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Citizenries enjoying freedom of religion failing to follow through towards moral and social freedom

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Abstract

The citizenries of some countries that already enjoy freedom of religion fail to use that freedom effectively to rid their societies of crime, violence and anomie. This paper examines Venezuela and South Africa as two case studies. Although both countries have experienced significant political unrest, given the similar values shared by the majority of their populations, their citizenries should have engaged in dialogue with their compatriots to establish common moral ground. Upcoming generations should be guided to use their freedom of religion to engage with compatriots of other religious persuasions, thereby contributing to greater religious tolerance, understanding and morally justifiable behaviour.

Keywords

Inter-and intra-religious dialogue, morality, moral education, religion, South Africa, religious freedom, values education, Venezuela, violence, violent societies.

1. Introduction and central theoretical statement

In most cases, strife and violence between groups of people within countries can be traced to political, social, economic, moral, religious and other differences that have detrimentally affected their social fabric for extended periods of time. In many cases, two of which are discussed in this article, the violence has become systemic and part of their social fabric.

We believe countries that enshrine religious freedom in their constitutions should, in principle, be in a favourable position to encourage their populaces to engage in inter- and / or intra-religious dialogue for the purpose of attaining a better understanding of other religions. This interaction should, in turn, contrib-

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ute to greater mutual understanding, peace and morally justifiable behaviour. This friendly dialogue is possible because most, if not all, religions share much the same or similar moral values. In this manner, great strides could be taken towards creating a better understanding of political, economic, ethnic, and – in particular – ideological, religious and worldview differences.

We flesh out this contention herein. First, by way of illustration, we look at two countries that have experienced extreme social violence in the recent past: Venezuela and South Africa. There are many countries around the globe in which freedom of religion and belief is guaranteed in their constitutions but which nevertheless have to contend with violence and unrest (e.g. Honduras and Mexico in Latin America; Nigeria, Ethiopia and Eritrea in Africa). We use South Africa and Venezuela here as cases where inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue could go a long way to eradicate such violence. We acknowledge that such dialogue would not completely eliminate the violence, crime and unrest, because of other socio-political conditions. However, inter- and intra-religious dialogue offers a way for citizenries to transcend morally the differences that seem to cause much of the unrest and strife. We then discuss the key religiously rooted ethical and moral values that religions tend to share, though they are variously formulated. Finally, we argue that violence, crime and anomie could be assuaged to some extent by exposing upcoming generations to inter-religious moral education.

2. Two countries that stand out as harbouring violent citizenries

Two countries situated in different parts of the world currently seem to suffer under the burden of violence: Venezuela, at the northern end of South America, and South Africa at the southernmost tip of Africa. According to the World Population Review (2023a, 2023b, 2023c), these two countries are among world's most violent societies. Both were among the 11 countries with the highest homicide rates in 2018 (World Population Review 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). The Venezuelan 2024 Numbeo Crime Index stood at 82.1, and its Overall Criminality Index at 6.72. South Africa's for the same year stood at respectively 75.5 and 7.18. Venezuela and South Africa counted among the four countries with the least favourable Crime Index and Overall Criminality, the other two being Papua New Guinea with 80.4 and 5.72 respectively, and Afghanistan with 78.4 and 7.1 respectively (World Population Review 2024).

2.1. Violence in Venezuela

In 2018, Venezuela ranked first with a homicide rate of 36.69 per 100,000 people. Its rate of serious assaults stood at 6.51 per 100,000 (World Population Review 2023a). According to the Global Peace Index of the Institute of Economics and

Peace, Venezuela ranked 12th-lowest in the world in 2021 with a Peace Index score of 2.934 (higher scores represent less peace; for instance, Iceland's Peace Index score was 1.1). The Peace Index gauges the presence or absence of violence, from the simple fear of it to actual violent acts. Its indicators cover a wide range of topics, from military conflicts and political instability to homicide rates and levels of violent crime (World Population Review 2023b).

