

# Towards New Taxonomies of Responsibility and Hope: An Introduction to the South African Policy on Religion and Education (2003)

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## Introduction

Generations of children born and yet to be born will suffer the consequences of poverty, malnutrition, of homelessness, of illiteracy and disempowerment generated and sustained by the institutions of apartheid and its manifest effects on life and living for so many. The country has neither the resources nor the skills to reverse fully the massive wrongs. It will take many years of strong commitment, sensitivity and labour to “reconstruct our society” so as to fulfil the legitimate dreams of new generations exposed to real opportunities for advancement denied to preceding generations (Judge Mohamed quoted by Jenkins, 2000, p. 415).

More than 10 years since the demise of apartheid, South Africa is still faced with enormous challenges. Apartheid contaminated and impacted every fibre and dimension of human life. The democratic elections held in 1994 were followed by the acceptance of a new Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996), heralded by many as one of the most progressive constitutions in the world (Archer, 2002; Comaroff & Comaroff, 2003; McEwan, 2000). Since the acceptance of the Constitution, South African society has increasingly been re-imagined and re-engineered to celebrate the multiple aspects of diversity in the service of social justice and peace. Education, and educational policy and curriculum were and are essential elements of the national strategy of re-visioning South Africa as a more just and compassionate society (Chisholm, 2005a; 2005b; Jansen, 1990a; 1990b; 2004).

In 2003 South Africa accepted a Policy on Religion and Education<sup>1</sup> (Republic of South Africa), which formalises a particular vision of the role the study of religion(s) can play in national healing, reconciliation and citizenship. The Policy gives a particular interpretation and gestalt to the belief that citizens, if empowered, can

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<sup>1</sup>Hereafter referred to as the Policy.

build a more just and compassionate society. This belief is reminiscent of the function of “hope” after the Holocaust in the work of the early critical theorists like Bloch, Horkheimer and Adorno. Mendes-Flohr (1983, p. 635) quotes Horkheimer who commented about hope “that the earthly horror does not possess the last word”. This hope for redemption and for emancipation “permits one to utter a confident No to the existent order” and looks at social reality “from the standpoint of redemption (*Erlosung*)” (Mendes-Flohr, 1983, p. 635). Mendes-Flohr (1983, pp. 636–637) writes

The future therefore in being anticipated, impels humans to act as active collaborators in the dialectical advance of history. These images of the future, however, are not generated by the dialectic itself, but by man’s primordial capacity to hope, or rather to prefigure the future. The prescient apprehension of the future, which is meant to guide the dialectics of history, ultimately is best articulated in religion.

In the same vein, Bloch calls for a “metaphysics of the future” (Mendes-Flohr, 1983, p. 637). Hope, in a critical theory sense, is at the centre of an epistemology which prevents “the limits of reality to reign supreme” and the forfeiture of the “very essence of our being: to be hopeful” (Mendes-Flohr, 1983, p. 641). Bloch continues to distinguish between “hope” and “idle desire and wishful expectation” by stating:

Hope probes the future and thereby illuminates the possibilities of the present, hope tells us that our present existence is not ultimate and that there is an alternative. Hope permits us to transcend the painful present by anticipating a utopian future – a kind of reality that has never been (1954, p. 312), nonetheless, it is a vision of a possibility that might be realized. Historically, according to Bloch, such visions were most forcefully articulated by religion (Mendes-Flohr, 1983, p. 641).

The Policy is a unique South African response to develop and embed new taxonomies of responsibility and hope. This chapter will continue to

- situate the Policy against the broader debates on citizenship and the nation-state;
- analyse the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as introducing *specific* taxonomies of “memory and forgetting”; and
- provide a brief overview of the Policy and some elements of the curriculum.

## The Constitution, Citizenship and Education

Since 1994 South Africa is a *rechtstaat* or constitutional state in which the Constitution is regarded as supreme and the final authority (De Waal, Currie, & Erasmus, 2001). The new South Africa is furthermore a *deliberative* democracy referring to the fact that the Constitution is the result of extensive and painstaking processes involving elected representatives from every sector in South Africa. As a deliberative democracy, all policies and legislation should be the result of deliberative and transparent processes (De Waal et al., 2001). Since 1994 the Constitution has been the guiding force and litmus test for new legislation and policy frameworks in a dramatic re-visioning and re-engineering of South African society. As

such, all new policies and legislation must adhere to the principles and the spirit of the Constitution.

Education in the South African context therefore has to translate the values and principles of the Constitution to give a particular gestalt to citizenship and patriotism. Education was historically and still is an integral part of the strategies of many nation-states to shape prospective citizens. Many nations are in the process of redefining their definitions of citizenship not only to address the increase in complexities and the dynamics of pluralism and migration (see, for example Kerr, 1999; Werbner, 2002) but also to address the insecurities of the nation-state with regard to the changed profile of its citizens. Concepts such as nationality, nation-state and citizenship are in flux and are the focus in various discourses and fields (e.g. Bauman, 1995, 1998; Guibernau, 2007; Habermas, 2001; Kymlicka, 2002; Matušík, 1993).

