Religion, State and Society
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/crss20

The Road to Religious Tolerance in Education in South Africa (and Elsewhere): a Possible ‘Martian Perspective’
Johannes L. Van der Walt, Ferdinand J. Potgieter & Charl C. Wolhuter

To cite this article: Johannes L. Van der Walt, Ferdinand J. Potgieter & Charl C. Wolhuter (2010): The Road to Religious Tolerance in Education in South Africa (and Elsewhere): a Possible ‘Martian Perspective’, Religion, State and Society, 38:1, 29-52
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09637490903500507

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions
This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
The Road to Religious Tolerance in Education in South Africa (and Elsewhere): a Possible ‘Martian Perspective’

JOHANNES L. VAN DER WALT, FERDINAND J. POTGIETER & CHARL C. WOLHUTER

ABSTRACT
Combining Dennett’s notion of detached curiosity with Alexander’s notion of transcendental pragmatism, we propose in this paper, from a ‘Martian perspective’, that religious understanding and tolerance in education may be pursued from at least two different angles: (a) via the spiritual substrata of religions or via confessional pluralism or (b) via a combination of both. On the basis of a hermeneutic reconstructive interpretation of (a), we subsequently argue that current South African policy on education and religion has effectively placed a ban on confessional pluralism by relegating religious education to parental homes and religious institutions such as churches, temples and mosques. We conclude that it provides no opportunities for helping learners to understand the religious differences that they will have to engage with in future as adults. We suggest that it effectively engineers a pedagogy of religious essentialism and the subsequent reemergence (of an almost Bourdieuian model) of cultural and spiritual intolerance.

Martian Investigators Focus on a Problem
The problem addressed in this article can arguably be approached best by employing a tactic suggested by the American philosopher Daniel Dennett in his book Breaking the Spell (2007, pp. 74ff., p. 154). A Martian approach of ‘detached curiosity’, he suggests, will enable us to transcend the multitude of facts, circumstances and theories that we have to grapple with in our efforts to find a way towards religious understanding and tolerance (in an educational context). Dennett’s advice is helpful in that it enables one to ‘[get] some distance from the ordinary world’ and to ‘focus our attention on what is otherwise too obvious to notice . . .’. It will help, he argues, if we temporarily put ourselves in the shoes of a Martian, and thus become one of a team of ‘alien investigators who can be imagined to be unfamiliar with the phenomena they are observing here on Planet Earth’ (2007, p. 75).

Dennett’s perspective of detached curiosity is reminiscent of Davidson’s principle of interpretive charity and Rawls’ ‘veil of ignorance’. Davidson (1984, p. 27) contends that when the speaker of one language constructs a theory of meaning for the speaker of another, the theory builder must not be assumed to have direct insight into likely equivalences between his own tongue and that of the alien. What he must do is to find out, however he can, what sentences the alien holds true in his own tongue. The
linguist will then attempt to construct a characterisation of truth-for-alien which yields, as far as possible, a mapping of sentences held true (or false) by the alien on to sentences held true (or false) by the linguist. Charity in interpreting the words and thoughts of others is unavoidable in another direction as well: just as we must maximise agreement, or risk not making sense of what the alien is talking about, we must maximise the self-consistency attributed to him, on pain of not understanding him. We do not know what someone means unless we know what he believes; we do not know what someone believes unless we know what he means. In radical interpretation we are able to break this circle, if only incompletely, because we can sometimes tell that a person accedes to a sentence we do not understand (Davidson, 1984, p. 27).

Rawls’ position is that in order to set up a fair procedure, so that any principles agreed to will be just, the effects of specific contingencies which put people at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage will have to be nullified. In order to do this, Rawls wants to assume that all parties are sitting behind a ‘veil of ignorance’: they do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations (Rawls, 1971, p. 118).

Dennett’s perspective of detached curiosity also resonates well with, among others, Alexander’s (2006) attempt at understanding the purposes and meanings that humans attribute to their educational practices. While Dennett calls his heuristic a ‘Martian perspective’, Alexander refers to his as ‘transcendental pragmatism’. According to Alexander (2006, p. 214) knowledge is always the possession of an embodied agent, constrained by language, culture and history, who grasps, albeit imperfectly, the contours of an entity or the meaning of an idea that transcends – exists independently of or outside of – his or her limited experience. This requires – as a regulative principle – the existence of ideals beyond our own contextualised experience whose ultimate content remains shrouded in culture, history, language and tradition. To recognise the futility of a view from nowhere, we must acknowledge the possibility of a view from somewhere. Therefore Alexander is convinced that any educational research worthy of the name should be conducted within the context of explicit and adequately defended visions of the good – higher ideals that govern human activities – in which non-dogmatic ideals are adumbrated to govern policies, practices and pedagogies (2006, p. 215).

What Martian investigators – looking through their binoculars of transcendental pragmatism that defends visions of the higher ideals that govern our human activities – may see from outer space, is briefly described by Dennett himself (2007, p. 76): ‘... a population of over six billion people, almost all of whom devote a significant fraction of their time and energy to some sort of religious activity ... . Like other phenomena of nature, it exhibits both breathtaking diversity and striking commonalities, ravishingly ingenious design ... and yet baffling inscrutability ... .’

The Martians observe that the populations of practically all the countries of the world are differentiated into religious groups, in a huge variety of patterns.1 Looking more closely, the Martian investigators observe tension and strife between religious groups (Roux, 2003, p. 330; Vermeer and Van der Ven, 2004, p. 37; Ota and Chater, 2006, p. 1), but also efforts at achieving a better understanding of religious differences and promoting tolerance, within a context that earthlings call ‘education’ and within structures called ‘schools’.

They also observe – again through their binoculars of transcendental pragmatism – that the increasingly pluralist religious composition of the countries of Western Europe and North America during the second half of the twentieth century has given
rise to certain policy developments regarding the relationship between education and religion. Multicultural education has demanded that schools strive towards the cultural enrichment of all pupils (hereafter referred to as ‘learners’, as in South African education jargon), in order to introduce them to the cultural diversity of the world and to prepare them for living in such a world (Kelly et al., 1988, p. 442). This has had two implications for the relationship between religion and education. First, it has discouraged schools from having one specific religious ethos. Second, it has also discouraged schools from inculcating any single, specific religion in their learners. Schools are expected to acquaint learners with the entire spectrum of religions prevalent in society with the aim of promoting understanding and tolerance towards others (see for example the recommendations of the Swann Commission in the UK (Swann, 1985, pp. 465–520), which were incorporated in the 1988 Education Reform Act (Rose, 2006, p. 186)). The Martians also learn that until 1997 Christian religious knowledge was taught in Norway as a compulsory subject in state schools, but was replaced by a compulsory subject through which Christianity, other religions and non-religious world views are being taught on an equal basis (Hagesæther and Sandsmark, 2006, p. 275); and that similar policy changes were effected in the Netherlands (in 1985: Westerman, 2001, p. 21; Miedema, 2006, p. 117), in other European countries and in South Africa (in 2003: Roux, 2005a, p. 274).

