

The Church order of De Mist and the advent of religious freedom in South Africa

An important contribution to the common good in South African society

Johan M van der Merwe¹

Abstract

The arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in the Cape in 1652 brought the reformed faith to Southern Africa. For nearly two hundred years the government in the Cape not only protected the reformed religion, but also prohibited any other form of religion. This changed with the introduction of the Church Order of de De Mist in 1804. Other Christian denominations and even other religions were then allowed. This article describes the changes that took place with the introduction of the Church Order of De Mist. It then compares the Church Order of De Mist with the current Constitution of the Republic of South Africa in order to illustrate that the introduction of the Church Order of De Mist was indeed the start of religious freedom in South Africa.

Keywords Religious freedom, Church Order, De Mist, Cape colony, Reformed faith, common good, Constitution of South Africa, Islam, Judaism, Roman Catholic Church, South Africa.

The 25th of July 1804 is the day which can be commemorated as the day on which religious freedom was announced in the then called Cape Colony.² Although it was a baby step, it was the first step. Coertzen is correct when he states that religious freedom was not guaranteed before 1997,³ the start of religious freedom in South Africa can be traced back to 25 July 1804 with the adoption of the Church Order of De Mist. In the year in which South Africa celebrates 20 years of freedom and democracy it is important to revisit this important event which changed the religious landscape in South Africa forever. The importance of this event is further confirmed by the fact that not even the notorious apartheid policies of the 20th century could change the fact that people had the right to practice the religion of their choice. Although the Church Order has been severely criticized

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² Meijer, GJ Ratifikasie [ratificatie] in die gereformeerde kerkrecht, 1995. www.kerkrecht.nl accessed on 20 April 2014.

³ Coertzen, P 2008 Freedom of religion then and now: 1652 – 2008. *Verbum et Ecclesiae* JRG 29 (2) 346.

in the past,⁴ it was nevertheless an important contribution to the common good in South African society.

The aim of this paper is to describe how the Church Order of De Mist changed the religious landscape of South Africa for the common good. In order to do so, the paper will firstly describe the lack of religious freedom in the Cape Colony in the time before De Mist. Secondly it will focus on De Mist and his Church Order as well as the consequences of his Church Order with regard to religious freedom. Thirdly it will compare the Church Order of De Mist with the current Constitution of South Africa and the Charter for Religious Freedom before it will conclude that what we celebrate today with regard to religious freedom, indeed all started with the Church Order of De Mist.

1. The Cape Colony: 1652 – 1803

One of the important features of the first hundred and fifty years of the history of the Cape Colony was the lack of religious freedom. In order to understand this, it is important to understand the church state relationship of the time. This is no easy quest. Coertzen is correct when he states that: “Many scholars have tried to define the relationship between church and state in South Africa between 1652 and 1994.”⁵ He then argues that “it was not a theocratic model of the relationship between church and state that determined the place of religion in the South African society from 1652, but rather a Constantine model. This meant that the political authorities, often with their own understanding of what Christianity is, were dominant over church authorities and that the political authorities assisted, influenced and sometimes fully controlled and used the church. Gerstner is correct when he states: “The position of the Dutch Reformed Church in colonial South Africa was parallel to that of the church in the Netherlands at the time except for some unique prerogatives claimed by the colonial administration.”⁶ He then goes further by saying that the colonial government had more direct influence on the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa than the civil government in the Netherlands because of the absence of a local classis. This control of state over church meant that the state had a role to play in the advancement and support of the “true religion” even to the extent of using its coercive power. The state, in various degrees, determined the position of church and religion in society without denying freedom of religion.⁷ This was the

⁴ Compare Van der Watt, Pont and numerous others.

⁵ Coertzen, P 2008 Freedom of religion then and now: 1652 – 2008. *Verbum et Ecclesiae* JRG 29 (2), 346.

⁶ Gerstner, JN 1997 A Christian monopoly: The Reformed Church and Colonial society under Dutch Rule, in Elphick, R and Davenport, R *Christianity in South Africa*, 20.

⁷ Coertzen, 349.

model prevalent in the Cape Colony. Although other religions were tolerated, the fact of the matter is, that for the first 150 years no other religion but Christianity was officially allowed in the Cape. To be more precise, only churches from the reformed tradition of Christianity were allowed by the Dutch government.