Kymlicka (2002, pp. 284–285) writes that the “health and stability of a modern democracy depend, not only on the justice of its basic institutions, but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens”. Just as the nation-state is withering away (Bauman, 1998, p. 66), so too are the traditional communities that used to provide stability and security for individuals. Individuals are discovering more frequently that these communities are anything but *temporal* places of safety (Bauman, 2000, pp. 169–172). In the past nation-states relied on a mixture of nationalism and patriotism to shape notions of citizenship (Guibernau, 2007). Most nation-states had dominant groups with regard to language, culture and/or religion that shaped descriptions of citizenship and underscored a clear idea of what a “good citizen” looks like. As the economic and political roles of nation-states changed, as well as with the increasing reality of pluralities in previously fairly homogenous states, nationalism and patriotism have changed and are in flux. In these liminal spaces in which nation-states (and citizens) find themselves – between what once was and what needs to be – constitutional patriotism as proposed by inter alia Habermas (2001) seems to be a viable and legitimate option.<sup>2</sup>

Habermas proposes a citizenship that is not based on “passive inheritance”. Even if it was, citizenship should always be responsive to re-interpretation (Hayward, 2007, p. 184). Hayward summarises the views of Habermas by stating that citizenship is “an artefact of political practice”. In addition to citizenship being an “artefact”, Habermas suggests that citizenship is always *in process*. “Citizen identity is an affiliation that people continuously create and re-create through a series of ongoing public conversations” (Hayward, 2007, p. 184). Collective political societies are bound to the past – whether this bondage is comfortable or not. Notions of nations and citizenship inevitably carry with them a history – a constant burden. “Still, Habermas underscores, there is much room for collective agency as citizens debate with one another and as they decide together *how to relate to their past*” (Hayward, 2007, p. 184; italics in the original). A new identity can be collectively and deliberately (in more than one sense) constructed.

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<sup>2</sup>Constitutional patriotism as proposed by Habermas (2001) is part of a broader “deliberative turn” in democratic theory as explored, for example, by Dryzek (as quoted by Kymlicka, 2002, p. 291).

The Policy is a key ingredient in the deliberate shaping of a collective new South African identity. As such, the Policy confirms the opinion of Codd (1998, p. 237) who says

... policy documents can be said to constitute the official discourse of the state (Codd, 1985). Thus policies produced by and for the state are obvious instances in which language serves a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict and foster commitment to the notion of universal public interest. In this way, policy documents produce real social effects through the production and maintenance of consent.

The Policy is a specific ideological response in and to a specific context. Codd (1988, pp. 243–244) emphasises “Policy documents ... are ideological texts that have been constructed within a particular context. *The task of deconstruction begins with the recognition of that context*” (italics added). To fully understand the Policy and its intended impact, we will now proceed to look briefly at the Policy’s context.

## Taxonomies of Hope and Reconciliation

Memories of South Africa’s past permeate South African discourses on identity and citizenship, allegiance, patriotism and various claims of entitlement. The majority of South Africans suffered under the system of apartheid with its immense socio-economic impact. *Race* and not religion was the defining characteristic of apartheid legislation. The irony was that adherents of different religions were on both sides of the apartheid system, either as beneficiaries (mostly whites) or as dispossessed and disenfranchised (mostly black). A particular version of Protestant Christianity as represented by Calvinistic Afrikaans churches was, however, foundational to legitimising apartheid as “God’s design” (see Bunting, 1969). Christian National Education (CNE) served the specific purpose of entrenching apartheid by proclaiming white superiority and consigning the majority of South Africans to inhuman conditions and lives of servitude. While the hegemony of CNE shaped the thinking of whites, Bantu Education destined the majority of black South Africans to inferiority and lower-class labour (Jansen, 1990b).

Post-1994, the Constitution, its principles and values provided a crucial framework and impetus to *Curriculum 2005* and the *Manifesto for Values in Education* (Department of Education, 2001). Another major defining moment in post-1994 South African history was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Not only was the TRC a specific negotiated response to the transition to democracy, but it also mapped an “ethics of memory and forgetting” (Booth, 1999) for South Africa. The TRC, its mandate, its processes and its taxonomies not only defined South Africa’s transition but still influences the academic discourses and public debates on curriculum, nation-building and citizenship.

The TRC exposed South Africa’s recent history as “three centuries of fractured morality” (Krog, 1999, p. 68). South Africans were confronted with the abyss of

what they all had become – whether as victims, oppressors or in the contested category of “bystanders”. All South Africans have become inhumane – whether as a result of being treated as such or losing our humanity by treating other humans as less-than-human. As Swartz (2006, p. 552) comments on the TRC, the “rebuilding of the fractured society” started with being confronted with the wounds. The TRC was further clothed in religious, and specifically Christian, taxonomies and rituals (Mamdani, 1996, p. 3; Smit, 1995, p. 13; Maluleke, 1997, p. 324). The distinct use of religious vocabulary and ritual during the hearings refers to a particular and state-sanctioned view on the function of religion in the process of nation-building. This functional view of religion by the newly elected government was later confirmed in the formulation of the Policy.

