

Article

Transforming Post-Apartheid South Africa Through Shared Religious Education

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Abstract: Ideas about shared religious education are in need of further exploration in post-apartheid South Africa. This is necessary, considering the contributions from faith communities in their shared resistance to apartheid. While some sectors of the Christian community, and particularly the Dutch Reformed Church provided a religious justification for apartheid, other denominations, together with Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu communities struggled against this white supremacist ideology. In other ways, the neglect of the potential of shared religious education provides an apt commentary on how some within-faith communities responded to a democracy by retreating into faith identities, as made explicit in the proliferation of faith-based schools. It follows, however, that if religious communities can mobilise together to resist the apartheid state, then it should be possible for these same communities to unite to work towards the kind of transformed society envisioned in their struggle against apartheid. Hence, the interest of this article: if faith-based schools are an inevitable manifestation of democratic and pluralistic societies, then what can these schools share in terms of content and ethos towards advancing democratic values? How might a shared religious education facilitate and sustain the reform measures, necessary for social transformation in South Africa?

Keywords: shared religious education; faith-based schools; transformation; post-apartheid South Africa



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1. Introduction

While it might be possible to distinguish between the political motivations of South Africa's periods of colonialism and apartheid, their long-lasting aftermaths, however, locate them in intractably shared narratives of domination through subjugation. The success of Dutch (from 1652) and British (from 1806) colonialism meant the entrenchment of land dispossession, economic impoverishment, and the exclusion of indigenous people from their own citizenship. By the time the colonisers departed from South Africa's shores, an already disfigured socio-political landscape provided strong foundations for the propagation of an apartheid state in 1948. Included in these foundations was an unholy reliance on Christianity as a legitimising ideology. Much like the rest of Africa, South Africa slipped into the mould of a 'dark' country, filled with 'savage natives', in need of 'civilisation' by converting them to Christianity (Villa-Vicencio 1988; Masondo 2018). While 'the gospel of the missionaries was linked to the ideology of British colonialism' (Villa-Vicencio 1988, p. 44), 'the African was perceived as a blank slate on which Europeans could write and reproduce themselves' (Masondo 2018, p. 210).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the English-speaking church denominations included the Anglican Church of the Province, the Church of England in South Africa, Baptist, Congregational, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. Associated with each denomination were missionary societies that sought to evangelise the indigenous peoples of the sub-continent (Du Plessis 2016). Masondo (2018) observes that the only way Christianity was able to take root in Africa was through the infrastructure of indigenous religions. Indigenous knowledge, explains Chidester (1996, p. 28), "was useful knowledge, useful for missionary intervention and conversion but also for efficient colonial administration". This was accomplished through the translation of some of the Christian practices and concepts

into the local idiom. And this, continues [Masondo \(2018\)](#), facilitated the conversion of Christianity into an indigenous religion through the efforts of Africans within the mainline churches and the emergence of African Indigenous Churches. The missionaries, according to [Kumalo \(2022\)](#), had two primary objectives: one, to spread Christianity and a western way of life among “heathen” Africans; and two, to establish schools so that African people would be educated enough to understand and appreciate church activities, as well as to establish their subjugated status in the colony.

Taking its cue from colonialism, those who created and sustained the system of apartheid claimed to be doing so as an expression of their Christianity. As the final report of the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report \(1988, p. 59\)](#) stated:¹

“Some of the major Christian churches gave their blessing to the system of apartheid. And many of its early proponents prided themselves in being Christians. Indeed, the system of apartheid was regarded as stemming from the mission of the church. Other churches gave the apartheid state tacit support, regarding it as a guarantor of Christian civilisation. They were the beneficiaries of apartheid, enjoying special privileges denied to other faith communities”.

[McEwen and Steyn \(2016\)](#) report that an analysis of all the conferences convened by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) [Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk] between 1950 and 1989 shows the roots of apartheid began taking shape in 1857. Using its interpretation of scripture to justify ‘white’ supremacy and the separation of ‘white’ and ‘black’ people, the church provided the cornerstone of the apartheid regime by proclaiming apartheid as “church policy” ([Du Plessis 2016](#)). Importantly, however, the DRC, says [Struby \(2018, p. 9\)](#), ‘did not create Apartheid’; it was ‘hugely influential in establishing segregation as an approach to avoiding racial conflict and giving doctrinal substance to racial prejudices’ ([Loubser 1987](#)). The DRC, together with the National Party which became South Africa’s government in 1948, promoted Afrikaner nationalism and effectively ensured the defence of apartheid both politically and theologically ([McEwen and Steyn 2016](#)). According to [De Gruchy \(1986\)](#), members of the DRC dominated every aspect of life in the apartheid state, whether as members of Parliament, provincial and local government councils, or as public servants in the police and the military.

The consequences for the South African population were immense. The cultivation and retention of ‘white’ supremacy and privilege was dialectically related to the sustained oppression and marginalisation of a ‘black’ majority. Aware of the potential risks of this ‘black’ majority, the apartheid government skilfully divided and re-categorised this ‘black’ majority into ‘Indian’, ‘coloured’, and ‘black’ communities. Apartheid laws succeeded in entrenching and segregating these different categories through race and ethnic-based residential clusters (the Group Areas Act, 1950), and education systems—one for each race, with the ‘black’ category further divided into ethnic identities, thereby establishing nineteen different education departments.²

The inseparability between the apartheid state and Christianity facilitated the introduction of Christian National Education (CNE) between 1948 and 1990 in all state schools. Influenced by a distinctive Afrikaner form of Calvinistic principles, CNE propagated an exclusive Christocentric worldview. All state schooling was regarded as inherently Christian, explains [Corrado \(2013\)](#), and apartheid theology was used as a benchmark for how society could be organised. Learners were treated like racialized ‘congregations’, and Religious Instruction was positioned within CNE as a curriculum subject purposed for evangelism, nurturing specific values and principles ([Orchard and Davids 2020](#)). Notably, there was no acknowledgement of other religions or traditions. Children from other faiths had no choice but to learn and participate in Christo-centric school cultures, often forcing them to navigate between two faiths—one at school and the other at home.

The apartheid regime succeeded in their dehumanising oppression and exploitation of all South Africans not categorized as ‘white’ for over four decades—from 1948 to 1994, when the country had its first democratic elections, signalling the political end of apartheid. But this success was not without intense resistance and struggle from liberation organisations,

such as the African National Congress (ANC), which was labelled as a terrorist organization. Alongside the ANC, and several other anti-apartheid movements, such as the Inkatha Freedom Party, the Pan Africanist Congress, and the United Democratic Front, there was growing resistance from an array of faith-based organisations. Together, as will be discussed in the first half of this article, they made tremendous contributions in condemning the immorality of apartheid and clarifying the responsibilities of religion when faced with injustices.