How did it all start? Although the prime reason for establishing the refreshment station in the Cape in 1652 was commercial in nature, the Dutch East India Company did not forget the importance of the “*Kerke Christi*.”⁸ Van der Watt argues correctly that colonization and church planting was two sides of the same coin.⁹ From the colony’s beginnings as a garrison, the Dutch East India Company provided for Dutch Reformed services led by officially recognized religious workers.¹⁰ The church in the East Indies of which the Cape was a part, derived its existence from the active interest of the trading company.¹¹ This was exemplary of the Constantine model¹² which had its roots in the reformation. One of the important confessions of faith of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was the Belgic Confession of Faith. This Confession was part of the Dutch Reformed Church that came to South Africa in 1652, as was also the case in the Dutch Reformed Churches in the other colonies of the Dutch Republic. Article 36 of the Belgic Confession of Faith states that:

The government’s task is not limited to caring for and watching over the public domain but extends also to upholding the sacred ministry, to remove and destroy all idolatry and false worship of the Antichrist; to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ and to see that the Word of God is preached everywhere so that God might be honoured and served by everyone, as He commands in His Word.¹³

In the light of this article, the government in the Netherlands saw it as their responsibility not only to enable the church, but also to control ecclesiastical matters.¹⁴ This did not only happen in the Netherlands, but became the norm in the different colonies. The Dutch East India Company claimed a God given authority to direct the affairs of the church and therefore, church affairs in the colonies were left to the governor and his Political Council. The church was regarded as an instrument of secular authority to which all requests had to be directed. This is confirmed by a letter from governor Simon van der Stel to the incoming governor, his son Simon van

⁸ Van der Watt, PB 1976. *Die Ned Geref kerk 1652-1824*, 3.

⁹ Van der Watt, 3.

¹⁰ Gerstner, 16.

¹¹ Hofmeyer, JW 1994 *Christianity in the period of Dutch colonisation*, in Hofmeyer, JW and Pillay, GJ A *History of Christianity in South Africa Vol 1*, 19.

¹² Coertzen, 349.

¹³ The Belgic Confession 1561, www.creeds.net accessed on 15 April 2014.

¹⁴ Coertzen, 350.

der Stel in which he: “invoked God’s grace for the ‘directing of Church and politics to the benefit of the company’s profit and interest here which shall extend to the glorifying of the all holy name of God and the enhancement of the new governor’s reputation.’”¹⁵

This is confirmed by the second charter of the Dutch East India Company of 1622 which stated clearly that it was also the task of the company to “conserveren het publijcke geloof”¹⁶ (to protect the public faith). This meant that in the Cape, the Reformed Church was the only church to be recognized by the government.¹⁷

History tells how this played out in the Cape. From 1652, during the first years of the Cape colony, Coertzen quotes Vorster saying that “responsibility for religion and the spiritual care for the people at the Cape resided with the Political Council under the leadership of the commander.”¹⁸ The church was regarded as an instrument of secular authority. This changed in 1665 with arrival of the first permanent minister, reverend Johannes van Arckel. Van Arckel started by founding the first congregation in the Cape and appointing the first Church Council.¹⁹ The first elder was Abraham Schut and first deacon Joan Reynierzen. All spiritual matters and pastoral care, were now the responsibility of the Church Council, however, all decisions that the Church Council took had to be submitted to the Political Council before they could be implemented. The Political Council elected elders and deacons from names that the Church Council submitted to them. Political Commissioners represented the Political Council at all the meetings of the different Church Councils.²⁰

The control of the Political Council over religious affairs and the privileged position of the Dutch Reformed Church are further demonstrated by two examples. The first was the fact that they refused the request of the French Huguenots to install their own Church Council in Drakenstein.²¹ The French Huguenots arrived in the Cape in 1688 and established themselves mainly in the districts of Drakenstein, Stellenbosch and Franschoek.²² They initially formed part of the Reformed Church congregations but due to mainly language reasons and the fact that they were accompanied by their own French minister, in 1689 they asked to form their own

¹⁵ Gerstner, 20.

¹⁶ Van der Watt, 4.

¹⁷ Hofmeyer, 25.

¹⁸ Vorster, JD 1956. *Die kerkregtelike ontwikkeling van die Kaapse Kerk onder die Kompanjie 1652-1792*, 38.

¹⁹ The minutes of the first meeting of the congregation are dated 23 August 1665 under the title: “Kerken – boek van de Caab van Goede Hoop.”