The TRC’s hearings revealed that religions did not play a role per se in the atrocities committed during apartheid. Perpetrators and victims both referred to the role their religion played in either legitimising or enduring oppression. In the South African context, religious intolerance has never played a role in conflict outside of either supporting opposition to apartheid or legitimising apartheid (Gouws & Du Plessis, 2000, p. 2).<sup>3</sup>

More than 10 years into the new democracy, taxonomies of who you are and who you *were* during the apartheid years continue to impact on the public discourse. Taxonomies are, however, nothing new to South Africa. As Maluleke (2001, p. 193) states “apartheid was the great simplification of a rather complex society”. The “simple” classification of your race determined where you could live, how late you could remain in which parts of town, the curriculum you were taught and the options you had after matriculation (if you got that far). The TRC not only institutionalised certain terms and concepts but also contributed to the emergence of taxonomies of transformation. Borer (2003), for example, speaks of “a taxonomy of victims and perpetrators”. But the taxonomies not only include categories of role players in the apartheid years but also give existence to categories of “being” in the *new* South Africa. Marx (2002, p. 53) points to the fact that victims’ openness to forgive their perpetrators was proclaimed and perceived as “a self-evident product of their Ubuntu”.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>These authors’ research refers to international studies which found that active participation in a religion often corresponds to political and religious *intolerance* (Gouws & Du Plessis, 2000, p. 4). These studies also found that non-religious people were in general more tolerant than their religious counterparts (2000, pp. 4–5). Gouws and Du Plessis found (2000, p. 6) that “the majority of people are very intolerant” regardless of whether adhering to a religion or not. They further argue that their findings indicate “religion is *not* contributing to making people more tolerant. Religious beliefs do not inspire people to “love their neighbours” (2000, p. 7; italics added). They conclude that tolerance “does not reside in the hearts and minds” of South Africans, regardless of religious adherence or affiliation (2000, p. 15). These authors propose that churches and religious institutions “can take on a new role as agents of socialisation” including acknowledging the “right to proselytise” (2000, p. 15).

<sup>4</sup>*Ubuntu* is a Southern African concept referring to the idiomatic expression in indigenous languages of “I am human because of you” (for a detailed and critical discussion see Marx, 2002).

There is a real expectation that education could and should provide new taxonomies that could contribute to preventing the atrocities of apartheid from happening again. The Policy is expected to play a crucial role in the creation and institutionalisation of new taxonomies of responsibility and hope.

## **A Short Overview of the Policy's Main Foci and Claims**

### ***Clarifying Religion Education, Religious Studies and Religious Instruction***

The Policy defines *religion* as follows:

Religion is used to describe the comprehensive and fundamental orientation in the world, mostly with regard to ideas of divinity, spiritual and non-secular beliefs and requiring ultimate commitment, including (but not restricted to) organised forms of religion and certain worldviews, as well as being used collectively to refer to those organisations which are established in order to protect and promote these beliefs (2003, p. 30).

In the Foreword to the Policy, the then Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal, makes it clear that South Africa is *not* a secular state: “We do not have a state religion. But our country is not a secular state where there is a very strict separation between religion and the state” (2003, p. 6). The Policy itself continues to describe its view of a secular state and the implications of such a state for the relationship with religion:

A modern secular state, which is neither religious nor anti-religious, in principle adopts a position of impartiality towards all religions and other worldviews. A separationist model for the secular state represents an attempt to completely divorce the religious and secular spheres of a society, such as in France or the United States. Drawing strict separation between religion and the secular state is extremely difficult to implement in practice, since there is considerable interchange between religion and public life. Furthermore, a strict separation between the two spheres of religion and state is not desirable, since without the commitment and engagement of religious bodies it is difficult to see us improving the quality of life of all our people (paragraph 3, 2003, p. 8).

The main thrust of the Policy is to provide a framework of implementation for specific guidance on religious observances during the official school day, and to provide a framework for Religion Education (as part of Life Orientation Grades R–12) and an elective subject, Religious Studies (Grades 10–12).

Religion Education and Religious Studies are expected to encourage tolerance towards religions *and* secular worldviews. The Policy also prescribes that any overt or covert “denigration of any religion or secular world-view” will not be tolerated (paragraph 14, 2003, p. 12). The Policy therefore not only acknowledges the reality of secularism but also warrants that secularism, as a worldview, will not be denigrated. The Policy states that:

We believe we will do much better as a country if our pupils are exposed to a variety of religious *and secular belief* systems, in a well-informed manner, which gives rise to a

genuine respect for the adherents and practices of all of these, without diminishing in any way the preferred choice of the pupil (paragraph 29; 2003, p. 16; italics added).

Paragraph 62 warrants that students who hold “secular or humanist beliefs” will not be forced to participate in any activities where they may feel denigrated or compromised. The Policy furthermore undertakes to teach *about* “secular values”. Paragraph 30 states:

By teaching about religious and secular values in an open educational environment, schools must ensure that all pupils, irrespective of race, creed, sexual orientation, disability, language, gender, or class, feel welcome, emotionally secure, and appreciated (2003, p. 17).

With regard to claims that the Policy promotes religious relativism, paragraph 68 of the Policy illuminates the Policy’s understanding of the different truth claims of different religions. The Policy states:

Religion can contribute to creating an integrated educational community that affirms unity in diversity. In providing a unified framework for teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity, this policy on Religion and Education does not suggest that all religions are the same. Nor does it try to select from different religious traditions to try and build a new unified religion. The policy is not a project in social or religious engineering designed to establish a uniformity of religious beliefs and practices.

The policy does not promote religious relativism, religious syncretism, or any other religious position in relation to the many religions in South Africa and the world. By creating a free, open space for exploration, the policy demonstrates respect for the distinctive character of different ways of life (2003, p. 28).

The Policy further refutes the notion (and allegations) that “all religions are the same” or that the Policy attempts to build a “unified religion”. The Policy does not want to bring about “uniformity of religious beliefs and practices”. By refuting these claims or allegations, the Policy refuses to be drawn into a debate about the “truth” of each religion or worldview *compared to* others. The word “compare” is never used by the Policy; nor does the word “truth” appear in the Policy. Paragraph 22 (2003, p. 14) specifically states that the Policy chose against the alternative to follow a confessional approach to Religious Studies.