In 2022, Relief Web (2023) concluded, "Although homicides have decreased, [Venezuela] still has the highest murder rate in Latin America, with 40.9 murders for 100 000 people … violence remains one of the main risks for Venezuelans." School bullying also seems to be increasing (Dominguez & Dugarte 2017). The fact that the country is staggering under huge economic problems adds to the complexity of the situation (Flóres & Becerra 2019:186).

A United Nations fact-finding mission identified widespread patterns of systematic violence and brutal crimes against the populace by the government, the armed forces and the police. These actions have led, according to the UN mission, to a severe humanitarian emergency, with millions of Venezuelans unable to access basic healthcare and adequate nutrition. The violent actions "include brutal policing practices, abject prison conditions, impunity for human rights violations, and harassment of human rights defenders and independent media." Human Rights Watch's World Report (2022) stated, "A special police force, and others have killed and tortured with impunity in low-income communities, instilling fear and maintaining social control. … There has been no meaningful justice in Venezuela for the victims of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture committed by security forces with the knowledge and acquiescence of high-level Venezuelan authorities." In view of the above assessments and the dismal state of education in the country, Venezuelans Flóres and Becerra (2019:186) concluded, "This country is now among the most violent and lawless around the world. People without values neither education will have a society lacks of respect, tolerant and love."

2.2. Violence in South Africa

"Violence is prevalent in South Africa, which has one of the highest homicide rates in the world," according to Campbell (2019:n.p.). In 2018, South Africa ranked second in the world with a homicide rate of 36.40 per 100,000 people, only slightly behind Venezuela. However, its serious assault rate was much higher than that of Venezuela, at 293.55 per 100,000 people. South Africa also had the fourth-highest incidence of rape (72.10 per 100,000) and was ninth in robberies (331.7 per 100,000), 15th in sexual violence (87.90/100,000) and fifth in kidnappings (9.57/100,000) (World Population Review 2023a). South Africa's score on the 2021 Global Peace Index was 2.344 (World Population Review 2023b).

South Africa is also regarded as particularly unsafe for women. According to World Population Review (2023c), its women's danger index for 2021 was 771.82 per 100,000, highest in the world. Only 25 percent of women in South Africa felt that it was safe to walk alone at night, the lowest percentage of any country. South Africa also ranked worst for intentional homicide of women. The country had an appalling 16.95 knife-related deaths per 100,000 people in 2019 (World Population Review 2023c).

Heinecken (2020) explains the high level of violence in contemporary South Africa in terms of the country's long-standing history of violence. Violence was used as a tool of power and governance by European colonists, and then later in the apartheid dispensation, to repress and control the indigenous people. Those in opposition to the apartheid policies of the National Party government who took power in 1948 also resorted to violence to overthrow the regime, and they now find it difficult to put an end to the culture of violence that has become ingrained in the citizenry's social fabric. The current problem in South Africa, three decades after the advent of democracy, is that those in power have failed to take the necessary measures to improve the protection of social and economic rights, or the rights of women and children, foreigners and environmental activists (Human Rights Watch 2022b), as well as to prevent the widespread and constant killing of farmers (Visser 2023:9).

3. The call for inter-and intra-religious dialogue

The violent situations in these two countries cannot be ascribed to any single outstanding factor such as, for instance, systematic religious persecution, economic exploitation or ethnic cleansing. The entire gamut of human factors seems to be playing a role in the crime and violence in both countries: physical, emotional, social, economic, labour, educational and political, to mention a few (cf. Resane 2021:1). The heavy-handed policies and actions of recent regimes in Venezuela seem to have fanned the flames of violence by causing many social and economic problems, thereby alienating citizens and pushing them towards crime, violence and emigration. The situation in South Africa can be partially ascribed to the fact that the government currently in power has been failing for the last three decades to act decisively against crime, lawlessness and violence.