²⁰ Coertzen, 351.

²¹ Hofmeyer, 13.

²² Hofmeyer, 13.

congregation. Although the request was later granted in 1691 when the first Church Council was elected and reverend Pierre Simond was appointed as minister, this only happened after the Political Council granted permission.

The establishment of the Lutheran Church serves as a second example. About 28 percent of the early settlers were German immigrants.²³ It would be a fair assumption to say that most of them were members of the Lutheran Church. Shortly after van Arckel's arrival in the Cape, the newly established Church Council decided that Lutherans of good standing, also being "reformed"²⁴ would be allowed to partake of Holy Communion. In 1742 a petition signed by 69 people was presented to the Political Council, requesting permission for public worship and a minister for the local Lutherans. This was rejected.²⁵ In the next four decades various attempts were made to gain recognition for the Lutheran church, without success. It was only in 1778 with the help of the Lutheran Consistory in Amsterdam, that the Lutherans in the Cape were granted the freedom to conduct worship on the same terms as existed in Batavia. In 1780 the first Lutheran minister, Andreas Kolver, arrived in the Cape.²⁶

With both the Huguenots and the Lutherans having trouble establishing their own congregations although they came from a reformed background, other non-reformed churches and other religions had no chance at all while the Dutch were governing the Cape.

This is confirmed by the fact that despite a small community at the Cape, the Roman Catholic Church was excluded from the Cape Colony.²⁷ The attitude towards Roman Catholic Christians is illustrated by a remark of reverend Johannes Apeldoorn, minister of Stellenbosch when he called the Roman Catholics "Antichristian, Papist Babylon" because they rejected the doctrine of justification by faith alone.²⁸ Gerstner is correct when he states that: "during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the colonial administration engaged in largely successful efforts to suppress Roman Catholicism in the colony."²⁹ Other religions like Islam and Judaism underwent the same treatment. Although there were Muslims and Jews in the Cape Colony, no official form of worship was allowed. This would only change with the introduction of the Church Order of De Mist in 1804.

²³ Hofmeyer, 28.

²⁴ The Lutheran church also stems from the Reformation of Martin Luther of 1517.

²⁵ Hofmeyer, 25.

²⁶ Hofmeyer, 25.

²⁷ Donaldson, ME 1994 Christianity in the period of English colonisation, in Hofmeyer, JW and Pillay, GJ A History of Christianity in South Africa Vol 1, 76.

²⁸ Gestner, 21.

²⁹ Gestner, 22.

2. The Church Order of JA de Mist changes the religious landscape

Change in the religious landscape of the Cape Colony would not take place without political change. That change came in 1795 when the Cape was first occupied by Britain during the war against Napoleonic France.³⁰ In 1803 the Treaty of Amiens again ceded the Cape to the Netherlands, by then constituted as the Batavian Republic. In keeping with the changes that took place in the Netherlands, the Cape came under new influences of rationalism and deism. This is confirmed by Davenport when he states that change in Europe also “brought French revolutionary deism to the Cape.”³¹ The new Dutch Commissioner, General JA de Mist, had done a survey of the Colony in 1802 and prepared a comprehensive memorandum outlining future policy. One of the important aspects of De Mist’s memorandum which was introduced was the Church Order of 1804.³²

The Church Order consisted of two parts. The first was general principles and stipulations³³ and the second instructions³⁴ about the management of different church societies in the Colony. It was especially the first part that opened the Colony to other churches, societies and religions and changed the religious landscape in the Cape forever. The different important articles read as follows:

Art 1. All religious associations which for the furtherance of virtue and good conduct respect a Supreme Being will have equal protection by law.

Art 2. All religious associations should confess their faith publicly, withhold themselves from criticizing each other and should have open right of admission.

Art 3. There will be no special privileges awarded in civil society to any religious group.

Art 5 Each religious group has the right to their own teachings as long as they do not intervene with public Order in which case the governor has the right to intervene.³⁵

In terms of this ordinance the colonial government would continue to provide for ecclesiastical needs of the colony and the Dutch Reformed Church continued in its position in the colony, but other denominations and religions were also entitled to

³⁰ Donaldson, 39.

³¹ Davenport, R 1997 Settlement, conquest and theological controversy: The Churches of nineteenth century European Immigrants, in Elphick, R and Davenport, R 1997 Christianity in South Africa, 51.

³² Donaldson, 45.

³³ Algemene Beginselen en bepalingen.