Much has been written about the role of faith leaders and organisations, as well as inter-religious dialogues in the struggle against apartheid (see [Naidoo 2023](#); [Forster 2023](#); [Davids et al. 2023](#); [Weisse et al. 2015](#)). It is unclear whether there were intentions to unify against apartheid, or whether the kinds of education propagated within faith communities were directed at resisting injustices, such as apartheid. On the surface, it would seem that religious leaders united against apartheid, because of a shared set of values, but not much is known about whether (and if at all) the united front presented by faith leaders was transferred into the educational practices and ethos of religious education and faith-based schools. This dearth might provide some insights into the individualistic responses of faith communities in post-apartheid South Africa. Not only has there been a proliferation of faith-based schools, but these schools are (un)intentionally repeating the segregationist agenda of the apartheid regime, albeit on different grounds. Despite their historical origins, and the historical context of a deeply divisive and dehumanising society, there seems to be an incapacity and/or unwillingness by faith-based schools to share and build on the role of religion and faith communities in countering oppression and injustice. I bring these two phenomena into conversation, firstly because there is a shared religious education between faith communities and faith-based schools. And secondly, because faith-based schools hold the potential to build on the teachings and contributions not only from their respective faith leaders and communities, but also from the role-modelling of inter-religious dialogue.

Of interest, therefore, in this article, is that if religions can serve as a common source of resistance against injustices—as demonstrated against apartheid—then there ought to be something in religious education that can allow and facilitate these same faith communities to collaborate and share in bringing about the kind of transformed society envisioned in their struggle against apartheid. Importantly, the focus of this article is not directly on faith leaders or communities, but rather on faith-based schools. In addition to the historical existence of private and public faith-based schools, post-apartheid South Africa has seen a surge in new faith-based schools—from church-owned or managed and private, to state-subsidised, and including a range of religions. Schools provide structured spaces, climates, and educational content which can be questioned, revised and refined. The implication is that if faith-based schools position themselves towards engagement with other kinds of faith or public schools, the potential exists for these engagements and understandings to spill over into both faith and broader communities. Specifically, if faith-based schools are an inevitable manifestation of democratic and pluralistic societies, then what can these schools share in terms of content and ethos towards advancing democratic values? How might a shared religious education facilitate and sustain the reform measures necessary for social transformation in South Africa?

The first half of this article attends to faith communities during apartheid, and the role of faith leaders in forging an inter-faith resistance to the apartheid state. Due attention is paid to the possibilities within religious values and education to transcend differences and converge against injustices. In the second half, I look at the renewed emergence of faith-based schools in post-apartheid South Africa. Faith-based schools—Christian Missionary and Moslem Missionary schools—have strong historical footholds in colonial and apartheid South Africa. The proliferation of these schools as the country transitioned to a democracy, however, raises questions about faith communities' responses to this democracy and its accompanying pluralism. More specific to the focus of this article, faith-based schools hold the potential for the creation and cultivation of renewed forms of shared religious education, which might assist in the transformation of South African society.

2. Faith Communities and Self-Preservation During Apartheid

The deeply segregationist imperative of apartheid succeeded in relegating people to widely disparate schooling, education and living conditions. It also succeeded sometimes, as [McEwen and Steyn \(2016\)](#) observe, in fragmenting religious communities by entrenching race as a central component of spiritual subjectivities. On the one hand, race intersected with religious identities. For Christians, it meant sharing a common faith but separated along racial lines. This meant racially separated congregations in separate churches. It also meant that in terms of the Group Areas Act (no. 41 of 1950), ‘black’, ‘coloured’ or ‘Indian’ Christians could not attend a church in a ‘white’-designated area. On the other hand, adherents of Islam, Hinduism, and Judaism were categorized as ‘coloured’ or ‘Indian’, or ‘white’ in the case of Jews, and did not experience the same kind of intra-divisions as Christian communities.

Notably, however, except for its emphatic stance on separation, apartheid did not impose any sanctions on religious communities and bodies for exercising their religious beliefs—on condition that they did not challenge the apartheid system ([Omar 2006](#)). Moreover, according to [Omar \(2006\)](#), non-Christian religious communities could acquire limited state support for their activities if they were willing to collaborate with the apartheid project. This arrangement benefitted the apartheid project in ensuring the separation of people. It also benefitted faith communities by allowing them to practise and preserve their beliefs, traditions and religious identities. Residential clustering, explains [Vahed \(2006\)](#), had the unintended consequence of allowing religious communities, such as Muslims, to practise their faith, build mosques, and establish Muslim-based schools and madrasahs without interference from the state. It was for this very reason of non-interference in Muslim communities and the propagation of Islam, explains [Jardim \(2015\)](#) that, except for a few, most of the clergy [*ulamā*] adopted a “socio-political quietism during the early years of apartheid, emphasizing religious matters without articulating socially relevant ideas or inspiring greater political activism”. The clergy’s conservatism and passivism, writes [Moosa \(1989\)](#), is symbolic of their interpretations of their roles as being limited to maintaining the traditions and spiritual needs of the Muslim community, and hence, the preservation of Islam.³ Importantly, as [Bangstad \(2007\)](#) points out, it was only when the rollout of the apartheid state’s Group Areas Act (no. 41 of 1950) presented a threat to the establishment of mosques that the Muslim Judicial Council (established in 1945) and other Muslim organisations condemned apartheid, in 1961.

Muslim communities were certainly not alone in their efforts and concerns regarding self-preservation. [Adler \(2000, p. 24\)](#) shares that the Jewish establishment, together with the vast majority of South African Jews “were inwardly focused on specifically Jewish issues, remaining distant from the central South African issue of racial injustice and unsupportive of the anti-apartheid cause”. A few rabbis, like Hungarian-born Andre Ungar, a Holocaust survivor, and Louis Rabinowitz, attacked apartheid and bemoaned the silence of Jewish communities. Both rabbis eventually left South Africa. [Adler \(2000\)](#) explains that while Ungar’s outspokenness led to his isolation from the Jewish community, and his eventual expulsion from South Africa, Rabinowitz left because he was unable to reconcile Jewish ethics with the oppression of apartheid. Although Jews had ‘white’ status within the apartheid racial scheme, continues [Adler \(2000\)](#), they faced social exclusion from English-speaking South Africans and, at times, vicious antisemitism from the Afrikaners. Echoing the Muslim clergy’s concern with self-preservation, the Jewish establishment, too, adopted “a quietistic, conciliatory policy vis-à-vis the government, fearing that it could be easily provoked into promoting policies hostile towards the Jewish community and towards Israel” ([Adler 2000, p. 28](#)).