The Martians then focus on the situation in South Africa. Demographically, South Africa is 68 per cent Christian, 2 per cent Muslim, 1.5 per cent Hindu and 28 per cent indigenous beliefs and animist. This religious divide still runs largely conterminously with the racial divide (with its political ramifications lurking not too deep beneath the surface). Afrikaans-speaking Whites belong mainly to the Calvinist-Protestant churches which can trace their descent to Calvinist churches in the Netherlands. The biggest denomination among these South African churches is the Dutch Reformed Church. English-speaking Whites belong to churches such as the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church. While all these churches also have Black members, Blacks are concentrated in indigenous/Africanist churches, such as the Zion Christian Church. Many Blacks of all denominations still practise a kind of syncretistic religion, combining Christianity with elements of traditional African religion, such as the worship of spirits and the revering of ancestors. Most Indians are either Hindus or Muslims (although 12 per cent are Christians). The so-called ‘Coloured’ population belongs to either Christian or Muslim denominations.

Historically, religion and education have had a very controversial relationship in South Africa. Western-type education started with the Dutch East India Company’s establishment of a refreshment station in the Cape in 1652. The first settlers brought their ideas pertaining to education from the Netherlands, a country that came into being as an independent nation-state after a war of independence with Spain. This war had strong nationalist and religious undertones (Spanish Roman Catholicism versus Dutch Protestantism). The Dutch national education system was born amid this war. Together with parents and with the state, the church was regarded as a full partner in the education project (see Venter and Verster, 1986, pp. 79–80). Up to 1994, White education in South Africa was openly and unashamedly typified (by government, teachers and the White population at large) as Christian-national (see Behr, 1988, pp. 97–99). Education for Black South Africans was provided until 1953 by Christian missionary organisations. Contemporary Black scholarship and political leadership have been very critical of (White) Christian-national education and (Black) missionary education alike. Missionary education was deemed to have fostered among Black children a culture of submissiveness to the ecclesiastical and (pre-1994) political
authorities. Christian-national education was seen as a bulwark of White Afrikaner nationalism that helped to inculcate a mindset of supremacy among White children (see Mphahele and Mminele, 1997, pp. 81–84; Christie, 1985, pp. 157–76).

The Martians learn that in 1996 a new Constitution containing a progressive Bill of Rights was adopted and that a new socio-political dispensation was subsequently established. The Constitution created a *de facto* secular state based on the modern-day creed of Human Rights – the Constitution is indeed buttressed by one of the most progressive Bills of Human Rights in the world. The new constitutional dispensation, in a country with a religious demography as described, led to a disconnect between the majority of the South African population’s (conservative) views on issues such as sexual orientation, abortion, capital punishment and corporal punishment in schools and the state’s secular-disposed approach. This can be observed in Constitutional Court decisions since 1994.

Although it brought about a *de facto* secular state, the Constitution, unlike that of the USA, does not contain an ‘establishment clause’ that constitutes a formal wall of separation between state and religion (see Oosthuizen, 2000, p. 467). This was confirmed by the Constitutional Court in the case of *State v Lawrence* (1997) (a case that dealt with the selling of alcoholic liquor on Sundays). Section 15(1) of the above mentioned Bill of Human Rights entrenches every South African’s right to freedom of religion (Constitution, 1996). Section 15(2) of the Constitution confirms this right by providing for religious observances to be conducted in state or state-aided institutions. Section 28(2), in turn, stipulates: ‘A child’s best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child’, and Section 31, dealing with cultural, linguistic and religious communities, reiterates that persons belonging to a cultural, linguistic or religious community may not be denied the right, with other members of that community, to enjoy their culture and practise their religion provided it is not exercised in a manner inconsistent with any provision contained in the Bill of Rights. Regarding equality, Section 9(3) stipulates that the state may not unfairly discriminate against anyone on religious grounds.

The Martians then wonder how the issue of the relationship between state schools and religion has been resolved in South Africa, given that the majority of the population are still religiously affiliated, that deep religious differences exist among the various sections of the population, and particularly, that tensions exist between the stipulations of the Constitution and of the Bill of Human Rights, the sentiments of the new political elite on the one hand, and the personal religious needs of the citizens on the other.

The Martians then find that the relationship between religion and education was a top priority for the new government in South Africa as it started to restructure the education system after 1994. Religion seemed to form an integral part of the country’s commitment to ‘nation building’ in the sense that the National Policy on religion ‘is driven by the dual mandate of celebrating diversity and building national unity’ (Policy, 2003, paras 10 and 64). In its first White Paper on Education (RSA, 1995) the government recognised parents’ right to choose the religious basis of their children’s education. In line with this, the ensuing South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), Section 7(1), stipulated that ‘every learner and every member of staff of a public [state] school shall have freedom of religion’, while Section 7(2) stipulated that ‘religious observances may be conducted at a public school under rules established by that school’s Governing Body provided that such observances shall be conducted on an equitable basis and attendance at them by learners and staff shall be voluntary’ (Act, 1996). Regarding the admission of learners to schools, the Act states (Section 5) that no
child shall be refused admission to any state school on the basis of race or religion, or because the child does not subscribe to the mission, goals and objectives of the school (Act, 1996). The post-apartheid Constitution (1996) and South African Schools Act (1996) seem to provide the country’s state schools with considerable latitude in investing – in particular – religious values into the educational process (Mawdsley et al., 2008, pp. 94, 104).

In the only court case so far since 1994 on the relationship between education and religion in South Africa, Wittman v Deutscher Schulverein, Pretoria and others (1998), the plaintiff instituted action against a private (independent) German school for compelling her child to attend confessional religion classes at the school. The parent regarded this as unconstitutional. The plaintiff based her argument on Article 14 of the interim Constitution, which was (as the court noted) the same as Section 15 of the (final) 1996 Constitution (as explained above). The court ruled in favour of the defendant, motivating its decision by the fact that the parent had waived her rights in terms of Article 14 of the interim Constitution when she enrolled her child in that particular private (independent) school. (The verdict was based on the interim Constitution (1993) as the case had commenced at a time before the final Constitution was promulgated in 1996). The court noted however, first, that it would have ruled in favour of the plaintiff in the case of a state school, and second, that in light of the final Constitution, unlike the interim Constitution, the Bill of Human Rights would have been applicable not only vertically (that is, between state and citizens) but also horizontally (that is, in civil lawsuits between citizens).

