

The quest to religious pluralism and treatment of religious minorities in post-apartheid South Africa

Dr MA Plaatjies van Huffel

One of most important challenges facing post-apartheid South Africa is how to manage moral and religious diversity. I will attend to the following subthemes in my presentation: a. Recognition of rights of religions in post-apartheid South Africa; b. religious pluralism and the building of a better society? c. religious pluralism and bridging diversity? This topic has to do with the question if religion per se has a place in the public space. It is very clear that the role of religion in politics up to 1994 was fairly undisputed. On the one hand, one finds the Dutch Reformed Church, theologically justifying Apartheid, helping to present the Apartheid State as Christian. Most religions were then marginalized. In Apartheid South Africa there was a state religion that was historically associated with the nation and occupies a prominent position in public and political life. Members of other religions and even those who were not adherents to any religion were marginalized during Apartheid South Africa. For example African traditional religions have been subjected to the misrepresentation, underestimation and basic stigmatization. The Constitution of South Africa no. 108 of 1996 makes provision protection for an individual's core belief system and for the right to manifest such beliefs either individually or with others, and both in private as well as in the public sphere. The post-apartheid State seeks to treat all faith communities and even those who profess no religion at all equally before the law. South Africa upholds the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to freedom from discrimination on the grounds of religious or other belief. The Constitution provides for the freedom of religion as a fundamental right. There is therefore in South Africa a legal obligation to accommodate religious minorities, religious beliefs and practices. Freedom of religion includes the freedom to practice one's religion. It implies also an obligation to accommodate other religions. In the recent past numerous religion and conflict case studies surfaced for example public schools prohibiting religious minorities for example Muslims from wearing the *hijab* (a headscarf) or the *jilbab* (a dark cloak). During 2010 the *South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms* had been endorsed by signatories from all major religions in South Africa as well as the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. The Charter was drawn up by South African religious and civil organizations and is intended to define the religious freedoms, rights and responsibilities of South African citizens. The Charter's signatories include representatives of religious groups and organizations, human rights organizations, legal and academic entities and media bodies. In the presentation concepts like religious pluralism, religious tolerance, intolerance, equality, respect, recognition of difference, accommodation will be clarified. At the end I of the presentation I want to underscore that assimilation should not be confused with religious diversity. Rather emphasize should be placed on an ethic of concern for each other and an option for an ethics of dialogue.