Similar initial patterns of withdrawal and reluctant activism are evident among Hindu communities. South Africans of Indian origin arrived in 1860 as immigrant labourers. In turn, Muslim communities in South Africa originate from two sets of re-settlements. One consists of the Mardykens from Amboya (in the Indonesian archipelago), who settled in the Cape in 1658. According to [Mohamed \(2002\)](#), they arrived at the Cape as Malay servants

of Dutch officials (Dutch East Indian Company) and were part of the forced migration of slaves and political prisoners that lasted until 1834. This gave rise to the category of 'Cape Malays'. The other re-settlement, explains [Vahed \(2006\)](#), involves descendants of trader immigrants who travelled from the Indian sub-continent in the 1860s. They consisted of Indian Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists. According to [Meiring \(2004\)](#), once the British colonial power began to see the Indians as an economic threat to 'white' settlers, new laws were enacted to deprive Indians of existing property rights, and radically reduced the areas which they could occupy or own. As with Muslim communities, the Group Areas Act of 1950 enforced re-settlement, forcing Indian communities to abandon schools, temples, and cultural centres that they had built for themselves over the years ([Meiring 2004](#)).

Exacerbating their re-settlement and efforts at resuming religious and communal traditions, was the fact that they struggled to secure sites to practise their religious traditions and establish faith communities. [Meiring \(2004\)](#) points out that this struggle led to many Indians converting to other faiths, especially to Christianity. At the TRC, Hindu spiritual leaders shared their difficulties in adopting a stance against apartheid. [Meiring \(2004\)](#) explains that in a community where all forms of life is held sacred, and where the doctrine of *Ahimsa* (non-injury in any form) dictates the lives of men and women, it proved very difficult for most individuals to take up arms, to join in the struggle against apartheid. As such, the Hindu community, "has neither supported nor condoned the actions of the apartheid regime" ([Meiring 2004](#), p. 1388).

Like the Hindu community, it was difficult for the African Traditional Religion community to play a visibly active role against apartheid. [Masuku \(2014\)](#) explains that this was predominantly due to the stigma attached to them and their religion by missionary Christianity and the 'Christian'-aligned apartheid state, which was laid down during the early encounters between Western missionaries and indigenous communities in Africa. African Traditional Religion was referred to as "heathen cultures," "religion of the lower races" or "uncivilized" (Setiloane 1976 in [Masuku 2014](#)). Despite it being an indigenous religion, explains [Mndende \(2013\)](#), African Traditional religion "was then not even in the margin, it was relegated to a barbaric and outdated African culture with a secular spirituality". Moreover, continues [Mndende \(2013\)](#), it was neither in state schools nor in any other government literature. The community had to perform their religion clandestinely. This, according to [Mndende \(2013\)](#), has contributed to a perception that African Traditional Religion is practised by illiterate people of the rural areas. And hence, for some African Christians, states [Masondo \(2013\)](#), it was deemed an embarrassment to be seen to be engaged in traditional rituals and practices, or to consult traditional religious specialists. Consequently, African Christians continued to practise some of their rituals in secret ([Masondo 2013](#)).

This very brief discussion provides broad insights into some faith communities in South Africa. Of importance are the multiple identities, religious and cultural diversity, which originate from indigenous communities, colonialism, and re-settlements.

3. Interfaith Resistance

Over time it became increasingly evident that faith communities could not remain silent in the face of the profound injustice and indignity perpetrated by the apartheid government. According to [Collins and Gillespie \(1994\)](#), in 1966, the most radical student organisation, the University Christian Movement (UCM) had challenged the apathy of various churches in not putting the anti-apartheid message into practice. The UCM was immediately successful in attracting large numbers of 'black' students into its ranks. With encouragement, explains [Collins and Gillespie \(1994\)](#), its 'black' members formed the original black consciousness organisation, the South African Student Organisation, in 1968.

While several major Christian churches and 'whites', specifically, benefitted from the apartheid state, it was also the case that racially segregated religious communities

"[S]uffered under apartheid, their activities were disrupted, their leaders persecuted, their land taken away. Churches, mosques, synagogues and temples—

often divided amongst themselves—spawned many of apartheid’s strongest foes, motivated by values and norms coming from their particular faith traditions (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report 1988, p. 59)

Inevitably, responses were split and inconsistent across and within faith communities. Hence, Cochrane et al.’s (1999, p. 171) assertion that “The wounds of the past are not only within, but also between faith communities. The RICSA Report, for example, mentions the need to address specific ‘church apartheid’ divisions”. The DRC remained steadfast in its acceptance of racial separation as scriptural and something which provided the spiritual sustenance for apartheid (McEwen and Steyn 2016). Masuku (2014) clarifies that although other Afrikaans-speaking churches did not adopt an official position in support of apartheid (like the DRC), as individuals, their members supported the system. This was evident in the continuous large voter support for the Nationalist Party by predominantly Afrikaner electorates, the majority of whom were Christians (Masuku 2014). Others, however, such as the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, the Congregational Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Catholic Church and the Anglican church considered it as blatantly unscriptural, and condemned apartheid (De Gruchy 1986; McEwen and Steyn 2016).

While not in full agreement, the strongest condemnation, reports De Gruchy (1986), came from the Episcopal Synod of the Church of the Province of South Africa as early as 1948, when they issued a statement, identifying themselves with the Lambeth Conference.⁴ The latter declared that “discrimination between men on the grounds of race alone is inconsistent with the principles of the Christian religion” (De Gruchy 1986, p. 55). Consequently, many Anglican missionaries, including Father Trevor Huddleston, who opposed the apartheid state, were deported. This put into a play a paradoxical situation, whereby on the one hand certain interpretations of Christianity were used in support of apartheid, and on the other hand, the teachings of Christianity were used as theological expressions against the atrocities of apartheid.