The brief depictions above indicate that the citizenries of these two countries – and, by implication, others that are similarly afflicted around the world – lack social and especially moral cohesion. It is as if the people in such situations live near to one another but are far away from each other spiritually, socially and particularly morally or ethically. The rampant acts carried out in these nations are not only against the law but also against widely shared moral norms and values. Instead

of working to create common bonds between the citizens, these immoral acts pull them apart and ruin any possibility of reaching national moral unity.

The citizens of both these countries enjoy freedom of religion as a human right, enshrined in their respective constitutions. According to the Fearon fractionalization index, Venezuela has a religiously relatively homogeneous population (Fearon score of 0.135, where 0.0 indicates that all the people belong to the same religion and 1.0 would indicate that no two randomly selected persons belong to the same religion) (Fearon 2003; Alesina et al. 2003). This means that it should in principle be possible for Venezuelans to engage in dialogue based on a widely shared belief system about the moral imperative of getting rid of the crime and violence in their country. As will be seen below, a few efforts have been made in this regard, though with minimal success.

South Africa, on the other hand, has a relatively diverse religious population (Fearon score 0.8603). An inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue between opposing and violent parties will arguably be more difficult because of the greater religious diversity, but should nevertheless be pursued to eradicate the current wave of social violence and crime. A dialogue of this kind has been sporadically conducted, but with little success, as will be discussed below.

In light of our concurrence with those who postulate a close link between religion, ethics and moral values, such as Frame (2008:5), we maintain that through persistent inter-religious, inter-faith, and intra-faith dialogue commonly shared core values could be discovered and employed for the purpose of overcoming the social, economic and political divides that exist in citizenries, thereby bringing about a more peaceful future. Through such dialogue, the citizens of these two countries, and of others that are similarly afflicted, could discover common moral values, such as the Golden Rule, on which to base their quest for peace, mutual understanding and calm.

4. Commonly shared moral values upon which to build a value-based approach to life

The citizenries of countries such as Venezuela and South Africa lack more than mere social cohesion; they lack *moral* cohesion. In other words, the various sub-sections of their populaces adhere to quite different and even conflicting sets of moral values. This is nothing strange, as Scheepers and Van der Slik (1998:678) observed; people and parties involved in moral conflicts derive their positions from different worldviews. Ways must be found to help different groups in the populace understand that peace and stability, and the resolution of economic, political, historical, ideological and even religious differences within a country and a society, should be sought by peaceful and morally justifiable means.

According to Scheepers and Van der Slik (1998:679), empirical research has shown that "religious characteristics are the strongest supporters of moral attitudes. A person's religious views as well as his or her religious involvement affect their views and behaviours also outside of the religious realm." In view of this statement, we are convinced that even secularists can participate in inter-religious dialogue, since secularism can be regarded as "a substitute or alternative religion" (Van der Walt 2007:228).

Our conviction, namely that an inter-religious, respectively intra-religious dialogue aimed at discovering commonly shared moral values is not only feasible but should be actively pursued by people of different religions, is in diametrical opposition to the view held by Ridley (1996:191ff). He quotes anthropologist John Hartung, who argued that "most religions were developed by groups whose survival depended on competition with other groups." As a result, "all good group-selectionists" tend to be "severe to the out-group [and] moral to the in-group" (Ridley 1996:192). Hartung seems to regard the Christian injunction to love all people as an exception, and he regards this teaching as "an invention of St. Paul" who lived in exile among the Gentiles, and "started with the idea of converting rather than exterminating the heathen" (Ridley 1996:192).

We agree that religion can indeed be a dividing factor and can be discriminatory in theory and practice, but in essence, if we accept its bona fides as expounded in believers' respected holy books and in other writings, most religions seem to share values that, if properly adhered to, will lead to peace and stability. In taking this stance, we distance ourselves from the Malthusian view that life is unavoidably a constant struggle for existence and competition, as well as from the Hobbesian dictum of *bellum omnium contra omnes*. Our standpoint is based on the view that the discovery of a number of commonly shared moral precepts (for instance, versions of the Golden Rule) amongst different religions, despite disagreements about doctrine and metaphysical beliefs, seems to offer *prima facie* evidence for common moral ground among people as a reality (Donovan 1986:368).