³⁴ Houdende Voorschriften omtrent het behoorlyk Bestuur der toegelaaten kerk- genoodschappen binnen deze Volksplanting.

³⁵ Pont, AD 1991. Die historiese agtergronde van ons kerklike Reg deel 2, 179.

support.³⁶ Pont argues correctly when he says that from the start it is clear that the Church Order of de Mist brought a totally new dispensation to the Cape. For the church in the Cape this meant progress and was therefore acceptable.³⁷

Although the Church Order was severely criticized for the fact that “where the church gave support it would also exercise control,”³⁸ it opened the way for other churches and religions other than reformed to establish themselves in the Cape Colony.

2.1 The Roman Catholic Church

One of the churches that immediately took advantage of this opportunity was the Roman Catholic Church. The earliest imprint of Christianity on Southern Africa was in 1488 when Bartholomew Diaz, searching for the sea route to India, planted three large stone crosses on South African soil. The settlement of the Dutch in 1652 meant that the Roman Catholic Church was excluded from this territory until 1804.³⁹ Although some Catholics did live at the Cape before 1795, they were obliged to conceal their faith.⁴⁰ In 1804 the church sent three priests to the Cape and services began in a room in the Castle of Good Hope.⁴¹ When the British occupied the colony again in 1806, the commander, Sir David Baird expelled the three priests and repatriated them with the garrison in which they served. Catholic chaplains were sent out after 1817 and they were followed by Fr Scully who arrived in the Cape in 1820.⁴² Scully served in the Cape for two years and even built a church which was used until 1837.⁴³ He was succeeded by two priests in 1822, namely Fr Wagenaar and Fr Rishtow. Both of them received a living of 100 pounds per annum from the colonial government which clearly indicated the ambivalence of the government towards Roman Catholicism.⁴⁴ When the parliament in England passed the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, restrictions were removed from Catholics in the colonies.⁴⁵ This led to the arrival of the first resident bishop, Patrick Raymond Griffith, an Irish Dominican, on Easter Sunday 1838.⁴⁶ On his arrival in Cape Town Griffith found the ruins of a washed away chapel and

³⁶ Donaldson, 45.

³⁷ Pont, 191.

³⁸ Donaldson, 45.

³⁹ Pillay, 7.

⁴⁰ Brain, J 1997 *Moving from the margins to the mainstream: The Roman Catholic Church*, in Elphick, R and Davenport, R 1997 *Christianity in South Africa*, 195.

⁴¹ Van der Watt, 75.

⁴² Van der Watt, 76.

⁴³ Donaldson, 76.

⁴⁴ Donaldson, 76.

⁴⁵ Donaldson, 76.

⁴⁶ Brain, 195.

a scattered congregation with meagre funds. During his twenty-five years in the Cape, he laid the foundation for the Roman Catholic Church in South Africa.⁴⁷ Although the Church Order of de Mist changed the official religious face of the colony, it did nothing for the anti-Catholic sympathies in the colony. Members of the Dutch Reformed Church were warned against the Roman Catholic Church. When Johanna C Bird indicated that she had become a member of the Catholic Church, she was excommunicated by the Church Council of Cape Town.⁴⁸

2.2 Islam

The first traces of an Islamic community at the Cape appeared in the seventeenth century. It grew slowly in the eighteenth century and rather spectacularly in the centuries that followed.⁴⁹ In the beginning of the nineteenth century there was a fairly strong and flourishing Muslim community in Cape Town. It included slaves and free blacks. The Dutch East India Company brought slaves, political exiles and even convicts from Indonesia and India including Bengal and the Malabar Coast to the Cape. These people, who had a long tradition of Islam behind them, brought Islam to the Cape. They were responsible for the introduction and spreading of the religion.⁵⁰ Many of these convicts stayed in the Cape after the completion of their sentences and became the nucleus of the Islam population, known as *Vrye Swarten* (Free blacks). Although In Corydon of Ceylon purchased two properties in Cape Town September 1794 and was the first muslim to own property in the Cape,⁵¹ the Cape Muslims were severely restricted in practicing their religion due to the *Statutes of India*, a set of rules aimed at restricting the spread of Islam in the Dutch colonies.⁵² Shell describes the early practice of Islam in the Cape as follows: "It was spread by word of mouth by *hafez* (persons who had memorised the Quran) and in ceremonies conducted at night in secret mosques in Muslim homes (*langes* or *masjids*), and later, at the end of the eighteenth century when the Muslim congregation became larger, in the town's quarry. The secrecy was necessary: the laws of the Dutch East India Company imposed heavy penalties, including the confiscation of the slave and a stiff fine on all who suffered their slaves to embrace Mohammedanism."⁵³

⁴⁷ Brain, 196.