During the decade 1974 to 1984, the Catholic Church was to undergo some of the greatest changes in its presence in South Africa. Outside the church, in the wider South African society, the quiet sixties among the oppressed were turning into the more militant seventies. Subsequently, some 17 different organisations covering all aspects of social life were to constitute part of the broader Black Consciousness Movement. Under the extremely competent leadership of Steve Biko and others, this movement challenged the very fabric of South African society, stating that ‘blacks’ should ‘go it on their own’ and no longer take to either being thought of as inferior or to being treated as inferiors, even in multiracial organisations such as churches. Liberation Theology became Black Theology in the South African context. The churches were put on the spot by this new mood among younger blacks. This was the start of a spirit of defiance among the ‘black’ people, and especially the young, which was to erupt in the school uprisings of 1976 and 1980 and eventually develop into a general mood of total opposition that led to the great turmoil of 1985 onwards and to the back-down of the government.

The struggle against apartheid did not only bring together a range of political parties and individual activists. It also brought together faith communities. Religious leaders and institutions were at the forefront of the anti-apartheid struggle, with some churches and mosques offering their places of worship as sanctuaries for activists fleeing possible apprehension and persecution (De Gruchy 1986; Taliep et al. 2016). According to Esack (1988), the interfaith movement arose from a commitment to co-operation among faith leaders and some members within these communities in their resistance to apartheid. One practical expression of this commitment, he explains, was the willingness of Muslim leaders and activists to speak at, and even officiate at, political funerals in the townships. Although funerals were not interfaith sites, the rituals attached to funeral marches and vigils had the potential of connecting and binding people to one another (Taliép et al. 2016). Lubbe (2015), too, recounts an incident involving several interfaith clerics on their way to a funeral in a ‘black’ township in Cape Town. The subsequent arrest and detention of 19 people from different religious convictions, but united in their quest for justice, according to Lubbe

(2015), would be regarded as a major chapter in the history of the interfaith movement. While imprisoned, the leaders spontaneously organized an inter-religious prayer service. According to Esack, who was one of the prisoners, “We discovered each other, different faiths but comrades in struggle. . . in a matter of hours, years of suspicion and mistrust were broken down” (Lubbe 2015, p. 219). Esack (1988, pp. 494–95) maintains that

Cooperation also increased at the confessional level through the increased number of interfaith services, the formation of the South African chapter of an international inter-faith organisation vis-a-vis the World Conference on Religion and Peace; and where Muslim Christian religious leaders have shared cells in the prisons of the apartheid regime.

Historical accounts show that individual activism in the Muslim communities preceded that of the involvement of the clergy and their congregations (Esack 1988). The forced removals of ‘coloured’ and ‘Indian’ people, which included Muslim communities, explains Esack (1988), laid bare the harshness of the Group Areas Act. In addition to being displaced from their homes, Muslims were also separated from their mosques, which, in most cases, served as community hubs. This specific displacement led directly to the establishment of the Call of Islam in 1984. According to Omar (2006, p. 281), the Call of Islam played an important role in persuading Muslims “to accept the theological legitimacy of others working with Christians and other faith communities in the struggle against apartheid”. This, says Esack (1988), represented the first attempt to organise Muslims against social and political, as opposed to purely religious, oppression.

As for the Jewish community, Adler (2000) shares that many Jews, such as Ruth First, Albie Sachs and Joe Slovo, participated in the anti-apartheid struggle. However, it is also true, says Adler (2000), that the Jewish establishment and most South African Jews were inwardly focused on specifically Jewish issues, remaining distant from the central South African issue of racial injustice and unsupportive of the anti-apartheid cause.

1984 seems to have been a watershed year for faith communities. As the struggle intensified, the apartheid state inaugurated a tricameral parliament (1983), which purportedly would allow parliamentary representation for ‘coloureds’ and ‘Indians’—depicted as an improvement on “whites’ only’ representation. However, ‘blacks’ were excluded, and it was clear that the purpose of a tricameral parliament was to sever any alliance and support between ‘coloured’, ‘Indian’ and ‘black’ communities, by destroying the unity of the oppressed (Esack 1988). After 1985, explains Adler (2000), the generally conciliatory, apolitical stance of the rabbinate begin to change, especially after the appointment of Cyril Harris as the new chief rabbi in 1988, who was an outspoken critic of apartheid. During the same time, the Board of Jewish Deputies formally condemned apartheid and encouraged the establishment of Jewish civil rights organizations, such as Jews for Justice in Cape Town and Jews for Social Justice in Johannesburg (Adler 2000).

In turn, prodded by the Call of Islam, the Muslim Judicial Council declared participation in the tricameral election to be juridically forbidden [*haram*], (Moosa 1989). According to Moosa (1989, p. 75), “Its theological reasoning stressed the primacy of ‘*adl* (justice) and a condemnation of racism since the only criterion valid in the eyes of God was the believer’s *taqwa*—(fear or consciousness of God)”. Omar (2006) reports that the robust role by Muslims in the anti-apartheid struggle provoked an anti-Islamic reaction within the ranks of right-wing Calvinists, including missionaries, who interpreted the anti-apartheid stance adopted by Muslim youth as a direct and massive onslaught on the West in general and Christianity in particular. This resulted in the General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, its highest decision-making forum, passing a resolution, in 1986, which condemned Islam as a “false religion which poses a threat to Christianity in South Africa, Africa and the world at large” (Omar 2006, pp. 280–81).

Regardless, the role of Muslims in the anti-apartheid movement, explains Omar (2006), led to the development of unique interfaith dialogues, shared religious education and camaraderie between anti-apartheid Muslims, liberation theologians and other Christian denominations and ecumenical institutions. Taliep et al. (2016) report that working together

across faith lines fostered understanding, respect, camaraderie and solidarity; it also enabled different faith groups to embrace diversity. Interfaith cooperation, “enabled religious leaders to enact a performance of solidarity, which reinscribed the ideas of coexistence and interfaith dialogue” (Taliep et al. 2016, p. 337). The existence of a public sphere, says Coertzen (2013), need not threaten any private religious person or religious institution—“To the contrary it is very important for religions to participate in the debates of the public sphere” (Coertzen 2013, p. 14).