In line with all these guidelines, a Ministerial Committee on Religious Education concluded in 1999 that for the majority of South Africans it was of paramount importance that their children should be educated in accordance with the religious principles and value systems of their parents (RSA, 1999). This confirmed a position taken in the above-mentioned White Paper (RSA, 1995, pp. 21, 75), namely that parents had the right to choose the form of education deemed by them best for their children, irrespective of whether it was provided by the state or not. This view was, however, not followed up in subsequent government policy. This is evidenced by the fact that on 12 September 2003 the minister of education proclaimed in the Preamble of a new National Policy on Religion and Education (Policy, 2003) that in a democratic society with a diverse population of different cultures, languages and religions, no particular religious ethos shall be dominant (Policy, 2003, p. 2).3 The National Policy therefore provided for a cooperative model of legal separation combined with the possibility of interaction between religion and the state. The approach to religion and education characterised as a ‘co-operative model’ recognises the ‘separate spheres for religion and the state’ under the Constitution, but also ‘[leaves] scope for interaction between the two’ (Policy, 2003, para. 3). It declares its ‘co-operative model’ to be a reaction both against the ‘theocratic model’ under apartheid ‘that tried to impose religion in public institutions’ (Policy, 2003, para. 3; Mawdsley et al., 2008, pp. 94, 104) and against ‘a separationist model...[that] completely divorce[s] the religious and secular spheres of a society, such as in France or the United States’ (Policy, 2003, para. 3). In fact, the National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) notes that while ‘we could reject any place for religion in education, by arguing that the mutual acceptance of our common humanity is the only solution for societal harmony’,

We believe that we will do much better as a country if our pupils are exposed to a variety of religious and secular belief systems, in a well-informed
manner, which gives rise to a genuine respect for the adherents and practices of all of these, without diminishing in any way the preferred choice of the pupil. (Policy, 2003, para. 29)

While protecting citizens from religious discrimination or coercion, the policy also encourages an ongoing dialogue between religious groupings and the state in areas of common interest and concern (Policy, 2003, p. 4). As will emerge below, however, the policy prevents – de facto – any potential exchanges and ongoing dialogue about confessional religious matters from taking place among learners belonging to the different South African religions within the territories of schools as public institutions (Smit, 2009). The policy distinguishes between ‘religion education’ and ‘religious instruction’ (Policy, 2003, pp. 8–9). Religion education is a curricular programme for learners in all grades up to grade 9 (approximately 14 years of age), and is justified by its educational and academic character which includes learning about the common values that all religions are believed to promote. It is furthermore aimed at inculcating desirable social ends, such as expanding understanding, increasing tolerance and reducing prejudice. Religious education, on the other hand, which entails confessional instruction in a particular faith or belief system, with a view to inculcating obedience to that faith or belief, is deemed to be primarily the responsibility of the parental home, the family or the religious community (Policy, 2003, p. 9). Confessional or sectarian forms of religious instruction are regarded as unsuitable learning content in state schools for a religiously diverse and democratic society (Policy, 2003, p. 9).

The Martians subsequently discover that the constitutionality of this new policy has so far not been challenged in court. They find this surprising in view of scathing criticism of the policy. A possible explanation for this state of affairs is the high cost of litigation in the Constitutional Court. It is way beyond the financial reach of even organised religions. Several points of criticism have been levelled against the policy.

First, a Christian interfaith position can be identified that objects not to learning about religions but to the apparent absence of explicit attention to spirituality in the new policy. Assuming that learning about religions will not engage the affective, emotional or spiritual development of learners, as if learning about religion were only cognitive, this position asserts that the policy is flawed – even constitutionally so – because it does not explicitly identify outcomes of ‘spiritual development’ (Chidester, 2003, p. 270).

Second, it has been pointed out (for instance by Malherbe, 2004) that on various counts the policy is at variance with both the Constitution and the South African Schools Act (1996). By declaring itself to be (religiously) neutral, the policy already exercises a (religious) choice, thereby violating the constitutional right of freedom of religion (Malherbe, 2004, pp. 251–52).

Closely related to this is the third objection, namely that the policy is by definition based upon a humanistic point of departure, which places humankind in the focus of the study of religions. The policy envisages that through the academic subject ‘religion education’ learners will discover and recognise their common humanity. Religion is thus regarded only in humanistic terms, thereby disregarding (for instance) Christians’ deepest convictions that reconciliation among people is possible only in and through Christ (Malherbe, 2004, p. 252).

Fourth, insofar as ‘religion education’ as envisaged in the policy document will be compulsory for all learners and will impose a humanistic perspective which goes...
directly against the views of religion held by Christians, Muslims, Jews and others, it violates Section 25(1) of the Constitution, which guarantees religious freedom (Malherbe, 2004, p. 253).

Fifth, the policy’s ruling out of single-faith observances when these form part of the official school day violates Section 15(2) of the Constitution that provides for religious observances to be conducted on state or state-aided premises. Rather than establishing a wall of separation between state and religion, the Constitution assigns to the state the responsibility for creating scope for religion to flourish. Section 15(2) does not put a damper on free and voluntary single-faith religious observances in schools (Malherbe, 2004, p. 254).

Finally, the policy is also at variance with Section 7 of the South African Schools Act (1996), which confers the power to regulate the conduct of religious observances in state schools on school governing bodies (Malherbe, 2004, p. 255). In court cases about the state’s impinging upon the rights of school governing bodies the Constitutional Court has repeatedly upheld this right. Malherbe (2004, p. 255) draws attention to the case of Minister of Education v Harris, which invalidated a notice issued by the minister regarding school admission age. In the recent (2009) case of Hoërskool (High School) Ermelo v The Head of Department of Education: Mpumalanga, the Constitutional Court also upheld the right of the school governing body to determine policy on the language of teaching and learning, and invalidated the state’s interference.

Their investigations into religion and education, especially as these dynamics have so far unfolded in South Africa, lead the Martian investigators to three preliminary conclusions. First, that the phenomenon that earthlings call ‘religion’ is deeply complex (see Abdool et al., 2007). Second, that while some of the earthlings resort to religion-based tension and conflict (such as the 11 September 2001 attack on the World Trade Center and the Mumbai attack in 2008, both of which arguably represent a clash of civilisations, with religious differences constituting an underlying dimension), others prefer dialogue between the different religious groups for the purpose of promoting deeper understanding and tolerance of one another. Third, that those who shun conflict can theoretically follow at least two avenues towards religious understanding and tolerance – via the spiritual substrata of religions or via confessional pluralism – or via a combination of the two (see Dennett, 2007, p. 290 for examples of such combinations).

The Martians find that much research has been done with respect to the first and second points: on the essence and nature of the phenomenon that the earthlings call ‘religion’ (see, for instance: Kruger et al., 1996; Kuitert, 2000; Boyer, 2002; Shermer, 2004; Dawkins, 2006; Dennett, 2007; Abdool et al., 2007; De Villiers et al., 2008), and on the relationship between religion and education, especially in the context of schooling (see Wolhuter et al., 2008 for an overview). Looking through their Alexandrian binoculars of transcendental pragmatism, the Martian investigators now decide to look more closely at this third conclusion. Although much has been written in the past about spirituality and confessional pluralism respectively, these approaches and/or a combination of them have not been seriously considered as possible routes to religious understanding and tolerance. Our imaginary Martian investigators will now, in the rest of this article, present a report on their findings regarding the substance of this third point. By way of illustration, they will apply their findings to the situation in South Africa, a country that has only recently become fully democratised (in 1994).
The Road to Tolerance via the Spiritual Aspect of Religion

The Complex Structure of Religion

The Martians note that earthlings, on the basis of a phenomenological-interpretive analysis (Jaeger, 1988, p. 326; Boyer, 2002, p. 69), have found that religions have the following basic structure.