⁴⁸ Van der Watt, 77.

⁴⁹ Hofmeyer, 29.

⁵⁰ Mahida, EM 1993 *History of Muslims in South Africa: A chronology*, 2.

⁵¹ Mahida, 12.

⁵² Mahida, 14.

⁵³ Shell, Robert – C. 1997. Between Christ and Mohammed: Conversion, slavery and gender in the urban Western Cape, in Elphick, R and Davenport, R *Christianity in South Africa*, 268.

This all changed with the introduction of the Church Order of de Mist. The importance of this event is reflected by Mahida when he wrote: "Thus on 25 July 1804 the patience and perseverance of the Cape Muslims were rewarded when religious freedom was permitted for the first time in the Cape of Good Hope."⁵⁴ Several prayer rooms were erected and the first piece of land for a Muslim cemetery was granted to Frans van Bengalen in 1805.⁵⁵ Although the first *masjid* was already constructed in 1794 important additions were only made in 1807.⁵⁶ Although Muslims were allowed to practice their faith before 1804, the history of the Muslim community in the Cape confirms the importance of the Church Order of De Mist with regard to freedom of religion. Muslims now had the same rights as their fellow Christian countrymen.

3. The Church Order of de Mist and the Constitution of South Africa

It is not only historical events that confirm the importance of the Church Order of de Mist with regard to religious freedom. A second important confirmation arises from a comparison with the current Constitution of South Africa. The final Constitution (1996) was agreed on by a Constitutional Assembly and adopted by Parliament.⁵⁷ According to Du Plessis section 15 (1) of the 1996 Constitution "unequivocally entrenches the right to religious freedom."⁵⁸ The Constitution states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion."⁵⁹ Du Plessis interprets this further by saying that: "This provision goes beyond protecting the right to freedom of religion in its narrow connotation and also guarantees freedom of conscience, thought, belief and opinion. This probably includes the right not to observe any religion at all."⁶⁰

He goes further by saying that: "Tolerance of religious diversity goes beyond putting up with the free exercise of divergent religious beliefs and practices. It also entails the evenhanded treatment of diverse religions and religious groups, communities and institutions with potentially conflicting interests. A broadly conceived establishment clause can play a significant role in guaranteeing such treatment."⁶¹

⁵⁴ Mahida, 14.

⁵⁵ Mahida, 15.

⁵⁶ Mahida, 16.

⁵⁷ Du Plessis L Religious rights and freedom in "the New South Africa." Brigham Young University Law Review, 239.

⁵⁸ Du Plessis, 449.

⁵⁹ Du Plessis, 64.

⁶⁰ Du Plessis, 449.

⁶¹ Du Plessis, 449.

Du Plessis' point of view is confirmed by the fact that the Constitution does not only guarantee freedom of religion. Section 9 (1) states: "Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law."⁶² This means that the Constitution guarantees equality before and equal protection by the law.⁶³ The Constitution further states in Section 9 (3) that: "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience of belief, culture, language and birth."⁶⁴ It is clear that unfair discrimination against "Anyone on one or more grounds"⁶⁵ of which religion, conscience and belief are specifically named is unconstitutional. Du Plessis is correct when he says that: "Protection of religious rights and freedom under the equality clause is arguably as significant and indispensable as their protection under Section 15 (1)."

To my mind, the Constitution of South Africa (1996) continues what was started by the Church Order of de Mist with regard to religious freedom. What started as a small step by De Mist became a huge leap in the Constitution of the post-apartheid South Africa. Although the Constitution is not perfect and has according to Du Plessis "rendered religiously biased provisions both in statutes and in the common law"⁶⁶ it constitutes freedom of religion in a post-apartheid South Africa and points in the same direction as the Church Order of De Mist did in 1804. In that sense it confirms the fact that the Church Order of de Mist was indeed the first step towards religious freedom in South Africa.

4. The Church Order of De Mist and the South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms⁶⁷

The South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms is another important benchmark in the history of religious freedom in South African. Similarities with the Church Order of de Mist will further help to ascertain if the Church Order of de Mist was indeed the start of religious freedom in South Africa.