As the political climate in South Africa improved after 1990, says Lubbe (2015), the interfaith movement increased, with the involvement of the South African Council of Churches, South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, South African Hindu Maha Sabha, South African Tamil Federation, Jewish Board of Deputies, Jews for Social Justice, Call of Islam, Muslim Judicial Council, Muslim Youth Movement, Buddhist groups, the Sikh Council of South Africa, and the Federation of Indigenous Churches in SA. Furthermore, although the democratic South African government does not openly promote or oppose traditional beliefs, African Traditional Religion, explains Denis (2006, p. 314) has benefitted from the endeavours of the South African government and Africanist intellectual circles to protect, promote, and scientifically validate indigenous knowledge. He elaborates that these endeavours are undertaken “within the framework of the African Renaissance, a vague concept but one which is politically important and which expresses the aim of [former president] Thabo Mbeki’s government to restore to the African continent its dignity, which was lost during several centuries of slavery, colonialism, and racial discrimination” (Denis 2006, p. 314). The foregrounding of indigenous knowledge is especially evident in a post-apartheid curriculum, and specifically in the compulsory subject of Life Orientation. It is also highlighted in the National Policy on Religion and Education (DoE 2003, p. 6):

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. 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.

4. Religion, Pluralism and Democratic Values

South Africa’s transition to a democracy meant shifting as far away as possible from apartheid in all its structures, forms and discourses, including the intimacy between the apartheid state and Christianity. Hence, as Roux (2000) reports, a Ministerial Committee was formed in August 1998 to investigate the diverse ideas and approaches, as well as outcries from religious communities, especially Christians who wanted to retain the previously Christian evangelical approach in most of the mono-religious public schools. According to Roux (2000), diversity within the committee precipitated two broad understandings of religious education in South African schools: religious education as educating learners to be religious and religious education as educating learners about religion and religions.

In ensuring a separation between the state and religion, Religious Instruction was removed from the national curriculum, and was deemed the responsibility of the home, family, and the religious community (DoE 2003). In its place, the state introduced Life Orientation as a compulsory subject, which would include the topic of Religion Education for the purposes of “teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity in South Africa and the world” (DoE 2003, p. 9). Certainly, much work had already been done in relation to new initiatives in teaching and learning about religions and religious diversity in South Africa. The Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA), for example, had been involved in policy research, pilot projects, curriculum development, and text production, to create a space in South African public schools for

a religion education program since 1991 (Chidester n.d.). Key to their work, explains Chidester, was an acute awareness of “the multiplicity of voices that can be heard in the process of fostering inter-religious communication in the classroom”. It was the ICRSA, explains Stonier (1998), which presented the three models which became the frame for the nation-wide discussion on the future of RE as South Africa prepared itself for a change in government. These were the single-tradition; multiple single-tradition; or multi-tradition approach. Notably, among the thirteen principles identified by the Ministerial Committee, which should govern RE in the future, is the following: ‘Religion in education shall contribute to both interfaith tolerance and understanding and the development of an appreciation of their own faith’ (Stonier 1998, p. 95).

By recognizing that South Africa is home to a wide variety of religious traditions, including a deep and enduring indigenous religious heritage, the state also introduced a new National Policy on Religion and Education (DoE 2003). The policy is directed at promoting “the relationship between religion and education” (DoE 2003, p. 3) that will best serve the interests of a democratic society. It works from a premise that the public school has an educational responsibility for teaching and learning about religion and religions, but that it should be done in ways that are different from the religious instruction (DoE 2003). Departing from a premise of religious diversity as a unifying national resource, the policy adopted a “co-operative model”, which simultaneously affirms the separation of religion and the state, while recognising scope for interaction between the two (Davids and Orchard 2022). While ensuring the protection of citizens from religious discrimination or coercion, the “co-operative model” adopted by the new policy

Encourages an ongoing dialogue between religious groups and the state in areas of common interest and concern. In such exchanges, 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. (DoE 2003, p. 6)

Hence Omar’s (2006) contention that the “co-operative model” was deemed as most appropriate, both in relation to South Africa’s religious demography and the powerful influence of interreligious solidarity on the anti-apartheid culture of the liberation movement. While welcomed by those who understood the importance of cultivating inclusive teaching and learning spaces, free from the proselytising of any religious doctrine, others, including principals, teachers, and parents, as well as religious leaders did not. Instead, they interpreted the national policy as “sterilizing” South African public schools of religions, creating an environment as only suitable for learners who are atheist or religiously indifferent (Nthontho 2017). Some parents viewed the state’s objective to propagate religious diversity as an interference in religion, rather than a neutral separation (Davids and Orchard 2022). Roux (2005), for example, reports that most of the schools and teachers visited by student teachers during their teaching practicums were still working from the old mono-religious paradigm. In most cases, she continues, ‘classes were given from a confessional religion education approach, irrespective of the diversities (cultures and religions) in the classroom’ (Roux 2005, p. 294). This pattern has continued over the years. Some schools have adopted the National Policy (DoE 2003), others have replaced it with a secular enunciation of values and others have rejected it (Davids and Orchard 2022). In sum, the idea of sending their children to “God-less” schools scared parents, report Driesen and Tayob (2016), and, as a result, many chose faith-based or home-based schooling instead—which takes me into the second part of this article.

5. Faith-Based Schools

Faith-based schools are not new to the South African landscape. Christian- and Muslim-based schools, for examples, have their roots in Christian Missionary and Moslem Mission schools, respectively. According to Kumalo (2022), the pioneer missionaries who arrived in the Cape from 1656 established the first school in Cape Town in 1663. The school taught slave children from the West Coast of Africa alongside European, ‘coloured’ and ‘black’ children. An Ordinance published in 1714, explains Kumalo (2022), determined that

religious instruction was to be an important part of Dutch Cape education, and also gave the state the power to regulate teachers' training and determine the type of content taught at schools. In turn, state [Marrou et al. \(2024\)](#), the first Church mission schools, which were established in 1789, were dedicated to converting the indigenous peoples to Christianity and generally inculcating an attitude of service and subservience to 'whites'. While some mission schools included a mixture of races, most were segregated. The mission schools were virtually brought into the state system through government subsidies and through provincial supervision, inspection, and control of teaching, curriculum, and examination standards ([Marrou et al. 2024](#)).

The first Moslem Mission school—the Rahmaniyyeh Institute in Cape Town—was established much later, in 1913, by Abdullah Abdurahman. These developed from the after-school classes offered at madāris (Muslim schools), which were typically attached to specific masājid (mosques) in the community. Like other mission school systems, Moslem Mission schools were subsidised by the state. In addition to preserving Muslim identity and practices, [Driesen and Tayob \(2016\)](#) clarify that Moslem Mission Schools served a dual purpose: to provide employment for Muslim teachers, who could not find posts in Christian-dominated schools, and to provide schooling for Muslim children whose parents were concerned about the dominant Christian ethos in both state and missionary schools.