We are convinced that through inter-religious dialogue, with a focus on widely shared moral precepts, we could discover, even in the most divided and violent societies, a number of shared moral values on which their members could build a more peaceful society. The challenge, therefore, is to persuade anti-social enemies and opponents to engage in such an inter-religious / intra-religious discourse. This is required because as citizens of our particular country we all share a similar fate (Miller 2013:223). It is possible, according to Donovan (1986:370), for people who hold quite divergent views and beliefs about "the way the world is" to act side by side in situations of common concern. According to Donovan

(1986:372), the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights can be seen as an example of how widely differing individuals and groups can reach a standpoint "without theological or ideological justification, yet … reflects ethical norms defined by common consent." McKay and Whitehouse (2015:465) go so far as to say that both morality and religion are largely arbitrary in that they are not coherent natural structures. This, in their opinion, makes it difficult to see connections between them. According to them, "the relationship between religion and morality expands into a matrix of separate relationships between fractionated elements" (McKay & Whitehouse 2015:465). Thus, some aspects of "religion" may promote some aspects of "morality," just as others serve to suppress or obstruct the same or different aspects. We maintain that even if this were indeed the case, efforts to reach common moral ground are within the reach of violent and conflicting individuals and groups.

The discussion in the following section focuses on how various religions around the world, some of them also present in countries afflicted by violence, anomie and crime, tend to share the same or similar moral values. We do this for two purposes. First, the inter-religious dialogue between antagonistic parties should focus on the values shared by all religions, although variously formulated. In doing so, the current violence in their countries could be ameliorated. Second, in the subsequent section, we examine the possibility that education in countries plagued by violence could focus on such widely shared moral values, thereby equipping future citizens to be in agreement as far as their adherence to shared moral values is concerned.

5. Common moral ground among various religious orientations

We restrict our attention to the core values of four mainstream religions around the world: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and secularism (we treat the last of these as a religious orientation for the reasons mentioned above), the recognition and application of which could lead to greater moral fortitude, and thereby to peace in violent societies. We concentrate mainly on those values that embody love, concern, empathy and compassion for other people – all arguably potential contributors to peace and the avoidance of violence – and not on the entire ethical value systems of the various religions.

Space does not allow a discussion of more than the moral value systems associated with the abovementioned four religions. There is no doubt, however, that most other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism and Baha'i, uphold moral values that are in many ways compatible with those discussed below (Vigil 2008:199; Revision World Networks 2018). Moreover, philosophers who did not necessarily align themselves with any

particular mainstream religion formulated a view on the Golden Rule. Rousseau, for instance, formulated it as "Do unto others as you would have them do to you," and Kant as "Act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal rule" (Comte-Sponville 2005:8, 9).

Judaism celebrates the Torah as the basis of all ethical teaching. Based on this starting point, people are called upon not to act only out of self-interest without a commitment to the common good, and not to focus only on self-esteem, thereby losing sight of the need to care for others as well. Only one thing will bring lasting happiness: making life better for others. People survive only by caring for others (Sacks 2021:2-3). Sacks (2021:17) is adamant that "when there is no shared morality, there is no society." Anomie, in his opinion, is the absence of a shared common good. A society with a strong, shared common moral code is a high-trust place, Sacks (2021:19) contends. Morality is born when individuals focus on other people and not on themselves. Sacks (2021:59) agrees with most ethicists that people learn to focus on other people and on the common good through subtle interaction with family, friends, peers, teachers, mentors and all other people with whom they come in contact. They develop empathy, sympathy, kindness and reciprocity through such interactions.