A few examples from the Charter serve as illustration to show how religious freedom is understood in a post-apartheid South Africa. In Article 1 the Charter states that: "Every person has the right to believe according to their own religious or philosophical beliefs or convictions and to choose which faith, worldview, reli-

⁶² Constitution: South African 1996. www.gov.za/documents/constitution accessed on 17 April 2014.

⁶³ Du Plessis 449.

⁶⁴ Constitution: South African 1996. www.gov.za/documents/constitution accessed on 17 April 2014.

⁶⁵ Du Plessis.

⁶⁶ Du Plessis, 448.

⁶⁷ As amended 6 August and 1 October 2009.

gion or religious institution to subscribe to, affiliate with or belong to.”⁶⁸ In Article 2 it is stated that: “No person may be forced to believe, what to believe or what not to believe, or to act against their convictions.” Article 3 states: “Every person has the right to the impartiality and protection of the state in respect of religion.” It is then further explained that the state must create a positive and safe environment for the exercise of religious freedom.⁶⁹ Article 6 states that: “Every person has the right to freedom of expression in respect of religion.”⁷⁰ This is further qualified in 6.4 that: “Every person has the right to religious dignity, which includes not to be victimised, ridiculed or slandered on the ground of their faith, religion, convictions or religious activities.”⁷¹

This overview of the Charter of religious rights to my mind indicates clearly that there are important similarities with the first part of the Church Order of de Mist. The fact that the Church Order states that all religions have equal protection by law, there should be no privileges to certain groups and that all religious groups should confess their faith publically breathes the same essence as the Charter. If the Charter is recognized as the benchmark of how religious freedom is understood in South Africa, the Church Order of De Mist was indeed the first baby step on the way to religious freedom in the history of South Africa.

5. Conclusion

History tells the story of how the Church Order of de Mist changed the religious landscape of the Cape Colony and therefore of South Africa for the common good of all the people in South Africa. Although there were signs of religious tolerance before 1804, religious freedom was introduced by the Church Order of De Mist. Although state intervention in church affairs was still the order of the day, non-reformed churches and non-Christian religions were for the first time officially allowed. The history of the Roman Catholic Church in the Cape and the history of Islam in the Cape serve as two examples that confirm this statement. It is not only historical events that confirm the advent of religious freedom. Both the Constitution of South Africa and the Charter for Religious Rights and Freedoms are benchmarks with regards to religious freedom in a post-apartheid South Africa. A comparison between these two important documents and the Church Order of de Mist further

⁶⁸ South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms. www.familypolicyinstitute.com accessed on 23 April 2014.

⁶⁹ South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms. www.familypolicyinstitute.com accessed on 23 April 2014.

⁷⁰ South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms. www.familypolicyinstitute.com accessed on 23 April 2014.

⁷¹ South African Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms. www.familypolicyinstitute.com accessed on 23 April 2014.

underlines the fact that the Church Order of De Mist was indeed the first step to a common good with regard to religious freedom in South Africa.

The following table of comparison confirms this:

	Church Order of de Mist	Constitution of South Africa	Charter of Religious Rights and Freedoms
Religious freedom	Art 1. All religious associations which for the furtherance of virtue and good conduct respect a Supreme Being will have equal protection by law.	Section 15 (1). Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.	Art 1. Every person has the right to believe according to their own religious or philosophical beliefs or convictions and to choose which faith, worldview, religion or religious institution to subscribe to, affiliate with or belong to.
Equality	Art 3. There will be no special privileges awarded in civil society to any religious group.	Section 9 (1). Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.	Art 3. Every person has the right to the impartiality and protection of the state in respect of religion.

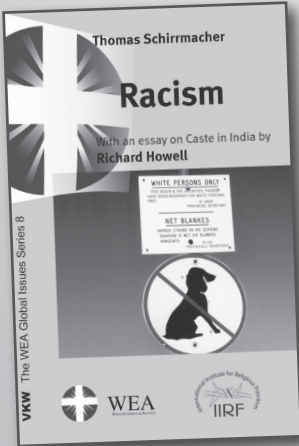
It is impossible to talk about the common good in South Africa without talking about religious freedom. It is impossible to talk about religious freedom without remembering the Church Order of de Mist. What started as a baby step in 1804 has become a giant leap for the common good 110 years later.

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