should also be included in this education. Such education will prepare learners to make informed choices.
- A SAPS section dealing with harmful new religion-related crimes exists and needs to protect society against new religion crimes. The information centre can also provide information on new religions that can be used in the training of SAPS officers. This section of the SAPS relies on the participation of society and can only be successful and add value if society contributes as the eyes and ears of the police force.

- *Concerned citizen group* is a corporate action of society with the aim of making the public aware of the harmful practices of a particular religious group. The aim of such groups must be to establish dialogue with the particular group as a means to address concerns about the practices of the group. A concerned citizen group can also move to a second phase namely to exhort a religious group to revise and adopt practices that are causing harm. Concerned groups must work together with the information centre.

4. Conclusion

The right to freedom of religion ensures and guarantees the free exercising of religion by all citizens. Unfortunately, the world we live in is not perfect and abuse of the right to freedom of religion will occur more easily because people are more susceptible when it comes to religion. People become victims of new religions that exploit their intentions to seriously commit to a religious group in the sincere believe of obtaining salvation. These abuses can be addressed through responsible religious communities and society. Members of society must unite as a religious family in order to rid society of elements that are harmful or destructive in a community.

Society plays an important role in acting as the conscience of society, campaigning for justice and the protection of basic human rights. Society is the custodian of a moral civil society. A proactive approach of society will not only create awareness about possible harm within society but also cause religious communities to tend to their own adherence of these rights.

The belief of this viewpoint is that new religious groups must be studied scientifically mainly because information on their practices, dynamics and functioning are mostly unknown factors to society. As a result of the secluded functioning of many of these groups members of society, when exposed to their practices through the involvement of a loved one, tend to react in ways that can create tension between society and the group. Members of society can also react emotionally and with limited knowledge and hastily label groups as “cults”. The solution is to provide reliable information also indicating if a group is potentially harmful that will ensure informed and responsible actions. This approach emphasises another aspect

of the right to freedom of religion namely; that society has the right to be informed of religious groups that violate the rights of their members. Further that religion and religious leaders are expected to respect the rights of their patrons or potential patrons by not using techniques that influence or force them to join or remain in the group or get involved in illegal activities.

Therefore, the government should acknowledge the need for a civil organisation (NGO) as an extension of that partnership with government to conduct study and research on religions in the quest of providing clear information on these groups and in building a moral and healthy society in order to ensure a harmonious functioning of religion in South Africa.

Bibliography

- ANDERSON, H.A. & PILLAY, G.J. 1997. The segregated spirit: The Pentecostals, in *Christianity in South Africa: Political, Social and Cultural History*, edited by R Elphic. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ANON. 2007. Apartheid in South Africa. Available at: http://www.rebirth.co.za/apartheid_history1.htm (accessed on 20/04/2007).
- BODDY-EVANS, A. (Sa). *About African History: Who supported Apartheid?* Available at <http://africanhistory.about.com/od/apartheidfaq/f/support.htm> (accessed on 20/04/2007).
- BOMBANI, B. 2006. 'Mandela Mania': Mainline Churches in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Third World Quarterly* 27(6):1137-1149.
- BROUGHTON, T. 2012. Lotter's "like new religion victims". IOL News. Available at <http://www.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/lotter-like-new-religion-victims-1.1253018> (accessed on 07/05/2012).
- CAROLL, R. 2009. New religion leader Tony Alamo Sentenced for sex crimes. Available at <http://voices.yahoo.com/new-religion-leader-tony-alamo-sentenced-sex-crimes-4875282.html> (accessed on 08/05/2012).
- CRIME INVESTIGATION NETWORK (CI). 2005. Heaven's Gate new religion. Available at <http://www.crimeandinvestigation.co.uk/crime-files/heaven-s-gate-new-religion/crime.html> (accessed on 08/05/2012).

- DAVIS, D.A. 2001. President Bush's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives: Boon or Boondoggle? *Journal of Church and State* 43:411-422.
- DE GRUNCHY, J.W. & DE GRUNCHY, S. 2005. *The Church struggle in South Africa*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- DUNBAR MOODIE, T. 1975. *The rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and Afrikaner Civil Religion*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- ERASMUS, J.C. & HENDRIKS, H.J. 2003. Religious affiliations in South Africa early in the new Millennium: Markinor's World Value Survey. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 117:88-96.
- FROISE, M. & HENDRIKS, H.J. 1999. *South African Christian Handbook 1999-2000*. Welkom: Christian Info.
- FULTON, J. 1991. *The tragedy of belief: division, politics and religion in Ireland*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- GERSTNER, J.N. 1997. A Christian Monopoly: The reformed Church and Colonial Society under Dutch Rule, in *Christianity in South Africa: Political, Social and Cultural History*, edited by R Elphic. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- GEST, A. & GUYARD, J. 1995. Commission sur les sectes en France. Assemblies Nationale.
- GILIOMEE, H. 2003. The making of the Apartheid Plan, 1929-1948. *Journal for Southern African Studies* 29(2):373-392.
- GRUCHY, J.W.D. 1997. *Grappling with the Colonial Heritage: The English Speaking Churches under Iperialism and Apartheid*, in *Christianity in South Africa: Political, Social and Cultural History*, edited by R Elphic. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- HACKETT, R.I.J. 2011. Regulating religious freedom in Africa. *Emory International Law Review* 25:853-887.
- HENDRIKS, J. & ERASMUS, J. 2001. Interpreting the new religious landscape in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 109:41-46.
- HEXHAM, I. 1981. *The Irony of Apartheid*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.
- HSRC. 2000. Media release from the Human Sciences Research Council, 14 November 2000. Available at: <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/media/2000/11/20001114-1.html>. Accessed on 08/08/2012).
- INTROVIGNE, M. 2001. The future of religion and the future of new religions. Available at: http://www.cesnur.org/2001/mi_june03.htm (accessed on 08/08/2011).