The key ethical rule of Christianity is to love your neighbour as you love yourself. This injunction is known as the Golden Rule, based on Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31 and Galatians 5:14. According to Stoker (1967:251), this principle means that each person should take loving care of the interests of others. Jesus proposed an ethic of renunciation, the downgrading of one's own worldly concerns, and greater emphasis on humility, loving and caring (Baggini 2020:17, 85, 86, 93). According to Van Aarde (2020:11), an ethics of radical inclusivity would mean the absence of discrimination with regard to gender, ethnicity, nationality or age. To be inclusive of other people requires respect and treatment of them with a heart of love, to speak of and to them as Christ would have spoken to and about them. According to Hoppe (2020:82), "Christians ... follow this rule to honor and obey Jesus – the only one who has ever followed the Golden Rule perfectly. ... [They] follow it out of thanksgiving that they are already golden in God's eyes because of Christ's work on the cross."

According to Davids (2018:671), it is not possible to discuss the Islamic view of morality and of moral values without taking into account the starting point provided by the Quran in chapter 16.92: "Truly, God orders justice and good works." The *Sunnah* or the "walked path" (McDowell & Brown 2009:102) states, in line with this principle, "Not one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself" (Vigil 2008:199). According to the Quran, a person's behaviour should be guided by values pertaining to justice, human well-being,

the social good and defensible social relations. It also emphasizes traits such as tolerance, courage and social ethics such as humility and self-sacrifice, as well as ethical concepts such as good and evil, justice and oppression, patience and kindness (Ramadhan et al. 2021:2). According to Davids (2018:686), social violence can be avoided if a person (a Muslim) also interacts with others (non-Muslims). In doing so, misunderstanding of others, others, their views and actions can be avoided. To interact with other people could mean having to deal with disagreement and criticism. She concludes that when Muslims follow this principle, they enact their roles as humans in society in acknowledgement of their commitment to God and His creation.

From the point of view of many Western secular thinkers, ethics is a set of informal social mores based on consensus, due to the fact, according to Bazalgette (2017:1), that empathy is "a wonderful quality that nearly all of us share." Nussbaum (2012:166) refers to this quality as empathetic imagination. All people, irrespective of religious orientation, possess the ability to like, love, respect, help and show kindness. All people also have the responsibility to provide to others what they expect for themselves (Pinker 2019:3-4). Morality, says Haidt (2012:xii), is the capacity that makes civilization possible. Human beings, even in tribal communities, interact with other individuals, and during such interactions they learn from their parents and/or by trial and error, by copying whatever is the most common tradition or fashion among adult role models (Ridley 1996:180-181; Haidt 2012:10). Paley (2021:165) agrees that people tend to adopt their principles from their peers and other group members. He also insists that, despite religious and other differences, "morality glues us together; it affects how we act towards other people. Morals bind us into cooperating groups with other humans, ... and [are therefore] beneficial" (Paley 2021:17, 42), in that, in many cases, they lead to compassionate action (Bazalgette 2017:6). The pursuit of an ethic of care and empathy remains a key challenge, in particular with respect to those who do not share one's own religious background. When we encounter people whose religious orientiation differs from ours, says Nussbaum (2012:165), we ought to focus on the ethical virtues of generosity, kindness and love, leaving aside for the time being the issue of religious truth.

We conclude with a statement by Vigil (2008:206): "If the golden rule is a 'least' rule and at the same time the 'greatest' common rule religions understand as being in God, then clearly the question of religion itself does not come into it. ... Religious dialogue itself should be introduced in the spirit of the golden rule." Hoppe (2020:82) concurs: "Do unto others as you would have them do to you. ... Most world religions teach [this rule]. Even most atheists agree with it. It's the closest thing that our world has to a universal moral code."