If any accusation of relativity could be entertained, it would be the allegation that the Policy is particularly positive about the role and content of religion. The Policy envisages that *all* learners will encounter Religion Education as part of Life Orientation, one of five learning areas in Curriculum 2005. The Policy describes Religion Education as “a set of curriculum outcomes which define what a pupil should know *about* religion” (2003, p. 30; italics added). Paragraph 19 of the Policy locates Religion Education and secondly clarifies the *purpose* of Religion Education within the broader curriculum.

### ***Locating the Policy***

The Policy locates the responsibility for Religion Education with *schools*. It secondly locates Religion Education within the curricular domain of values and moral

education.<sup>5</sup> The location of Religion Education is important and significant as it establishes accountability and responsibility. The Policy locates the responsibility for Religion Education with schools, and *not* with religious leaders in the community or religious organisations or parents. Although all of these role players were involved in the drafting of the Policy and all of them may to a certain extent be involved in the teaching of Religion Education, the *responsibility* of Religion Education is located with schools. This not only makes schools accountable for the implementation of the Policy but also requires schools to translate the Policy into curriculum and syllabi.

Religion Education is secondly located within the curricular domain of *values* and *moral* education. Other options regarding the location of Religion Education may have included anti-racist or genocide/holocaust, citizenship, multicultural studies or peace education. Each of these locations would have impacted on Religion Education. In its present location, it is envisaged to contribute to learners' achievement of "religious literacy" (paragraph 19, 2003, p. 30). Paragraph 19 repeats the parameters as being "religion in its broadest sense, about religions, and about religious diversity in South Africa and the world". The purpose for engaging learners "with a variety of religious traditions" is to encourage "them to grow in their inner spiritual and moral dimensions. It must affirm their own identity, while leading them to an informed understanding of the religious identities of others" (2003, p. 13).

### ***Defining "Religious Literacy"***

The term "religious literacy" as such occurs only *once* in the Policy in the context of other literacies. Paragraph 44 (2003, p. 19) states the following:

The Revised National Curriculum Statements of Curriculum 2005 understand literacy to include cultural literacy, ethical literacy, and religion literacy; creativity to include developing capacities for expanding imagination, making connections, and dealing with cultural difference and diversity; and it understands critical reflection to include comparison, cultural analysis, ethical debate, and the formulation and clarification of values. These capacities are captured in the outcome statements and assessment standards of the curriculum, and are obligatory for all pupils.

The Policy does not define or describe what it means by "religious literacy", unless this is defined in the statement in Paragraph 19 that Religion Education should "affirm their own identity, while leading them to an informed understanding of the religious identities of others" (2003, p. 13). Should this be the case it would seem that religious literacy has, according to the Policy, two dimensions: to be first grounded in their own identity and spiritual growth, and second, to have an *informed understanding* of other religious traditions. This seems to concur with

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<sup>5</sup>For a discussion on the location of the Policy in the context of legitimising the new dispensation see Chidester (2006).



a definition of religious literacy provided by Prothero (2007). Prothero compares religious literacy to literacy in general and says:

... literacy refers to the ability to use a language – to read and perhaps to write it, to manipulate its vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. In this sense religious literacy refers to the ability to understand and use in one’s day-to-day life the basic building blocks of religious traditions – their key terms, symbols, doctrines, practices, sayings, characters, metaphors, and narratives (2007, p. 22).<sup>6</sup>

Prothero (2007) expands the parameters of his definition by referring to “religious literacies” (plural) to not only refer to different bases for religious literacies, for example “Protestant literacy, Sunni literacy, Zen literacy”, but also include “functional capacities of religious literacy” namely ritual literacy (knowing the meaning and content of different rituals), confessional literacy (a foundational understanding of the basic doctrines), denominational literacy (knowing about the differences between, e.g. Reform and Conservative Jews), narrative literacy (knowing the foundational narratives and characters in the major religions) (Prothero, 2007, p. 23).

The Policy defines Religion Education and Religious Studies as different from *Religious Instruction*, which it describes as “a programme of instruction which is aimed at providing information regarding a particular set of religious beliefs with a view to promoting adherence thereto”. Where Religion Education teaches “*about* religion in its broadest sense, about religions, and about religious diversity in South Africa and the world” (2003, p. 13; italics added), *Religious Instruction* has as focus to promote adherence to a specific faith/belief.

## Diversity, the Policy and the Constitution

The Policy therefore attempts to take diversity as a characteristic of South Africa seriously. The Constitution and the Policy are aimed at preventing discrimination and ensuring equality and equity, as well as to finding ways to celebrate diversity. In the Foreword to the Policy, the Minister already indicates, “The Policy is necessary and overdue to give full expression to the invocation of religion in our Constitution and the principles governing religious freedom” (2003, p. 6). Paragraph 9 (2003, p. 10) states:

South Africa is a multi-religious country. Over 60 per cent of our people claim allegiance to Christianity, but South Africa is home to a wide variety of religious traditions.