First, religions have a directly observable outer layer, which is of a cultic or ritual nature (Greek leitourgia, Latin officia, English service, duty, ministry). Religious believers attend services or worship at shrines, altars, churches, mosques, temples, synagogues or other holy places. They pray, read from sacred scriptures, sing hymns or incantations and make use of symbols or symbolic activities (see Dennett, 2007, pp. 141–42). Education at this level is aimed at training young people/novices into the understanding and practice of such rituals.

Closely associated with this first layer is the second: that of a sense of awe and respect owed to the god or gods (Greek eusebia, Latin reverentia, English reverence or worship). The deity is the object of worship, cultic or ritual practices and religious observances. Believers repent of their sins and wrongdoings, observe certain rules or customs with respect to food, drink and clothing, and are expected to behave in certain prescribed ways. Education at this level entails guiding the novice into the different aspects of worship.

Third, religions tend to have a theological, dogmatic and confessional layer (Greek dogma, derived from ‘dokein’, to seem good; Latin confessus, derived from ‘confiteri’, to admit or acknowledge). Religious leaders study the dogmas, cultic practices and observances of their respective religions, and write or preach about them. Formulations of these religious aspects are ratified by the higher authorities of the particular denomination, and novices are expected to master the tenets of the faith before they can be confirmed as full members. Education at this level centres on the mastery of the dogmas and confessions.

Fourth, religions also have a philanthropic or caring layer (Greek philanthropia, philadelphia; Latin humanitas, caritas; English love of humanity, brotherly love, charity). One can see a particular religion functioning at this level when believers display a sense of civic or social virtue or care for others (White, 2005, p. 48). Education at this level entails helping the young understand how to care for others and to develop a sense of moral duty and charity.

Fifth, religions have a faith or ‘pistic’ dimension (Greek pistis, Latin pietas, English faithfulness, loyalty). Believers need basic security and they tend to find this in a relationship with what they regard as a higher, transcendent or divine force. In some cases, the deity or the transcendent force is believed to have revealed him-/her-/itself in a book and/or in nature. Education at this level is aimed at reinforcing the faith of believers, especially their relationship with the divine or transcendent force.

Sixth, at the deepest level, religions have a spiritual dimension (Greek pneuma, Latin spiritus, English breath or spirit). All people share certain primordial questions at a deep spiritual level, though the answers they find to these questions, expressed in terms of the ritual and other levels, can be quite diverse. The spiritual is a subjective experience that points to an orientation towards both an intrinsic and an extrinsic religiousness. In terms of the former, religion is viewed as something deeply personal to the individual (Valenkamp, 2006).

On the basis of this analysis, and in accordance with transcendental pragmatist principles, the Martian investigators conclude that understanding and tolerance among adherents of different religious groups should particularly include
understanding of religions at their deepest level, that is, the spiritual. They therefore proceed to take cognisance of analyses of the phenomenon that earthlings call ‘spirituality’, and of efforts to relate spirituality to education and the road to tolerance.

**Spirituality**

There has been a revival of interest in the West in the pervasive spirituality of human life (Waaijman, 2000, pp. 1–2), something that has always been a feature of traditional African culture (Fowler, 1995, p. 141). Spirituality is an inherent component of being human, and is subjective, intangible and multidimensional (Roux, 2006a, pp. 155, 156). It symbolises the human being’s quest for meaning, depth and values, and describes how a person relates his or her actions and behaviour towards the Absolute (that is, how a person shows obeisance to and worships that which is regarded as imperishable, unchanging, eternal, indestructible, sacred and meaningful, the ultimate source of all meaning) and towards others, to his or her own being, core values and practices. Spirituality can also be seen as the mystical face of religion, as the fountainhead of divinity, the source and essence of the soul. In a sense, says Janse Van Rensburg (2006), spirituality is beyond religion, science and philosophy, yet it also embraces all religion, science and philosophy. In Kuitert’s opinion (1999, p. 223), it is a ‘metaphysical longing’ and as such it represents a transcendental beyondness – a sincere yearning to understand human visions of the good, that is, the higher ideals that govern human activities (Alexander, 2006, p. 215).

There have been several discussions in Quality of Life research about how to define ‘spiritual’ (McPherson, 2001; Caras, 2003; Moller and Huschka, 2009). McPherson (2001, p. 9) notes that the meanings attached to the term ‘spiritual’ vary considerably from one context to another. There are however certain trends in the discussion about definitions – definitions that originated in the studies of Allport (1950/1966) and Allport and Ross (1967). Allport and Ross conclude that the spiritual is a subjective experience and that it points to an orientation towards both intrinsic and extrinsic religiousness.

In terms of the former, religion is viewed as something deeply personal to the individual. It is often defined as ‘persons living their religion’ (Allport, 1950/1966; Allport and Ross, 1967). According to *World Spirituality: an Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (Cousins, 1985) some traditions refer to the intrinsic or inner dimension as ‘spirit’, which then forms the deepest core of the human being. However, it always also leaves the person open towards a transcendental dimension where he or she can find ultimate reality and meaning (Waaijman, 2000, p. 3).

An individual’s extrinsic orientation towards spirituality, by contrast, emphasises spirituality (often in the form of religion or faith) as membership of a powerful in-group (Genia and Shaw, 1991) that can provide protection, consolation and social status (extrinsic–personal) (Allport and Ross, 1967), and can allow religious participation, social status (extrinsic–social) (Fleck, 1981/1984), or the use of mechanisms of ego defence (Kahoe and Meadow, 1981).

In Fowler’s (1995, p. 142) opinion, human beings are ‘constitutionally spiritual beings in the core of their being’. It is spirituality alone that gives depth of meaning to life. Spirituality has to do with the core of human existence: it refers to a person’s relationship with the Absolute, irrespective of how the ‘Absolute’ is defined. Spirituality is always in the background of daily life in the form of a silent force, an inspiration or an orientation. From time to time, however, it surfaces in our
consciousness as an unavoidable presence that demands form and reflection (Waaijman, 2000, p. 1).

Spiritual questions and answers have a special function in human existence. They provide a person with existential security or, as psychologists call it, a subjective feeling of basic security. Each person is in need of such basic security (Maslow (1954) refers to it as a ‘safety need’). It helps a person and/or the community to avoid anxiety, or to cope with insecurity if uncertainty cannot be avoided (see Hofstede and Hofstede, 2005, p. 201, regarding cultural insecurity). It is the spiritual aspect or dimension of being human that provides in that need. Basic security can therefore be seen as an aspect of the inner subjective side of a person’s appreciation of his or her life. It is the outcome of all the answers a person, and humankind generally, gives – subjectively – with respect to all the life-questions that might crop up in a person’s life or in the life of humankind. Spirituality, in a broader sense, therefore also pertains to the personal well-being of a person from a holistic point of view. It is, says Roux (2006a, pp. 152, 156), ‘a whole person approach, involving the person religiously, affectively, emotionally, cognitively and physically, with all aspects embedded in personal experiences’. Answers to questions such as the following come from this deep spiritual level of humanness. How do I relate to the divine, to evil and unhappiness, to myself, nature, culture, life and death, emotions of happiness or loss, of guilt and shame? The answers that people give to these questions come from the deepest level of their humanity, their inner realm that is timeless, eternal, deeply profound, subjective and intangible as well as multidimensional. Again, spirituality seems to represent a peculiar transcendental beyondness; it symbolises the human being’s quest for depth and values, and describes how people relate their beliefs and actions towards god(s)/God and/or otherness, to their own being and core values, and then express them in religious practices. In a sense, the spiritual dimension represents the mystical face of religion, the fountainhead of divinity, and the source and essence of the soul.

