

# The fall of the Berlin Wall three decades ago: Repercussions for Christian education in Hungary and South Africa



## Authors:

Johannes L. van der Walt<sup>1</sup>   
Sarolta Nagy<sup>2</sup>

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Edu-HRight Research Focus Area, Faculty of Education Sciences, North-West University Potchefstroom, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Sárospatak Calvinist-Reformed Theological Academy, Sárospatak, Hungary

## Corresponding author:

Johannes van der Walt,  
hannesv290@gmail.com

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The study reported in this article centred on the question of whether one could speak of a rebirth of Christian education in South Africa and Hungary respectively after the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Although the two countries are geographically far removed from each other, on two different continents and with different backgrounds, histories and social contexts, developments regarding Christian education in both were deeply affected by the Fall of the Wall in 1989, and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union. While one could conditionally speak of a rebirth of Christian education in Hungary, the same cannot be said of the situation in South Africa where religion and religious education were relegated away from the public school to the private sphere of the parental home and religious institutions. This might have contributed to the current deplorable state of morality in the country.

**Keywords:** Hungary; South Africa; Christian education; Religion; Religious education; Berlin Wall; Union of Socialist Soviet Republics; Morality.

## Introduction and problem statement

This article is the product of investigations into the socio-political and religious-educational events in two countries that are geographically quite distanced from each other. During discussions between us as researchers about the state of Christian education in our two countries, we came to the conclusion that the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) three decades ago had had a significant impact on the status of religious education in the two countries, and that we had to account for what has transpired in this period of time. We could not let the Fall of the Wall go unnoticed in Christian pedagogical circles, mainly because of the socio-political repercussions that these events in 1989 had for the Christian communities in the two countries, particularly regarding the status of Christian education. Our investigations then began revolving around the question: How and to what extent has the collapse of the Berlin Wall and of the USSR in 1989 affected the state of Christian education in Hungary and South Africa respectively?

A more basic question then cropped up: Why attempt to compare the situation regarding Christian education in Hungary in Central-Eastern Europe with that of South Africa at the southernmost tip of the African continent? One answer to this question can be found in an observation by the former United States of America president, Barack Obama (2018), in his Nelson Mandela Annual Lecture in 2018, namely that after the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the USSR, 'it seemed as if the forces of progress were on the march, that they were inexorable'. During the last decades of the 20th century, Obama (2018) continued:

... from Europe, to Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, dictatorships began to give way to democracies. The march was on. A respect for human rights and the rule of law, enumerated in a *Declaration* by the United Nations, became the guiding norm for the majority of nations, even where the reality fell far short of the ideal. (n.p.)

The march was on, also for Hungary and South Africa, despite the geographical distance separating them. Both of them felt the socio-political and subsequent religious-educational impact of the Fall of the Berlin Wall and of the implosion of the USSR in 1989. As nationals of the two countries, we found ourselves well positioned to examine this impact. We furthermore saw our two countries as co-actors on the inter- and transnational world stage. The media, particularly the social media, have closed up the geographical distance between them. They are both part of a globalised, inter- and transnational world and hence have become neighbours in the virtual realm due to new technology such as improved transport and electronic communication.

The purpose of this article is to share the results of our investigations, particularly those pertaining to religious education (see below for an explanation of the meaning of this term), with our compatriots and in particular with the educationists in our respective countries. In order for the article to achieve this aim, we structured the remainder thereof as follows: The next section contains a brief outline of the method of investigation, followed by an outline of the conceptual and theoretical framework that we used as a theoretical lens for evaluating our findings. The sections following thereafter contain brief outlines of the socio-political events and circumstances as they unfolded in the two countries after 1989, and how they affected religious education in the two countries. The article concludes with a comparative perspective and a conclusion about possible future expectations and repercussions.

## Method of investigation

The investigation began with an examination of the available literature about the post-1989 socio-political and religious-educational developments in the two countries. The results of this exercise were then constructively processed to create a coherent picture of what had transpired (cf. Leutwyler, Petrovic & Mantel 2012:111). Because researchers, as all people, relate to their world epistemologically through the mediation of interpreted experience, we applied interpretive and evaluative procedures based on insights gleaned from the theory outlined in the next section to reach the conclusions offered towards the end of this article (Van Huyssteen 2006:15–16). In other words, the theory, as outlined below, formed the theoretical lens through which the results of the study were viewed, interpreted and evaluated (cf. Elbanna, Eid & Kamel 2015:106). In more explicit terms, we used the perspectives that emerged from our conceptual and theoretical framework as indicators of human intentionality as a key determinant of behaviour such as policy-making with respect to religious education in the context of internal (political, for instance) and external (historical, such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall) factors (Packard 2015:536).