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<sup>6</sup>Prothero (2007) expands the parameters of his definition by referring to “religious literacies” (plural) to not only refer to different bases for religious literacies, e.g. “Protestant literacy, Sunni literacy, Zen literacy” but also to include “functional capacities of religious literacy” namely ritual literacy (knowing the meaning and content of different rituals), confessional literacy (a foundational understanding of the basic doctrines), denominational literacy (knowing about the differences between, e.g. Reform and Conservative Jews), narrative literacy (knowing the foundational narratives and characters in the major religions) (Prothero, 2007, p. 23). Also see the definition of Heimbrock, Scheilke, and Schreiner (2001).

With a deep and enduring indigenous religious heritage, South Africa is a country that also embraces the major religions of the world. 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* (italics mine).

In dealing with the “given” nature of diversity, the Policy tries to “translate” and embody the Constitution’s guidelines regarding diversity. In the Foreword, the Minister already states that “The Policy is necessary and overdue to give full expression to the invocation of religion in our Constitution and the principles governing religious freedom” and “Following the lead of the Constitution and the South African Schools Act, we provide a broad framework within which people of goodwill will work out their own approaches” (2003, p. 6).

The Policy is founded on four principles of which the first principle is that the relationship between education and religion “must flow directly from the constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination, and freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion” (paragraph 8, 2003, p. 9). Paragraph 11 reiterates this position and adds, “By enshrining these basic values, the Constitution provides the framework for determining the relationship between religion and education in a democratic society” (2003, p. 10).

It is crucial to notice that the Policy describes the relationship as “neither advancing nor inhibiting religion” and assuming a “position of fairness, informed by a parity of esteem for all religions, and worldviews”. The Policy describes the state’s position towards religion as “positive impartiality carries a profound appreciation of spirituality and religion in its many manifestations, as reflected by the deference to God in the preamble to our Constitution” but also states that as a state it would “not impose these” (paragraph 5; 2003, p. 9).

The last dimension of the Policy problem is to provide a framework for the relationship between education and religion. The Policy states “we identify the distinctive contribution that religion can make to education, and that education can make to teaching and learning about religion, and we therefore promote the role of religion in education” and

In doing so we work from the premise that the public school has an educational responsibility for teaching and learning about religion and religions, and for promoting these, but that it should do so in ways that are different from the religious instruction and religious nurture provided by the home, family, and religious community (paragraph 1, 2003, p. 7).

In the light of the past, it is also necessary to define the relationship between religion and education. The Policy states:

We do so also in the recognition that there have been instances in which public education institutions have discriminated on the grounds of religious belief, such that greater definition is required. In many cases pupils of one religion are subjected to religious observances in another, without any real choice in the matter (paragraph 2, 2003, p. 7).

### *The Different Options the Policy Considered*

The Policy distinguished between and considered several alternatives or options (also see Chidester, Mitchell, Phiri, & Omar, 1994). The first alternative the Policy entertained is that of a “theocracy”. The Policy rejected theocracy as a viable option as follows: “In a religiously diverse society such as South Africa, this model clearly would be inappropriate” (paragraph 3, 2003, p. 7). The second option considered for regulating the relationship between state and religion was a “repressionist” system defined as “At the other extreme, a repressionist model is based on the premise that the state should act to suppress religion”. In such a model, the state would operate to “marginalise or eliminate religion from public life” (paragraph 3; 2003, p. 7). The Policy judges that “In a religiously active society such as South Africa, any constitutional model based on state hostility towards religion would be unthinkable” (paragraph 3; 2003, p. 7).

The third option the Policy entertained was that of secular/separationist – “A modern secular state, which is neither religious nor anti-religious, in principle adopts a position of impartiality towards all religions and other worldviews. A separationist model for the secular state represents an attempt to completely divorce the religious and secular spheres of a society, such as in France or the United States” (paragraph 3, 2003, p. 8). This option is rejected due to the fact that:

Drawing strict separation between religion and the secular state is extremely difficult to implement in practice, since there is considerable interchange between religion and public life. Furthermore, a strict separation between the two spheres of religion and state is not desirable, since without the commitment and engagement of religious bodies it is difficult to see us improving the quality of life of all our people (paragraph 3; 2003, p. 8).

The fourth option is defined as a “cooperative model” –

In a co-operative model, both the principle of legal separation and the possibility of creative interaction are affirmed. Separate spheres for religion and the state are established by the Constitution, but there is scope for interaction between the two. While ensuring the protection of citizens from religious discrimination or coercion, this model encourages an ongoing dialogue between religious groups and the state in areas of common interest and concern. Even in such exchanges, however, religious individuals and groups must be assured of their freedom from any state interference with regard to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion (paragraph 3; 2003, p. 8).

The Policy also entertained a number of alternatives regarding the specific relationship between education and religion. The Policy rejected confessional forms of religious instruction and motivates the rejection as follows:

Confessional or sectarian forms of religious instruction in public schools are inappropriate for a religiously diverse and democratic society. As institutions with a mandate to serve the entire society, public schools must avoid adopting a particular religion, or a limited set of religions, that advances sectarian or particular interests. Schools should be explaining what religions are about, with clear educational goals and objectives, in ways that increase understanding, build respect for diversity, value spirituality, and clarify the religious and non-religious sources of moral values. We owe this to our pupils, as well as to parents, citizens, and taxpayers (paragraph 22; 2003, p. 14).

Single-faith and multi-faith approaches were also considered but rejected. The Policy opted finally for a “multi tradition” approach, which the Policy describes as

...a multi tradition approach to the study of Religion Education does not promote any particular religion. It is a programme for studying about religion, in all its many forms, as an important dimension of human experience and a significant subject field in the school curriculum (paragraph 23; 2003, p. 15).