In typical transcendental pragmatist tradition, the editors of World Spirituality: an Encyclopedic History agreed on a working hypothesis about the special function of spiritual questions and answers in people’s lives. According to them, spirituality is a dual structure: the orientation of a person (the inner dimension, spirit, spiritual core, deepest centre) towards a transcendental dimension (ultimate reality, ultimate purpose). This orientation is not static but rather a dynamic process of development, discovery, travel and progress. The spiritual process is mediated by facilitators such as prayer, guidance, maps or methods. According to Waaijman (2000, pp. 4–5), this working hypothesis is deliberately vague and broad in order to allow individuals to fill each of its facets with personal content and meaning.

Hollick (2006, pp. 34–35) correctly points out that spirituality is not the same as faith in one of the established religions, although religion/faith can be an expression of it. As indicated in the previous section, it involves a supra-religious and supra-faith sense of being in and connected to a universe filled with beauty, mystery and meaning, a desire to explore and deepen that connection, a general enquiry into the deepest of questions, such as ‘Why am I here?’ ‘Where did I come from?’ ‘Where am I going?’, and an instinct to stretch beyond our ego boundaries and to love others. Spirituality, he insists, is concerned with considering life’s problems from a higher, enlightened, synthetic point of view, testing everything on the basis of values, by (inter alia) endeavouring to reach the essence of every fact – precisely as Alexandrian transcendental pragmatism suggests.

Persons who are aware of their spiritual dimension have an intuitive understanding of certain spiritual characteristics, including wholeness, creativity, freedom, consciousness, co-creative evolution, love and compassion (Hollick, 2006, p. 331). They feel connected
with the whole, and discover wells of love and compassion in themselves through caring for others (Hollick, 2006, p. 333). They feel that all of life is sacred.

A person who does not find meaning in spirituality, that is, in an intimate relationship with a higher being and in connecting with a higher and broader reality, tends to search for meaning in a different value system, such as the acquisition of material possessions, the quest for the new, enjoyable sensations, acquiring social status, the sense of power that comes from technological control, various forms of entertainment, or other achievements that give only short-term advantage (Fowler, 1995, p. 142). A person living a spiritual life, on the other hand, does not cut himself off from the everyday affairs of this world, but rather recognises the pervasive spirituality of human life in all human affairs (Fowler, 1995, p. 143). People who lose sight of their spirituality tend to live a secularised life: the spiritual aspects are restricted to so-called sacred areas of life; other areas of life are regarded as non-spiritual.

The Martians conclude that the road via spirituality to tolerance and understanding entails connecting with others on a deep spiritual level that transcends all the other more superficial religious cultic, ritual and dogmatic layers. Such connection is premised by thoughtful insight into spirituality and all its ramifications.

The Road to Tolerance via Confessional Pluralism

The Martian investigators then explore the other possible road to religious understanding and tolerance: confessional pluralism. Although secularism has taken a double toll from religion in public life (diminishing religious as well as ecclesiastical influence), most people still belong to some or other faith group or denomination. This is still the case in South Africa despite growing secularism. Some still belong to mainstream churches, others to smaller sects, and others regard themselves as agnostics, atheists or secular humanists. Whatever the case, each and every person has certain ‘faith convictions’ and even embraces certain ‘faith or religious tenets’ or ‘sacred values’ which can be expounded and defended in open debate. Most policies on religion and education have relegated these personal or private faiths, religions (with the exception of the ‘religion’ of secular humanism, as some would claim) and the concomitant convictions to the private lives of their adherents, in other words to the interiors of their homes, their churches, temples and similar, and faith-based institutions such as private or independent schools. According to most policymakers in the religion/education domain, these convictions and ‘sacred’ values are ‘personal and private’ and should therefore not play any role in public affairs, including public education or schooling.

The Martians also learn, however, that confessional pluralism, involving the insistence on the right to speak openly in public (also in state schools) about one’s personal and privately embraced religious convictions and doctrines, seems to enjoy strong support in non-public or non-government quarters. Whereas government policymakers tend to argue that religious tension and conflict in the public sphere can best be avoided by banning people’s sacred values to the private spheres of their lives and existence (for instance, as stipulated by the South African Policy on Religion and Education (Policy, 2003)) (though not banning the beliefs of, say, agnostics or those urging other kinds of dogma (sexual for example)) the adherents of confessional pluralism insist on their (constitutional) right openly to confess their personal religious faith convictions and values in public, including in state schools. This will, they argue, not only facilitate a better understanding of religious differences, but also enable religious believers to lead integrated religious lives in the sense that it circumvents any private–public life dualism.
There are several practical examples of confessional pluralism in schools. The National Evangelical School in South Lebanon (Klaushofer, 2004) has successfully employed this policy. The school is testament to the complexities of religious co-existence in today’s Middle East. Founded by Presbyterian missionaries 75 years ago, the school is Christian, although its learners – from the town of Nabatieh in Hezbollah’s heartlands – are Shia Muslims. As the first generation to grow up since the end of a civil war which pitted Lebanon’s various sects against each other, these learners are acutely aware of bearing a special responsibility (Klaushofer, 2004). They have learned from the civil war that they simply must tolerate each other as much as they can. Speaking openly about their personal religious faith convictions and values in this school greatly enhances and supports religious tolerance in this strife-torn region.

A second example of successful confessional pluralism can be found in the work done by Stella Nneji in Nigeria. Her doctoral research (Nneji, 2007), based on a study of a case where the hermeneutic-communicative model in religious education was applied, presents a major paradigm shift as far as the practice of religious tolerance is concerned. This is because its method of religious learning not only denounces indoctrination and fundamentalism but also opens a perspective through which different religious traditions including those of Christians and Muslims, and even members of African religious traditions, can meet, appreciate, relate, dialogue, understand, coexist and cooperate with one another, without denying their own identity and particularity.

Another example of confessional pluralism can be found in present-day Ethiopia, where a diversity of nations and nationalities live together in harmony. Ethiopia is one of a handful of countries where Christians and Muslims manage to live together peacefully in a spirit of mutual respect and togetherness. Its citizens are living examples of successful confessional pluralism, because they manage to solve their problems together. They give precedence to their peaceful coexistence as human beings and as Ethiopians rather than to dwelling on their religious differences (Ethiopian Reporter, 2007).