In addition to mission schools for 'blacks', states [Christie \(1990\)](#), many churches also had 'white' private schools linked to them. Although these schools were linked to churches 'in matters of doctrine, faith, and worship', explains [Christie \(1990\)](#), in most other ways they were independent. The schools were responsible for their own administration, appointed their own staff, had their own admission policies regarding learners. The split between matters of religion and matters of education meant that the churches often had limited influence over the schools, which generally argued that they could not admit 'black' children because this was against the law ([Christie 1990](#)). In 1965, for example, reports [Christie \(1990\)](#), the Anglican Synod called on Anglican schools not to exclude any children on grounds of colour. But the schools ignored this. By the end of the 1960s, however, this situation changed—elite 'white' private schools 'opened' their doors to 'black' students. In the next section, we will see how this happened.

The movement towards integrating the private church schools was led by the Catholic Church ([Christie 1990](#); [Collins and Gillespie 1994](#)). [Christie \(1990\)](#) highlights that it is more appropriate to describe these schools as 'open' rather than 'integrated', which implied that integration was not compulsory, but simply available. As such, 'open' schools emphasised the new freedom of parents to choose which Catholic school their children would attend. In practice, however, says [Christie \(1990\)](#), the idea of 'open' schools only referred to 'white' Catholic schools, because 'black' Catholic schools were overcrowded, understaffed and inconveniently located for 'white' families. Hence, it was only 'white' Catholic schools which began admitting small numbers of 'black' learners, after receiving permission from state authorities, to avoid political trouble ([Christie 1990](#)).

The 'opening' of schools, initiated by some, and especially 'white', faith-based schools, was the precursor to the official desegregation of schools, as of 1994. Alongside the establishment of one national education in place of 19 separate ethnically based education departments, desegregation is seen as pivotal to not only breaking from a racially divisive past, but also to cultivating citizens, who are able to actively participate in a pluralist and multicultural democracy. Although welcomed by most, the unfamiliarity of desegregated created uncertainty and doubt among parents and communities ([Davids and Waghid 2021](#)). [Du Toit \(2004\)](#) shares that some parents questioned the quality of education in desegregated schools. Others were concerned about the consequences of their children having to engage with those who were not like them in terms of race, religion, ethnicity or culture ([Davids and Waghid 2021](#)). [Hoel \(2016, p. 37\)](#), for example, reports that certain clergy [ulama] warned Muslims against 'the atheism and moral corruption' (of girls and women in particular) that would ensue from the new curriculum and the National Policy on Religion and Education ([DoE 2003](#)). Warnings such as these were exacerbated by incidents

of discrimination, especially against Muslim learners (see [Davids and Orchard 2022](#); [Driesen and Tayob 2016](#)). [Driesen and Tayob \(2016\)](#) maintain that because several parents feared the prospect of their children being exposed to ‘God-less’ schools and/or ‘other’ religions, they have opted out of state-funded education altogether, in favour of ‘faith-based’ or home-based schooling. In turn, as [Nogueira-Godsey \(2016\)](#) observes, South Africa has long been regarded as a religiously active society. These issues combined have led to a dramatic surge in independent schools, which included private and faith-based schools. The post-apartheid South African Schools Act (Act No. 84 of 1996) makes provision for two types of schools—public and independent schools, which includes faith-based schools.

Faith-based schools might be motivated by different reasons, as well as degrees of difference. Some are extensions of religious communities, and often located within the precincts of places of worship. Others do not have any direct ties with religious communities within South Africa, such as the Egyptian ‘Al-Azhar schools’, which are funded mainly by Al-Azhar University in Cairo, and the Turkish Star Colleges, which are shaped by the philosophy of Fethullah Gülen ([Mohamed 2002](#)). Regardless of the differences in motivation, the end-result is the same for South African society, which is that historical racial segregation is being replaced by new configurations of separation, such as religious identities. This is a matter of concern, especially insofar as children are being prepared to co-exist, participate and engage with the differences encountered in a diverse and pluralist society. However, there are merits to faith-based schools and their educational offerings. On the one hand, many would agree that faith-based schools are inevitable and necessary features of diverse and pluralistic societies ([McLaughlin 1992](#); [Grace 2012](#)), and reflect the ideals of a liberal–democratic society ([Merry 2015](#)).

[Tayob et al. \(2011\)](#) posit that Muslim schools (and, similarly, other faith-based schools) may empower Muslim minorities to better grapple with the challenges of secular discursive formations; to engage in processes of nation-building, in and articulations of citizenship. When considered within the context of post-apartheid educational reform, which includes the rights of faith-based schools to exist, and the adoption of a “co-operative model”, it is apparent that the state is interested in promoting religious pluralism and collaborating with religious organisations on public issues of mutual concern ([Davids and Orchard 2022](#)). The “co-operative model” emphasizes the importance of “religious literacy” and seeks to achieve this through the Life Orientation curriculum, which sets out to cover extensive content on religions and their practices, so that learners might increase their knowledge about different faiths. Hence [Omar’s \(2006\)](#) contention that religious pluralism has been one of the major beneficiaries of the democratic state’s commitment to develop a culture and ethos of interreligious tolerance and cooperation. The state’s commitment is underscored by Section 15(1) in the Bill of Rights of our Constitution, which reads “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion”. Ironically, however, and despite the tremendous role of faith groups and inter-faith initiatives in the struggle against apartheid, the state’s policy of religious pluralism has not been supported by a sympathetic religious leadership at the civil-society level, which means that it has not sufficiently filtered down to the grassroots level ([Omar 2006](#)).

On the one hand, the emphasis on, and importance of, religious pluralism in cultivating a democratic society of mutual regard and understanding seems to be at odds with a proliferation of faith-based schools. While these schools have the right to exist in a democratic society, they also have responsibilities in contributing to that democracy. On the other hand, the gains of the inter-religious movement in fostering dialogue and common ground have seemingly lost traction in South Africa’s democracy. To [Omar \(2006\)](#), the inter-religious movement has lost most of its motivation, intellectual vitality and support base, as well as the rich potential for sharing religious education. This is not to say that all faith communities were united against apartheid, but rather that the inter-religious movement demonstrated the capacity for unity and resistance against injustice. Instead, there has been a growing opposition to the state’s religio-pluralistic policy, which, says [Omar \(2006\)](#), is often interpreted by conservative Christians as the new government favouring

Muslims and other minority faiths at the expense of the Christian majority. In turn, other concerns, such as the state's liberalism on matters of abortion, pornography and gambling, has caused faith communities to turn inward and focus on their religious identities, rather than engaging in larger public debates on nation building, reconciliation, reconstruction and development (Vawda 2017). For conservative religious communities these kinds of liberal values are incommensurable with their own religious tenets and values. In some instances, as exemplified in faith-based schools, this incommensurability has forced religious communities to turn inward. This reality notwithstanding, I wish to argue in the ensuing sections that, despite the motivations of faith-based schools, they have the potential and communal connections to draw on the teachings and examples of the interfaith movement to re-establish the value of shared religious education.