The Policy motivates choosing a “multi-tradition” approach as follows:

Instead of promoting a religious position, a programme in Religion Education pursues a balanced approach to teaching and learning about religion. Religion Education can provide opportunities for both a deeper sense of self-realisation and a broader civil acceptance of others. It can balance the familiar and the foreign in ways that give pupils new insights into both. It can facilitate the development of both empathetic appreciation and critical analysis. It can teach pupils about a world of religious diversity, but at the same time it can encourage pupils to think in terms of a new national unity in South Africa. By teaching pupils about the role of religion in history, society, and the world, a unified, multi-tradition programme in the study of religion can be an important part of a well-balanced and complete education (paragraph 25; 2003, p. 15).

The Policy provides the rationale for introducing Religious Studies at an early age by referring to international research:

Research has concluded that Religion Education can be introduced at an early age, in ways that are appropriate to the development of pupils. With an age-appropriate emphasis placed on living together, and without any overt or covert pressures, religion education can start at a very early stage. Pupils in the Foundation Phase could begin a study of religious diversity by exploring the more tangible forms of religion, the observable aspects of religious diversity found in churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, and other places of gathering for religious life (paragraph 50; 2003, p. 23).

The following assessment criteria envisaged for the different grades indicate how the Policy addresses the appropriateness of the curriculum for particular age groups:

*Grade R:* Identifies and names symbols linked to own religion.

*Grade 1:* Matches symbols associated with a range of religions in South Africa.

*Grade 2:* Describes important days from diverse religions.

*Grade 3:* Discusses diet, clothing and decorations in a variety of religions.

*Grade 4:* Discusses significant places and buildings in a variety of religions.

*Grade 5:* Discusses festivals and customs from a variety of religions.

*Grade 6:* Discusses the dignity of the person in a variety of religions.

*Grade 7:* Explains the role of oral traditions and scriptures in a range of the world's religions.

*Grade 8:* Discusses the contributions to social development of organisations from various religions.

*Grade 9:* Reflects on and discusses the contributions of various religions in promoting peace.

*Grade 10:* Displays an understanding of the major religions, ethical traditions and indigenous belief systems in South Africa, and explores how they contribute to a harmonious society.

*Grade 11:* Reflects on knowledge and insights gained in major religions, ethical traditions and indigenous belief systems, and clarifies own values and beliefs

with the view to debate and analyse contemporary moral and spiritual issues and dilemmas.

*Grade 12:* Reflects on and explains how to formulate a personal mission statement based on core aspects of personal philosophies, values, beliefs, religions and ideologies, which will inform and direct actions in life and contribute meaningfully to society.

An analysis of the Policy by Prinsloo (2008) has found seven policy claims. These claims are important in evaluating the policy argument as well as determining the probability of the Policy having the impact it envisages.<sup>7</sup> The Policy claims to

- function in the service of democracy and nation-building (paragraph 14; 2003, p. 11);
- translate the Constitution's provisions regarding the relationship between state and religion as well as education and religion (see for example the Foreword to the Policy (2003, p. 6);
- provide and distinguish between the constitutional roles for state, education, religious organisations and home (paragraphs 2, 5, 14, 17; 2003);
- use and promote religion and certain worldviews as vehicles in a vision of a more just and compassionate society (paragraph 7; 2003, p. 9);
- affirm learners' own religious affiliation and grow their spirituality (paragraph 19; 2003, p. 13);
- promote religion and certain worldviews in service of a common humanity (paragraph 21; 2003, p. 14); and
- be a unique South African response (paragraph 67; 2003, p. 27).

An attempt to cluster these seven claims into a *main* claim results in the following:

The Policy on Religion and Education is a unique South African response to defining citizenship and education, empowering learners to be established in their own cultures and religions as well as being competent and confident in being critically literate in an increasingly diverse and globalising world. The Policy provides an enabling environment by establishing and demarcating clear and distinct roles for parents, religious bodies, educators and educational institutions (Prinsloo, 2008, p. 341).

## Some Examples of How the Curriculum Unfolds

Although the Policy also deals with issues like religious observances and the role of parent bodies, and so on, it specifically provides a framework for curriculum development. As such it foresees Religion Education as a compulsory, integrated aspect of Life Orientation (one of five learning areas) and an elective subject, Religious

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<sup>7</sup>See Dunn (1994) for a discussion on the interrelation between different elements of policies like policy claims, policy warrants, and a policy argument.

Studies, for Grades 10–12.<sup>8</sup> Life Orientation has five outcomes (RNCS, 2002a, p. 26),<sup>9</sup> and the content and assessment criteria for each outcome differ according to the phase in which learners are (RNCS DoE, 2002b, pp. 7–71). The learning outcomes are as follows:

- *Learning Outcome 1: Health Promotion* The learner will be able to make informed decisions regarding personal, community and environmental health.
- *Learning Outcome 2: Social Development* The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities, and to show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions.
- *Learning Outcome 3: Personal Development:* The learner will be able to use acquired life skills to achieve and extend personal potential to respond effectively to challenges in his or her world.
- *Learning Outcome 4: Physical Development and Movement* The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of, and participate in, activities that promote movement and physical development.
- *Learning Outcome 5: Orientation to the World of Work* The learner will be able to make informed decisions about further study and career choices (RNCS DoE, 2002a, p. 26).