The Martians discover a succinct outline of confessional pluralism in the work of McCarthy et al. (1981). In their struggle against secular humanism in the North American education system, these authors argue that

paying lip service to ... toleration of [the many faiths in a school] is poor compensation for the practice of privatising religious differences, and for the identification of religion with church and then exiling it from the public domain, or for the insistent failure to grant confessional pluralism structural rights in society as a matter of just public policy. (McCarthy et al., 1981, p. 167)

The Martians find the stance taken by these authors to be echoed in the interpretivist view outlined by Feinberg and Soltis (1985, p. 129):

Just because an interpretation is mine does not mean it can’t be defended whenever it’s challenged by someone else’s. Some interpretations are better than others. . . . I’d have every right [to tell others that I disagreed with their views]. The interpretivist isn’t forced to condone other’s actions. He’s forced to understand their actions from their point of view, not just his. He might see that those people were not bloodthirsty savages, but rather thoughtful and religious [emphasis added]... With an understanding of [a certain group], he would be better able to explain his views to them, and he’d have
the right to assert the applicability of his values to their society. We can criticize others’ interpretations. The point is not to do it without understanding them.

Interpretation of others’ views and behaviour is always somehow linked to one’s own values, including ‘sacred’ or religious values. The concept ‘values’ is used here as defined by Kluckhohn (1951): ‘values . . . mean something similar to conceptions of the desirable, that influence the ways people select action and evaluate events’. (According to Hattingh (1991, p. 40), this definition is the one most widely used in the scientific literature on values.) Every interpretation is based on a set of religious and ethical standards. Confessional pluralism recognises the fact that every person comes from ‘somewhere’, and that his or her life-conceptual orientation determines each of his or her interpretations. According to New Zealand educationist Gousmett (2004, p. 227), it is the common and generic values approach to religion in education that

subverts teaching from an authentic religious tradition as it claims to understand the values of each tradition in a more insightful manner than those adhering to that tradition. It is in fact an attempt to relativise all religious and ethical traditions and replace them with a new, superior and universal tradition.

(See also Mouw and Griffioen, 1993, pp. 3ff.; Colson, 2001, pp. 30–40; Miedema and Vroom, 2004, p. 7; and Van der Walt, 2007, pp. 302–04, for discussions of aspects of confessional pluralism.)

The creed of universal values has been criticised for undercutting respect for concepts such as human dignity. Andrew (1995, p. 170) shows how moral grammar is deeply personal and particularist rather than universalist. Confessional pluralism can of course also relativise religious ‘truth’, in the process undercutting religious understanding and tolerance. To circumvent this threat, the emphasis should not be on ‘truth’ aspects but rather on the differences that need to be understood and tolerated. Dennett (2007, p. 268) provides us with an example: while refusing to view evolutionism and atheism as regular religions, he treats them as such by insisting on spreading the word about them and helping people understand them. This can be seen as an effort on his part to see where his

own religion measures up to the sort of scrutiny that we [direct] at others . . . . Every religion – apart from a negligible scattering of truly toxic cults – has a healthy population of ecumenical-minded people who are eager to reach out to people of other faiths, or no faith at all, and consider the modal quandaries of the world on a rational basis. (Dennett, 2007, pp. 93, 297)

This is a pithy exposition of confessional pluralism.

Where political, religious and intellectual freedom has already been established (for example, constitutionally entrenched, as in South Africa), say Buruma and Margalit (2005, p. 149) from an oriental perspective, it must be protected with conviction; also in schools, it may be added. ‘We cannot afford,’ they conclude, ‘to close our societies as a defence against those who have closed theirs’. Van der Walt (2007, p. 138) concurs: despite rampant secularism, the right of different religions to express their convictions in different societal relationships should be recognised.
The Martians’ Findings, with Particular Reference to South African Policy

Having informed themselves of the earthlings’ analyses and proposals regarding religion, spirituality, confessional pluralism and education/schooling, the Martian investigators conclude as follows.

First, dialogue among the adherents of the different faiths and religions represented in a state school or a classroom (that is, interreligious dialogue) becomes a virtual impossibility in a situation such as that in South Africa, where official policy provides only for (a) religion education, an academic subject in which learners contrive neutrally, formally and objectively to come to grips with the generics and commonalities of religion as a universal phenomenon, and for (b) the equitable observation of religious practices only. If and when a particular policy, such as that of South Africa, de facto exiles confessional religious education (faith-based instruction) to the private sphere of the church, the mosque, the temple and the parental home and not the ‘ecumenical setting’ of the school (Dennett, 2007, p. 267), interreligious dialogue or open discussion cannot occur. (Home schooling in South Africa has in fact on occasion been criticised for indoctrinating learners (De Waal, 2000, p. 26; Wynn, 1985, p. 34)). Interfaith and interreligious understanding and tolerance cannot be promoted in the context of the state school because of the ban on confessional/sectarian religious education (instruction). This, the Martians conclude, may not only be pedagogically unjustifiable, but can also be detrimental to the ideal of attaining peace, understanding and tolerance among South Africans. It seems to prevent learners from stating and defending their own visions of the good; of the higher ideals that govern human activities – including human religious activities (Alexander, 2006, p. 215). This sort of recognition has been made clear by the South African Constitutional Court as well. In Christian Education South Africa v Minister of Education (2000) (para. 36) the following appears:

For many believers, their relationship with God or creation is central to all their activities. It concerns their capacity to relate in an intensely meaningful fashion to their sense of themselves, their community and their universe. For millions in all walks of life, religion provides support and nurture and a framework for individual and social stability and growth. Religious belief has the capacity to awake concepts of self-worth and human dignity which form the cornerstone of human rights. It affects the believer’s view of society and founds the distinction between right and wrong.

The Martians concur with Dennett (2007, p. 283) that all religions provide social infrastructures for creating and maintaining moral teamwork. Perhaps, as Dennett remarks, their value as organisers and amplifiers of good intentions far outweighs any deficits consequent on the putative incoherence created by contradictions between (some of) their respective doctrines. In Dennett’s opinion, it would perhaps be foolish perfectionism, an act of moral ineptitude, to distract ourselves with minor conflicts of dogma when there is so much work to be done making the world a better place. The official policy on religion and education promulgated in 2003 by the South African government should therefore have provided for interreligious dialogue also on a confessional, faith-based level in the controlled conditions prevailing in schools. Provision should have been made for entrusting professional educators who have an inside, first-hand knowledge of their particular religion as well as religious leaders with the task of facilitating better interfaith understanding and tolerance by actually
promoting confessional interreligious dialogue in school classes. By the same token, learners should have been officially allowed to speak freely about their personal religion and sacred values. This would have facilitated connection among learners on the very deepest religious level, the spiritual, without necessarily implying that all religions are the same or equally true.

Second, the Martians note that parents in many cases prefer their children to be exposed in state schools to religious education that agrees with what they as parents teach them at home, especially for younger children. They find that international conventions also support this view. The United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) declares freedom of thought, conscience and religion as a fundamental human right, also in the educational context (Article 18). The United Nations’ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966) likewise stipulates that parents have the liberty ‘to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions’ (Article 81.4). The same applies to the United Nations’ Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (UN, 1981) which says that

1. The parents or, as the case may be, the legal guardians of the child have the right to organize the life within the family in accordance with their religion or belief and bearing in mind the moral education in which they believe the child should be brought up.