6. Inter- and intra-religious dialogue is a *conditio sine qua non* for the eradication of violence and for the promotion of peace – but is often neglected or overlooked

It was encouraging that, despite the seriously adverse political and social conditions prevailing in Venezuela, in 2020, representatives of the Catholic Church as well as of various Protestant, evangelical, and Jewish organizations created the Inter-religious Social Forum of Venezuela (*Foro Interreligioso Social de Venezuela*). This group was constituted to align and strengthen the capacities of various religious and social organizations for the purpose of "confront[ing] the humanitarian crisis, pursu[ing] peace, and reconstruct[ing] the country" (Outreach Aid to the Americas 2023). Although this forum was erected with good intentions, it never became operational due to the prevailing social and political difficulties in the country.

Also in June 2023, an interfaith dialogue, jointly organized by Soka Gakkai International-Venezuela (SGIV), the United Religions Initiative and the Luis Dolan Chair at the Central University of Venezuela, was held at the Venezuela Peace and Friendship Cultural Centre in Caracas. Various religious leaders and scholars, including SGIV Vice-General Director Gustavo Cabrera, spoke on topics such as peace, spirituality and coexistence (SGI-USA 2023). The emphasis on bringing about peace in the turbulent social and political conditions – much of which have resulted from the government's oppressive policies and tactics – in Venezuela can be lauded.

As far as South Africa is concerned, inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue has occurred only sporadically, such as when representatives of numerous faith groups gathered at the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1999 for the purpose of "dialogue and action" (Bamford & Rice 1999:n.p.), or during discussions in media talk shows and in the daily press (Roux 2016:307-321; Willemse 2021:1). As Resane (2021:1, 9) remarked, "South Africa can be a unified diversified society living in peace if dialogue is given a chance … [there is a] need for a theology of dialogue to intervene as a measure of bringing harmony into the situation." Human Rights Watch (2022:n.p.) concluded that "South Africa failed to take meaningful measures to improve the protection of social and economic rights." Even the Moral Regeneration Movement, instituted in 1996 (Moral Regeneration Movement 2018), has stopped functioning and has, for all intents and purposes, disappeared from the scene. Saunderson-Meyer (2016) predicted its demise already in 2016, stating that the ideals of the movement were "laudable but irretrievably doomed."

The situation in both of these countries is such that the entrenchment of the right to freedom of religion and belief in the constitution is, in practice, not sufficient to bring about peace in its citizenry. Many conditions in Venezuela impede the free exercise of this right and also prevent any fruitful inter- and intra-reli-

gious / inter- and intra-faith dialogue. Space does not allow a detailed discussion of how the current socio-political conditions in Venezuela impose this limitation on fruitful dialogue. However, the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Latin America (2024) has affirmed that government and societal practices have made exercising the right to religious freedom very difficult. The government's constant monitoring and sanctioning of all forms of opposition, and of everything perceived to be in opposition to it and its policies, render this type of dialogue very difficult, if not totally impossible.

South Africans have experienced similar problems with inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue due to widespread social unrest and high levels of crime and violence. They have, however, not experienced the same levels of negative intervention from the government. Although there is a high level of mutual respect among the different religions in South Africa, at least at the senior leadership level, this has not significantly filtered down to society in general. The *South African Policy of Religion and Religious Instruction* (RSA 2003) provides sufficient scope for inter-faith dialogue in schools, but it has so far proved to be at best only a partial solution to the social problems with which people have to contend. As argued in the next section, it remains important to encourage children from a tender age to engage in inter-religious and inter-faith dialogue.

7. Inter-religious dialogue should begin early, with early childhood education

As pointed out by Haidt (2012:5-7), children can understand and master moral values from a very young age, through interactions with their parents, caregivers, peers and other people. Moral education, therefore, should begin at a very young age at home, and also in school, already in the early childhood education phase, in the context of subjects such as elementary social studies, ethics education, moral education, values education, civic education, life skills or life orientation. Exposing learners from a very tender age to these fields of study will hopefully enable them to master, in due course, the values that are basic to morally justifiable behaviour and social interaction (Nguyen 2018:13, 21). According to South African moral values education expert De Klerk-Luttig (2023:21), teachers in a well-functioning education system can fill a moral gap that parents might have left in the upbringing of their children. One way in which this can be done is for the teachers to serve as morally reliable and responsible role models (Brits 2022:9).