Religion Education falls in the second focus of Life Orientation, called “Social Development”. Social Development is described as follows (RNCS DoE, 2002b, p. 5):

In a transforming and democratic society, personal development needs to be placed in a social context so as to encourage the acceptance of diversity and commitment to democratic values. Discrimination on the basis of race, origin and gender remains a challenge for learners in the post-apartheid era. To address these issues, this Learning Area Statement deals with human rights as contained in the South African constitution, social relationships and diverse cultures and religions.

Religion Education within the context of “Social Development” is described by the RNCS as follows (DoE, 2002b, p. 6):

The term “religion” in this Life Orientation Learning Area Statement is used to include belief systems and worldviews. Religion Education in the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (Schools) rests on a division of responsibilities between the state on the one hand and religious bodies and parental homes on the other. Religion Education, therefore, has a civic rather than a religious function, and promotes civic rights and responsibilities. In the context of the South African Constitution, Religion Education contributes to the wider framework of education by developing in every learner the knowledge, values, attitudes and skills necessary for diverse religions to co-exist in a multi-religious society.

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<sup>8</sup>Life Orientation as one of the learning areas is envisaged as follows: “It guides and prepares learners for life and its possibilities. Life Orientation specifically equips learners for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society” (RNCS, DoE, 2002a, p. 26).

<sup>9</sup>The Foundation and Intermediate Phases cover only the first four learning outcomes, while the Senior Phase includes all five learning outcomes.

Individuals will realise that they are part of the broader community, and will learn to see their own identities in harmony with those of others.

An example of how the above unfolds in the curriculum is Learning Outcome 2 (Citizenship Education) for Grade 10. Assessment Criterion 2 (AS2) states that the learner: “Formulates strategies based on national and international instruments for identifying and intervening in discrimination and violations of human rights. Concepts: strategies and instruments for dealing with human rights violations”. Religion is specifically involved when learners will: “Define the discrimination and violation of human rights, including what causes it (e.g. race, class, creed, rural/urban, HIV and AIDS status, religion, ethnicity, xenophobia, gender, language, prejudice)” (NCS DoE, 2008a, p. 28).

In Learning Outcome 2 (Citizenship Education), Assessment Criterion 4 (AS4) for Grade 10 states that a learner: “Displays an understanding of the major religions, ethical traditions and indigenous belief systems in South Africa, and explores how they contribute to a harmonious society” and covers the following concepts: major religions; ethical traditions; belief systems; harmonious society and

- major religions (e.g. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, African religions);
- ethical traditions/religious laws;
- indigenous belief systems; and
- religious diversity in South Africa and how each religion contributes to harmonious living (NCS DoE, 2008a, p. 28).

Here it is noteworthy that AS4 focuses on “how each religion contributes to *harmonious* living” (italics added). The same Assessment Criterion (AS4) for Grade 11 (Learning Outcome 2, NCS DoE, 2008a, p. 29) states that a learner: “Reflects on knowledge and insights gained in major religions, ethical traditions and indigenous belief systems, and clarifies own values and beliefs with the view to debate and analyse contemporary moral and spiritual issues and dilemmas.” AS4 covers the following concepts – “major religions, own values and beliefs, moral and spiritual issues” – and suggests that learners

- analyse contemporary moral and spiritual issues such as sex, marriage and divorce; abortion; death penalty; crime and punishment; genetic cloning; etc. within the context of at least 2–3 major religions studied in Grade 10.
- analyse and clarify own values and beliefs concerning the above issues.
- prepare for/engage in debates/discussions in which own values and beliefs are used to support one’s position on an issue/dilemma (NCS DoE, 2008a, p. 29).

The elective subject of *Religion Studies* (Grades 10–12) defines the subject as follows:

Religion Studies is the study of religion as a universal human phenomenon, and of religions found in a variety of cultures. Religion and religions are studied without favouring any or

discriminating against any, whether in theory or in practice, and without promoting adherence to any particular religion. Religion Studies leads to the recognition, understanding and appreciation of a variety of religions within a common humanity, in the context of a civic understanding of religion, with a view to developing religious literacy (DoE, 2005, p. 9).

Religion Studies (NCS DoE, 2005, pp. 9–10) is foreseen to have the following purpose:

Religion Studies enhances the constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination and freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion. Religion Studies contributes to the holistic development of the intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner. The purpose is to enhance knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary to enrich each learner, interpersonal relationships and an open and democratic society.

The NCS (DoE, 2005, p. 10) further demarcates the scope of Religion Studies as follows:

- Variety of religions (Learning Outcome 1).
- Universal dimensions of religion as a generic and unique phenomenon (Learning Outcome 2).
- Topical issues in society (Learning Outcome 3).
- Research into religion as a social phenomenon, and across religions (Learning Outcome 4).

The NCS (DoE, 2005) foresees on the one hand that learners will be capable of “cultivating sensitivity and respect across a range of religions” as well as the “confidence to deal positively with differing views”. “Dealing with different views” is part of the challenges facing humans living together. Often different views based in organised religions can become divisive and confrontational. The claims religions often make to represent the “truth” or “the only way”, and that the acceptance or rejection of their claims have eternal consequences, considerably raise the stakes. The study of religion as “a *human* phenomenon” (the first principle; italics mine) however opens the way for “dealing positively with differing views”. At least from an educational perspective, a different viewpoint from my own is “just” another view. This does not imply that the differences are *not* serious or that “all paths lead to Rome”. The contrary is true when learners consider the claims of a religion for its *own* sake and deal with the resultant ambiguity and often perplexing complexities.