2. Every child shall enjoy the right to have access to education in the matter of religion or belief in accordance with the wishes of his parents . . . and shall not be compelled to receive teaching on religion or belief against the wishes of his parents . . . , the best interests of the child being the guiding principle. (UN, 1981, Article 5)

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR, 1950) also contains a stipulation to this effect (Article 2).

The Martians find that it was on all these grounds that some Norwegian parents – in November 2004 – managed successfully to challenge (in court) the policy on religious education in state schools (Hagesaether and Sandsmark, 2006, p. 284). These two researchers did a study of the views of Norwegian teachers, pupils and pupils’ parents on the place of religion in schools in Norway. Of the 649 parents who completed a questionnaire, 31 per cent wanted schools to pass on what children were being taught at home with regard to what is ‘right’ and ‘true’ (this view was especially common among those parents who were religiously active). While 49 per cent of the respondents wanted the school to teach their children that all faiths were equally valuable, only 10 per cent wanted them to teach their children that all faiths were equally ‘true’ (Hagesaether and Sandsmark, 2006, p. 282). The parents argued that adolescents were facing the educational obligation of developing personal identity, as explained in terms of Erikson’s psychosocial stages of human development (Dworetzky, 1981, p. 43). In their opinion, religious education according to the new Norwegian policy would lead to identity confusion (Hagesaether and Sandsmark, 2006, p. 278).

Third, the Martians conclude that the current (from 2003) South African policy on religion and education has failed the test of confessional pluralism. In order to meet the parental requirement that learners be religiously (confessionally) educated in schools in accordance with parental preferences, and in order for learners themselves
to understand the differences between religious groupings and/or denominations, the policy should have provided for confessional pluralism in state schools. The current South African policy on education and religion has effectively placed a ban on confessional pluralism by relegating religious education or instruction to parental homes and religious institutions such as churches, temples and mosques. It provides no opportunity for helping learners to understand the religious differences that they in future will have to engage with as adult citizens. In failing to do so, it effectively engineers a pedagogy of religious essentialism and the subsequent reemergence of cultural and spiritual intolerance (somewhat along the lines of a Bourdieuan model of cultural hegemony). It also promotes the de facto secularism of South African society.

The much-vaunted cooperation between state schools and parental homes/faith organisations remains restricted to religion education as a purportedly religiously neutral academic subject and to the equal and equitable practising of religious observances only. The far more important part of religious education, namely confessional religious instruction, remains confined to parental homes and faith organisations, thereby effectively creating a wall of separation between state schools on the one hand and parental homes and faith organisations on the other.6 Dennett puts the need for interreligious dialogue and open discussion in perspective:

Even if you are convinced that your religion is a unique path to the truth, you must be curious about why all the other religions are so popular around the world. And if you think it would be a good thing to bring these people to see the truth as you do, then you should see the point of looking intently, as an outsider, at these religions, to ‘see what makes them tick’. Considering how your own religion looks to an outsider would also be a valuable exercise, wouldn’t it, since understanding how outsiders react to what they discover when they encounter you could hardly fail to improve your effectiveness in carrying your message to others (Dennett, 2007, p. 360).

Such an ecumenical effort relies ‘on the respect for the truth and the tools for truth-finding to provide a shared pool of knowledge from which we can work together toward mutually comprehended and accepted visions of what is good and what is just’ (Dennett, 2007, p. 378).

Confessional pluralism is also required for more mundane reasons, as empirically discovered by Roux and her colleagues (2005b, pp. 294–96, 300–04; 2006b, p. 1297). Learners first have to feel safe with and in their own religion before and while gaining knowledge and understanding of other religions (Roux, 2003, pp. 131–32). She finds that despite the new policy on religion in education having come into effect in 2003 South African teachers still prefer to present religion education from their own religious perspectives; they are apprehensive, reluctant, negative and even fearful about presenting other religions and/or multireligious content because of a lack of knowledge and/or fear of change. They tend to make monoreligious presentations in spite of the presence of up to 50 per cent of learners adhering to other religions being present in their classes (see also Ferguson and Roux, 2004, p. 16). This form of teacher insecurity can be eradicated by first allowing for confessional pluralism for both learners and teachers, and by then encouraging all of them to venture further afield into encounters with other religions and their specific spiritualities.

Fourth, the Martians conclude that a better understanding of the spiritual substratum of all religions should indeed be regarded as one of the avenues to
better interreligious and interfaith understanding and tolerance among the different religious groups represented in a classroom. In the process of facilitating interreligious dialogue in their classes, teachers should contrive to help learners understand that all religions have a spiritual dimension at their deepest levels. They should guide the learners to understand that spirituality symbolises the human being’s quest for meaning, depth and values, and describes how a person relates his or her actions towards what is perceived as the Absolute and towards others to their own being, core values and practices. They should learn that the spirituality at the foundations of every religion can be seen as the fountainhead of divinity, the source and essence of the soul, as the intrinsic or inner dimension of human beings, their ‘spirit’, which then forms the deepest core of being human.

Spiritual/religious questions and answers have a special function in human existence. They provide a person with existential security. Spirituality, the Martians note, is dually structured: the orientation of a person (the inner dimension, spirit, spiritual core, deepest centre) towards a transcendental dimension (ultimate reality, ultimate purpose). Insight into the spiritual substrata of the different religions as such does not contribute, however, to understanding and tolerance of religious differences. It merely reveals that all religions share some or other deep spiritual dimension. The acquisition of insight into the spiritual substrata of religions will remain a theoretical exercise centring around the generics and commonalities of religion. True understanding and tolerance of religious differences, according to an Alexandrian vision of the good and higher ideals that govern human activities (Alexander, 2006, p. 215), require transcending the generics and the commonalities. This is exactly where confessional pluralism can be fruitfully combined with insight into the spiritual dimension of religion, the Martians find. Once learners realise that all religions somehow share a deep spiritual dimension, that all religious believers somehow find themselves in a relationship with a Being or something that they consider Absolute, sacred and meaningful, or find some discipline important to ‘enlightenment’, they can proceed to an exposition and inter-faith/ecumenical discussion of the different religions prevalent in a given classroom situation. In this way, confessional pluralism can play a significant role in promoting understanding and tolerance without necessarily relativising the truth aspects of the religions concerned. On the basis of their sense-making of their experiences in the classroom and their resultant shared pool of knowledge, the learners in a particular class will be able to build a tacit social contract about what they understand and respect about religion in general, about their own religions and about the religions of their classmates. Each social contract then becomes a meme, that is a cultural recipe or cultural information package (Dennett, 2007, pp. 348–49), that can be replicated and fruitfully reapplied by the learners in their adult lives (see Dawkins, 2006, pp. 191–201). The process of accepting worthwhile religious–cultural memes plays a particularly significant role in the lives of adolescents, who typically find themselves in the moratorium phase of their lives, according to Erikson’s psychosocial theory of identity formation. Adolescents in this stage tend to believe without commitment; they are still undecided about their personal religious commitment (Vermeer and Van der Ven, 2004, p. 57). Exposure to the spiritual substrata of the different religions while at the same time feeling safe in the religion of their out-of-school upbringing will help them acquire religious–cultural memes with which to overcome their initial indecision about their personal religious commitment.
Religion and education policy should – whenever and wherever possible – be amended to provide for a deeper understanding of the spiritual dimension of all religions represented in a classroom or school as well as for confessional pluralism in such a setting. The Martians concur with Roux (2006a, p. 154): children need to engage in dialogue to help them interpret and comprehend their personal life stances, beliefs, values systems and spirituality. Understanding of the spiritual dimension will reveal commonalities (similarities) among religions, and confessional pluralism will reveal the differences (particularities, singularities of each). Policy that provides for meaningful engagement with both the spiritual roots and the singularities of the different religions will be more advantageous than attempts either to ban particular religions from schools (as is currently the de facto case in South Africa) or to concentrate religious education as far as possible only on the generic or commonly shared aspects of religions (as is currently the case in state schools in South Africa, the Netherlands, the UK, the USA and Norway, for example). In the opinion of our imagined Martian investigators and on the basis of a transcendental pragmatist attitude towards religious tolerance, a combined spiritual and confessional–pluralist approach to religion in education can make a meaningful contribution to understanding and tolerance among individuals and groups belonging to quite different religious groups or denominations.