6. Religious Education and the Potential for a Deep Transformation

Following the above discussions, it becomes evident that, on the one hand, the interfaith movement and religious groups were able to unite in their resistance against apartheid. Through engaging and sharing their religious views and teachings, they were able to connect in a shared condemnation of apartheid, while simultaneously highlighting their responsibility to those in need, whether in the form of poverty or oppression. Hence, despite the multiplicity of their beliefs and traditions, they used a common thread of acting with humanity and compassion as the foundation of their resistance. On the other hand, however, the political demise of apartheid seemingly rendered the need for inter-religious dialogues or movements superfluous—despite the state's constitutional and educational focus on religious pluralism. The realization of a democracy symbolized the liberation of the oppressed; it also brought to the fore a centralized recognition of diversity as a national asset. While this was exactly what the struggle against apartheid was for, it seems that the new-found intensities of difference and unfamiliarity might have proven too much for certain parents, communities and religious leaders. For many, it was hard to move beyond perceived associations of "Godlessness" with the state's secular Constitution, even when the state has been clear in its commitment to a "co-operative" model for religion and its teachings.

The residual effects of apartheid are evident in the retention of communal separations—except that now they are self-imposed. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the same insularity instigated by the apartheid state—which unintentionally enabled the preservation of religious communities—is being re-deployed to avert the influence of diversity, and its myriad differences, whether racial, cultural or religious—as found in the proliferation of faith-based schools. Evidently, although democracy has entered South Africa's shores, democracy has not (yet) delivered on a socially just and equal society. Through its education system it has also yet to inculcate among learners (and hence, citizens) a natural curiosity about diverse ways of being, thinking and acting. If anything, the post-apartheid landscape has morphed into new formations of exclusion and marginalization, and hence reproduced pockets of separation and injustices, based on class, as well as ethnicity and religion. For the overwhelming majority of South Africans, conditions and degrees of poverty have intensified, bringing widespread frustration and hopelessness. Lubbe's (2015) contention that the interfaith movement should have positioned themselves with the poor and the oppressed in their struggle for justice and freedom, remains elusive.

However, as I will attempt to show in the closing discussion, if it were possible for shared commitments across different religious beliefs to be used in resisting apartheid, then shared religious education also has the capacity to transform post-apartheid South Africa into a socially just society. I concur with Richardson (2014), that, contrary to perceptions that religion is divisive when people of different beliefs are together, there is a strong case to be made for sharing religious education. Richardson (2014) contends that there is a role for education in general and Religious Education in particular in the task of trying to create a more shared and inclusive society, amidst cultural and religious diversity. In post-apartheid South Africa, the religious freedom of faith-based schools is

acknowledged in their establishment. As long as they adhere to the principles of the South African Schools Act (no. 84 of 1996), and the implementation of the national curriculum, they have autonomy to determine their own internal order in accordance with their faith identity (Coertzen 2013). To Coertzen (2013, p. 6), this autonomy and perspective “can have a huge impact on the inhabiting of a public sphere by religions, especially if it is kept in mind that all the religions in the public sphere can claim all of the rights that are associated with freedom of religions and also that they are all equal before the law”.

Importantly, although faith-based schools did not adopt an active resistance role against apartheid, their existence, nevertheless, suggests an opting-out from state-run schools. For non-Christian parents, faith-based schools presented opportunities for attending to the specific religious needs of their children. The same motivation is evident in the proliferation of faith-based schools in a post-apartheid era, which is that the state cannot be trusted with the education of their children (Davids and Waghid 2021). There is, therefore, something to be learnt from both the interfaith movement, as mobilized by religious leaders and faith-based schools, as they prepare the next generations of citizens.

On the one hand, the mere existence of interfaith movements confirms that there are common and shared worldviews, worthy of dialogue and deliberation. As Esack (in Lubbe 2015, p. 2019) experienced, in a matter of a few hours, while imprisoned together, “years of suspicion and mistrust were broken down”. This is a profound observation and experience, because it is often the myths of who one thinks people are, and in this case, what they believe, which stifle curiosity or interest in others. Instead, as Taylor notes, by misrecognising others, we distort ideas about who they really are, and in turn, shut down any possibilities of learning and knowing. On the other hand, although faith-based schools function separately, divided by religious identities, there are historical connections not only in relation to why these schools were established in the first place, but also because of the engagements shared among religious leaders and the interfaith movement. In other words, there is a pre-existing body of knowledge, and role-modelling—by religious leaders and interfaith participants, as well as activists, who were not religious—as generated through the resistance against apartheid, which can provide a curriculum of shared education. Importantly, this potential curriculum emerged organically through dialogue and an openness to wanting to know about the other. And in doing so, the dialogues revealed a strongly shared God-consciousness, which naturally extended into the importance of acting humanely, and in solidarity against a state of dehumanisation and oppression—as aptly captured by Papastephanou (2008, p. 125):

“The disclosure of the divine takes a different form in each religion, yet in all religions the disclosure of the divine is not solely metaphysical (i.e., providing mystical or rational answers to questions about the existence of a beyond) or moral (i.e., determining the governmentality of the self). It concerns also the sacred that suffuses everydayness, the vision of a better world and the meaning of existence as longing for, or aspiring to create, such a world”.

For Papastephanou (2008), the spiritual meets the social when knowledge about religions is thought to contribute to cohesion, solidarity, understanding and cooperation in a multicultural society. In the first instance, therefore, it would be important for faith-based schools to consider what they understand by their religious identity. What is it about Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu schools that distinguishes them as faith-based institutions? Muslim schools, for example, might state that the Islamic ethos of the school is found in the structure of a school day, which accommodates the daily prayers [salaah], as well as subjects on the history of Islam [seerah], Islamic jurisprudence [fiqh], or outreach programmes. Performing the daily prayers or giving alms are seen as spiritually nourishing endeavours, but why are these acts important, and how do they contribute to the wellbeing of both the individual and society? What are Muslims meant to learn and demonstrate or show from these acts? And what parts of these acts can be shared with others, so that the benefits of these spiritual enactments translate into social upliftment and cohesion?