School education in Venezuela is in such turmoil that a concerted programme of values or citizenship education could not be effectively put into practice up to this point. The vast majority of Venezuelan children are enrolled in school, and

they should have been exposed to moral education in a bid to lower the levels of violence, crime and anomie in the country. In the three-year period ending in 2021, around 1.2 million Venezuelan learners dropped out of the school system, and hence they did not have any meaningful exposure to moral education in school (Marques 2023:n.p.). The number of school-age learners who did not attend the free schools increased to 557,327 in 2019, according to a 2019 UNESCO study (Langlois 2023:n.p.). Moreover, nearly half of all adults have had no secondary education, and many have received no formal schooling at all. The possibility of exposing learners to moral education is also very small in that most schools suffer from poorly trained teachers, and in that on average only half the mandated days of instruction are available due to holidays and strikes. Furthermore, many schools have closed due to poor economic conditions, with teachers quitting to find better-paying occupations elsewhere (Flóres & Beccara 2019:183). Poor learner attendance can also be ascribed to a lack of water and food at school and at home, one of the side effects of Venezuela's current economic crisis (Langlois 2023:n.p.). The humanitarian crisis has caused more than five million Venezuelans to flee the country since 2015.

Probably because of all these shortcomings in the education system, including the lack of a moral education programme in primary and secondary education, and to promote his own political philosophy centring on socialism, former President Hugo Chávez launched the Bolivarian Missions system (Duffy 2015:652, 660). Even though values of solidarity and humanity are being taught, however, the Bolivarian Education Missions programme has an overtly political agenda, namely to construct an alternative socialist democracy (Duffy 2015:662).

South Africa's national *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements* (CAPS) (Department of Basic Education 2011) provide for two subject fields in which moral education could be taught in schools. In the Life Skills subject field for very young learners (Grade R to Grade 3), provision is made for teaching about values and attitudes (CAPS 2011a:9). Learners in the intermediate phase (Grades 4-6) are to be taught values such as social well-being, positive relationships, and respect for the rights of others (CAPS 2011b:8). Learners in the first three grades of the senior phase (Grades 7-9) are to be educated about values such as self in society, quality of life, and the maintenance of relationships and good communication. A significant part of the curriculum is devoted to "health and safety issues related to violence" (CAPS 2011c:22). The curriculum for the grades 10-12 focuses on the inculcation of values centred on the development of the self in society, social and environmental responsibility, and democracy and human rights (CAPS 2011d: 12-25). No reference is made in the CAPS, as far as we could determine, to the need for inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue to help in eradicating the current violence, crime and anomie in South Africa. "Values education" and "peace education" do not appear in the indices of two widely used

textbooks in this learning area (Jordaan & Naudé 2021; Nel 2019). The alarming aspect of the situation in South Africa is that, even though learners have been exposed to the school subject Life Skills and Life Orientation since 2011, the country's levels of violence, criminality and anomie have steadily risen.

8. Concluding remark

As stated at the outset, the core claim of this article is that since most if not all religions share much the same moral values, in particular the Golden Rule of compassionately caring for others and their interests, an inter- / intra-religious dialogue should be conducted for the purpose of lowering the levels of crime, violence and anomie. In countries that enjoy constitutional protection of religious freedom, of which Venezuela and South Africa are examples, violence could be assuaged to some extent if the perpetrators thereof could be persuaded to become more knowledgeable of the moral values shared by most religions. Not only should inter-religious dialogue about commonly shared, religiously based moral values be encouraged in violent societies, but upcoming generations also be taught from a very young age how, why and when to engage in such dialogue.

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