Notes

1 Patterns vary widely, as the following sample shows. (Countries are listed alphabetically; all the figures are percentages.) Afghanistan: Muslim, but differentiated into Sunni (80), Shiite (19) and others (1). Albania: majority Muslim (70), Albanian Orthodox (20), Roman Catholic (10). Angola: indigenous beliefs (47), Roman Catholic (38), Protestant (approximately 15). Austria: Roman Catholic (73), Protestant (5), Muslim (4), other religions (0.1), unaffiliated/no religion (more than 17). Germany: Protestant (34), Roman Catholic (34), Muslim (3.7), unaffiliated/other (28). The Netherlands: Roman Catholic (31), Protestant (21), Muslim (4), other (4), unaffiliated (40). South Korea: no affiliation (46), Christian (26), Buddhist (26), Confucian (1), other (1). The UK: Christian (approximately 80), Muslim (3), Sikh (1), Hindu (1). The USA: Protestant (52), Roman Catholic (24), Mormon (2), Jewish (1), Muslim (1), other religions (10), no affiliation (10) (statistics from Tellinger, 2005, pp. 249–59; see also Vermeer and Van der Ven, 2004, pp. 36–37 for details about Dutch religious plurality and diversity).

2 Private or independent schools have the right to determine their own religion and education policy. Only a small minority of South Africans attend private schools, however.

3 When governments begin ordering the lives of citizens, they tend to eradicate pluralism in favour of coordinated systems that would, in their opinion, preempt strife and conflict. A case in point would be the ‘legal pluralism’ that ruled in Europe until Roman law was rediscovered in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and all currents of law were gradually brought into one coordinated system (De Soto, 2000, p. 186).

4 In somewhat poetic terms, Wilber (2001, pp. 5, 13, 15) describes the mystical experience of the spiritual as follows: ‘...in the mystical consciousness, Reality is apprehended directly and immediately, meaning without meditation, any symbolic elaboration, any conceptualization, or any abstractions; subject and object become one in a timeless and spaceless act that is beyond any and all forms of meditation... In the realm of spirit... the soul becomes Being in a nondual state of radical intuition and supreme identity variously known as gnostic, nirvikalpa, samadhi, satori, kensho, jnana, etc... in the spirit realm, both soul and God unite in Godhead, or absolute spirit, itself without exclusive boundaries anywhere... [Spirit is] the
Ground or Being of all realms, the pure That of which all manifestations is but a play or modification.'

5 ‘Spirituality’ as used here does not primarily refer to the currently growing emphasis on a ‘vulgar’ form of hedonism that tends to end up in an entertainment economy. The importance of this form of spirituality should not be underestimated, however. Because of an apparent loss of plausibility in the master narratives of the mainstream religions, there is a tendency to divorce spirituality from traditional religious or cult meanings. This leads to the conviction that human behaviour can be perfected through certain types of spiritual acts. Growth in behaviour patterns seems to become more important than growth in religious belief (see: Fry, 1997; Cobb and Robshaw, 1998; Louw, 1998, pp. 233–42; Alexander, 2003, pp. 471–93; Edwards and Titchen, 2003, pp. 450–60; Bathgate, 2003, pp. 277–85; Takyi and Addai, 2002, pp. 177–93; Northcut, 2004, pp. 349–58; Hodge, 2005, p. 37; Heelas and Woodgate, 2005). Dennett (2007, pp. 302–07) points out that ‘spirituality’ should not be seen as the opposite of ‘materialistic’. Materialists can also have regard for the spiritual aspects of life. Other forms of spirituality that do not figure in this article are forms of non-religious spirituality, such as those of art, historical, traditional and indigenous contexts, the environment, language, literature, music and science, all of which are also connected with whole-person wellness (Roux, 2006a, p. 156). Another aspect of spirituality that does not receive attention in this article is that which has become the focus point of the caring professions such as psychiatry, nursing practice/health care, social care, criminology and education. An emerging approach in spirituality studies understands care, education and spiritual practices to be relational and enacted through discursive exchanges among participants within any shared context. Thus practitioners are understood to be involved in complex discursive practices which involve – among others – polyphonic speaking about spirit. This interdisciplinary approach explores the influence of society, ideology, culture, rationality and different epistemological paradigms on the notions of ‘spirituality’ and ‘spiritual care’. Rather than seeking to determine the meaning of spirituality or spiritual care, it aims at fostering discourses about spiritual care and spiritual formation. This interdisciplinary approach was first pioneered by members of the Centre for Spirituality Studies (http://www.hull.ac.uk/php/isg/) at the University of Hull, UK (see also: Frid et al., 2000, pp. 695–703; McSherry, 2000, passim; McCance et al., 2001, pp. 350–56; Hardin, 2001, pp. 11–18; Carson and Fairbairn, 2002, p. 15; Flick, 2002, pp. 5–24).

6 The Martians understand the present government’s reasons for relegating confessional religious education or instruction to the parents and to church communities: the ideal of nation-building demands the avoidance of potential conflict in public institutions. (See also note 2.)

7 To help their learners become acquainted with the spiritual dimensions of the various religions would mean, according to a distinction made by Roux (2006b, p. 1295), that teachers would have to follow an interreligious and not a multireligious approach. The latter amounts to learning about the different religions and their traditions, whereas the former ‘is an integrated dimension where the student’s perceptions, experiences and reflections form part of the discussions, and the teacher’s methodologies and approaches in the classroom need to reflect the integration of these different variables’.

References

(a) Books, Articles and Papers


Hofstede, G. and Hofstede, G. (2005) *Allemaal andersdenkenden (Dissenters, All of Us)* (Amsterdam, Contact).


Smit, M. (2009) Personal consultation, 2 April, Potchefstroom-Port Elizabeth (Advocate Smit teaches education law at the North-West University, South Africa).


Valenkamp, M. (2006) Interview about this article, 26 July, Port Elizabeth (Valenkamp is senior lecturer in philosophy, ethics and religion at the Diemen College of Education, Amsterdam, Netherlands).


(b) Court Cases