Secondly, what kind of human being and citizen is being produced at faith-based schools? Presumably, learners might have more knowledge about their respective religions than those who do not attend faith-based schools. But what does this mean for them as citizens of a pluralist and multicultural society? How has their religious knowledge equipped them (if at all) to engage with those who hold different worldviews, whether religious or not? How do they engage with difference? How has their religious knowledge prepared them for a world that is seldom in harmonious equilibrium? And, to the focus of this article: what kind of religious education can be shared among faith schools to demonstrate Papastephanou's (2008) contention that religious education can be made relevant to a 'healthy' political identity and a citizenship for justice and equality?

South Africa is one of only three countries in the world where religious participation has increased in recent years (Forster 2024). Drawing on 2022 Census data, Forster (2024) reports that 96.1% of South Africans profess or practise some form of faith—with 85.3% identifying as Christian of some kind or another. Only 2.9% claim to have no religious views at all. Certainly, within this context, religious ideas and the potential for sharing religious education is not unfeasible. And, as Papastephanou (2008, p. 129) maintains, the point of convergence for believing and non-believing parents would be in wanting their children to become "intelligent lifelong learners, capable not only of performing tasks successfully within their exclusive cultural horizon but also of thinking in strikingly fresh ways beyond conventional wisdom".

The potential of shared religious education in post-apartheid South Africa, therefore, is not only profound and immense, but also seemingly the only avenue left in bringing about deep transformation. In both public and faith-based schools, there are dire needs for learners to have a clearer grasp of South Africa's history, not only understand its painful past for most citizens, but also to recognise why its society is so widely unequal and disconnected. Whether framed within the syllabi of history or life orientation, the courageous role of religious education in resisting oppression and othering cannot be excluded. More importantly, the resistance presented by religious leaders only become realisable because of their commitment to unify and work together. They were able to do this because there are commonalities not only in their beliefs in God or a Divine Being, but also in that these beliefs necessarily demand responding to societal and societal dystopias, and understanding whether they involve any form of injustice. Possibilities exist, therefore, for learners not only to learn about different religions, but, more importantly, what it means to put religions into practise. In practical terms, schools have the means to establish forums for their learners to engage with others, whether this involves dialogues, or joint ventures, such as inter-cultural days, or awareness drives about current challenges.

Invariably, religious values advocate goodness and compassion, as well as responsibilities towards others. This means that the onus on religious communities to address and assist in matters of social alleviation and humanitarian aid stands. In this way, communities might come from different religious affiliations, but their shared understandings of what it means to enact religious obligations become a unifying force—whether in faith-based schools or congregational settings. Signs of these interpretations of religious knowledge are already evident in "social outreach" pillars and initiatives in faith-based as well as public schools.

The interest of religious education argues, Papastephanou (2008), is not simply about creating the believer, or encouraging exclusively the judging mind or the tolerant mind. Instead, religious education should be expected "to help in the creation of reflective, imaginative and passionate subjects that are capable of involving empathy, acceptance and criticality in their judgements and of being aware of the political role their judgements play for the lives of others" (Papastephanou 2008, p. 129). Transforming South African society, therefore, is not only about external systems and structures of reform, and policies on transformation. Transformation also involves self-reflection, unlearning certain beliefs and prejudices, and being open to seeing the world from different perspectives, by recognising that there are multiple ways of being in the world. Sharing religious education, therefore,

is not only about exchanging ideas and participating in dialogues or traditions. Sharing religious education is about recognising the reality that others have something to share, that individuals can learn from each other for the purposes of understanding, mutual regard and peaceful co-existence. Perhaps no more so than in the context of South Africa, where Christianity has been misused in the legitimisation of apartheid, a “politically self-reflective” (Papastephanou 2008, p. 135) religious education may undo many prejudices about non-Western religious doctrines.

In conclusion, shared religious education—although not formally framed as such—has played a tremendous role in liberating South Africa. It has played a critical role in deconstructing binaries between theological frameworks, and foregrounding discourses of convergence. Of course, there are interpretive differences across religious beliefs, but even these differences can be used in advancing and emphasising the diversity within differences, which ultimately can enhance the openness and hospitality of a society. The strong historical foundation of shared religious education can be used as a foundational reference to inform curricula content, practices of dialogue and deliberation, and most importantly, mutual human regard. South Africa has attained its hard-fought-for democracy, but it has not yet succeeded in implementing the values of a democracy, which includes sharing knowledge and traditions. Civil society, schools, and, specifically, faith-based schools, have as much as responsibility as the state to cultivate the values necessary for a flourishing democracy. Shared religious education has the capacity to do this, by moulding ethical, compassionate and kind human beings, as well as attuning people to the necessity of human concern and preservation. In a world of increasing discontent, conflict, and war, these values are inherent within shared religious education. To this end, shared religious education has the capacity to bring about and sustain reform measures, in which transformation is understood as renewed ways of being with others, guided by an unequivocal commitment to social justice for all.

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Notes

- ¹ The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up by the Government of National Unity to help deal with what happened under apartheid. The TRC was based on the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995. The TRC effected its mandate through three committees: the Amnesty Committee, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee, and the Human Rights Violations Committee. Three days were set aside for the different faith communities in South Africa to appear before the TRC (17–19 November 1997). Eminent church leaders took turns to address the Commission. So did representatives from the Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist and Baha’i communities, as well as spokespersons from traditional African religious communities.
- ² Ethnically, the racial groups are sub-divided, with the African community itself broken up as follows: the Nguni (comprising the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele, and Swazi people); Sotho-Tswana, who include the Southern, Northern and Western Sotho (Tswana people); and the Tsonga and Venda. White people are divided into Afrikaners and English (Soudien and McKinney 2016).
- ³ At the time, the main Muslim organisations who articulated a conservative political discourse were the *‘u/ama-groups*, chiefly represented by the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), the *Jamiatul ‘Ulama* (Council of Theologians) of Transvaal, the *Jamiatul ‘Ulama* of Natal and the *Majlisul ‘Ulama* (Council of Theologians) of South Africa (Moosa 1989).
- ⁴ The Lambeth Conference is a decennial assembly of bishops of the Anglican Communion convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The first conference took place in Lambeth in 1867.

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