Dealing with difference successfully is at the core of peaceful and productive coexistence. A prerequisite for such coexistence is the ability to not only deal with difference but also communicate across differences using a “range of symbolic, conceptual, linguistic and other means of communication”. The “beauty” of the purpose of the Religion Studies as envisaged by the NCS (DoE, 2005) is that it does not *prescribe* ways of coexistence. Rather than prescribing “the way”, it encourages individuals and communities to “co-exist and collaborate with people of various religious persuasions in a variety of ways”.



Religion Studies as a subject also contributes to an open and democratic society by

- allowing the voices of all religions to be heard in the public domain on the basis of equality and nondiscrimination;
- respecting and promoting the human rights and responsibilities of people of all religions in South Africa, Africa and the world;
- stimulating the positive acceptance and appreciation of religious diversity in South African society;
- developing the skills to communicate meaningfully and constructively across religions in a diverse society; and
- reflecting on and critiquing the contributions of religions to the moral, social, economic and political regeneration of society (DoE, 2005, p. 10).

The outcomes as envisaged by the NCS (DoE, 2005, p. 14) for Religion Studies are as follows:

1. The learner is able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a variety of religions.
2. The learner is able to analyse, relate and systematise universal dimensions of religion.
3. The learner is able to reflect critically and constructively on topical issues in society.
4. The learner is able to apply skills of research into religion as a social phenomenon and across religions.

An example of how the curriculum for Religion Studies unfolds is Learning Outcome 1 (LO1) in which learners are introduced to the religions using the world map as *geographical* point of departure (NCS/LPG DoE, 2008b, p. 34). Learners are therefore introduced to religions in Africa, Europe, Asia, the Americas and Australasia and the Pacific. Different points of departure could have been a historical timeline or clustering religions according to the mono or plural character of the religion in focus. A *geographical* starting point may provide learners with a “safe” and known place from where to start to explore the “world” of religions. As a result of globalisation the traditional geographical distribution of religions has changed immensely. Such a “map” may provide the opportunity not only to discuss the spread of the religion from the countries of “origin” but also to their being represented worldwide.

Learning Outcome 2 has as its focus: *The learner is able to analyse, relate and systematize universal dimensions of religion* (NCS/LPG DoE, 2008b, p. 34). In this outcome learners are introduced to the purpose (and history) of defining religion(s) and how it relates to other concepts such as worldview, ethical systems, indigenous knowledge systems and belief systems. In Grade 12 learners explore the way the term “teaching” differs from belief, doctrine, dogma, parable, myth, ideology. This will allow learners to engage in the discourses of a particular religion

and really critically explore fundamental beliefs and concepts. In Grade 12 learners can choose one religion and study different components of their choice of religion. These components include

- the nature of divinity;
- the nature of the world;
- the nature of humanity, with reference to community and the individual;
- the place and responsibility of humanity in the world;
- the origin and the role of evil;
- the overcoming of evil; and
- life after death (NCS/LPG DoE, 2008b, p. 34).

One of the main characteristics of the Policy is to provide guidelines for the *educational* study of religion(s). In this educational project the Policy and the NCS/LPG Content Guidelines (2008b, p. 35) are very clear that the subject is not looking for truth and judging whether someone's beliefs are "real". The Content Guidelines are very clear that the subject encourages an understanding of religions "from the point of view of the adherents" (Learning Outcome 2.3 in Grade 10; NCS/LPG DoE, 2008b, p. 35). This is furthermore entrenched in LO2.5 in Grade 10 where learners are exploring "How various religions began" – the roles of the founders, prophets and reformers. LO2.6 (Grade 10) provides for an engagement on the "role of social forms, institutions and roles in religions". The social forms that will be discussed are monarchies, oligarchies, democracies and the division of power between central and local organisations.

The *critical* nature of the Policy and the LPG becomes visible when learners in Grade 10 (LO3.1) are encouraged to explore how specific topics manifest themselves in religions. These topics can include euthanasia, crime and punishment, genetic cloning, suicide, capital punishment and so forth. It is often in exploring a specific belief system's views on such topics that learners, teachers and the communities surrounding the learner are "defamiliarised" (Jensen, 2002) to what they thought they knew or expected. Learners at this age (Grade 10) are very critical of traditional role models and institutions (like their parents) and discovering what their particular belief system or religion states about, for example, abortion may cause considerable disequilibrium for learners, teachers and their communities. The educational study of religion may then lead to a confessional crisis for the learner or even his or her family and/or teachers.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The Policy and resulting curriculum provide a clear picture of the role the study of religion *can* play in re-envisioning and reshaping South African society. The

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<sup>10</sup>This approach to the study of religion(s) is reminiscent of the suggestion by Wood (2001) to promote the study of religion(s) as "critical organic practice".

Policy stands in the service of hope as envisaged by the early critical theorists and as testimony of a “maybe”.

“Maybe” comes with no guarantees, only a chance. But “maybe” has always been the best odds the world has offered to those who set out to alter its course – to find a new land across the sea, to end slavery, to enable women to vote, to walk on the moon, to bring down the Berlin Wall.

Among the many challenges facing South African society, a religiously literate citizenry may contribute to the creation of taxonomies of responsibility and hope.

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