- JUERGENSMEYER, M. 1994. *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- KROPVELD, M. 2007. A comparison of different countries' Approaches to New religion-Related Issues. Paper delivered at Conference of European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism (FECRIS), April 28. Available at: http://www.icsahome.co/infoserve_articles/kropveld_michael_count_ryapproaches_en0701.asp (accessed on 16/04/2012).
- LALICH, J. & TOBIAS, M. 2006. *Take back your life: recovering from new religions and abusive relationships*. Berkley: Bay Tree Publishing.
- LANGONE, M.D. (s.a.). New religions: questions and answers. International Cultic Studies Association. Available at: http://www.icsahome.com/infoserv_articles/langone_michael_new_religionsqa.htm (accessed on 13/02/2012).
- MANDELA, N. 1994. Speech by President Nelson Mandela to the Annual Conference of the Methodist Church. Available at: http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS201&txtstr=religious_institutions (accessed on 05/04/2012).
- MANDELA, N. 1997a. Speech by President Nelson Mandela on the occasion of Regina Mundi day 1997. Available at: http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS539&txtstr=1997 (accessed on 05/04/2012).
- MANDELA, N. 1997b. Speech by President Nelson Mandela at the International Pentecostal Church Youth Day Function. 1997. Available at: http://db.nelsonmandela.org/speeches/pub_view.asp?pg=item&ItemID=NMS480&txtstr=religious_institutions (accessed on 05/04/2012).
- MAYSON, C. 1997. *Faith and Politics in Society*. Marshalltown-Johannesburg: ANC, Commission for Religious Affairs.
- MITCHELL, C. 2005. Catholicism and the construction of communal identity in Northern Ireland. *Irish Journal for Sociology* 14(1).
- NATIONAL POLICY ON RELIGION AND EDUCATION (NPRE). 2003. Available at: http://us-cdn.creamermedia.co.za/assets/articles/attachments/00779_natpolonrelig&educ.pdf; http://wced.pgwc.gov.za/documents/religion/religion_in_education-1.html (accessed on 17/04/2012).
- NUCKOLS, B. 2008. Cops say Mom, New religion starved boy to death. Crimeshots. Available at: <http://www.crimeshots.com/forums/showthread.php?t=8891> (accessed 13/05/2012).

-
- PERLMUTTER, D. 2004. *Investigating religious terrorism and ritualistic crimes*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.
- PRETORIUS, S.P. 2007. Opposing abuse in religious high-demand groups in South Africa: the case study of the “prophet” of Hertzogville. *Verbum et Ecclesia* 28(2):602-621.
- SENAT, UN SITE DES CITOYENS 2012. Allemagne. Available at <http://www.senat.fr/lc/lc93/lc931.html> (accessed on 18/04/2012).
- SENATE GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS PERMANENT SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS (SGAPSI). 1995. Murder and Mayhem; Precursors to gas. Available at [www://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1995_rpt/aum/part05.htm](http://www.fas.org/irp/congress/1995_rpt/aum/part05.htm) (accessed on 07/05/2012).
- SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES (SACC). Does our Church need to register? Available at <http://www.sacc-ct.org.za/registration.html> (accessed on 16/04/2012).
- SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT. National Education Policy Act 1996, 27 of 1996.
- UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. 2006. *Report of Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or belief, Asma Jahangir. A/HRC/4/21*, paras. 43-47.
- VARMA, S.R. (Sa). Biography for David Koresh. Available at <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0466205/bio>. (accessed on 13/05/2012).
- VERKUYL, J. (Sa). The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the Ideology and Practice of Apartheid. Available at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/misc/verkuyl.htm> (accessed 20/04/2007).
- WEST, L.J. & LANGONE, M.D. 1986. Cultism: a conference for scholars and policy makers. *Cultic Studies Journal* 3:117-134.