## Conceptual and theoretical framework

The investigation centred on the following keywords: 'the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989', 'Christian education' and 'rebirth'.

Regarding the 'Fall of the Wall': By 1989, Hungary had suffered from four decades of communist rule that had impacted comprehensively and mostly negatively on its Christian value system (Gyarmati 2011:126–129; Horváth 2014:109–143; Mindszenty 2015:188–193; Ravasz 1957:94, 1992:328–330 in Fodorné Nagy 2006:261–266). Atheism became the order of the day, and religious belief became a subject of ridicule, also in schools. The people were turned against religion and the churches. People with a Christian

worldview could, for instance, not gain admission to teacher education institutions (Pusztai 2011:373). The learning materials in schools were also used for purposes of communist indoctrination (see Fodorné Nagy 2006:1–340 and Gyarmati 2011:142–146 for a detailed outline of these conditions). By 1989, however, the communist ideology and rule began losing its grip. The Iron Curtain fell on 27 June 1989 when people were allowed to move freely to the West. The Berlin Wall collapsed on 09 November 1989, signalling a momentous turning point in the histories of many countries around the world – also those of Hungary and South Africa.

After the fall of the USSR, the leaders of the pre-1994 apartheid regime in South Africa saw their way clear to begin negotiations with the leaders of the black majority in the population. They were convinced that the threat of a communist take-over in South Africa had dissipated as a result of the demise of the USSR and that Western-type democracy would prevail after negotiations for a new political dispensation. The Fall of the Wall was a double-edged sword for the South African Government, however. On the one hand, fear of a communist take-over had largely vanished. The then president, Frederik Willem de Klerk, referred to the Fall of the Wall and of the USSR as a 'God-given opportunity' and reassured his followers that the African National Congress (ANC) would receive no more support from the Soviet Union during the ensuing negotiations about the future of South Africa (Pretorius 2012:415). On the other hand, it rendered the 'apartheid' Government's opposition to Communism out-of-date, thereby depriving the Government of its strongest argument why Western powers should pressurise the ANC into accepting power sharing (Giliomee & Mbenga 2007:394–395).

In this discussion, the term *religious education* will mostly refer to *Christian education*. The latter term refers to two phenomena: on the one hand, a biblical-confessional approach to the teaching of all the school subjects, but specifically to biblical faith or confessional education (education *into* the faith, not just *about* the faith, as in comparative religious instruction) and, on the other hand, Christian religious observances during the normal school day, such as observing Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas as school holidays, opening the school week with Bible reading and prayer during assembly, and opening and closing every school day in the same manner. As will be discussed, both these aspects of Christian education underwent changes in the period post-1989 in the two countries concerned.

The term *rebirth*, which will be used below, refers to the restoration (or not) of Christian education subsequent to the Fall of the Wall and of Communism. The question is whether one indeed can speak of a rebirth of Christian education after 1989 in the two countries concerned.

Several theories come into contention when searching for a theoretical lens through which to view the problematic of this

article: complexity theory, social capital theory, ecological systems theory, the cultural-historical action theory and action theory, among others. Our choice fell on *the social space and ethical or moral function theory* as developed by Van der Walt (2017a, footnote 5; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d; 2018; Andresen & Van der Walt 2018; Van der Walt & Wolhuter 2018). The theory hinges on two ideas that are central to this investigation: firstly, that events occur in particular *social spaces* (such as the socio-political spaces represented by Hungary and South Africa respectively); and secondly, that examination of such events and conditions always raises the question whether the role-players in a particular space demonstrate(d) a sense of *moral direction, consciousness and awareness* in their actions and behaviour.

According to the theory, schools, as societal relationships, exist in social spaces in modern differentiated societies (Strauss 2009:761, 778). *Space* can be defined as the situation in which a school and its relationships are physically located in the real world (Verburg 2015:420) – in this case in Hungary and South Africa as nation-states. Other modalities of social life, such as the ethical or moral, also function in real life and resultantly cohere with the modality of space (Strauss 2009:763). The school, as a societal relationship or space in its own right, has been entrusted with a unique mandate, function, calling and purpose in the modern differentiated society, and is supposed to discharge this function and purpose with a sense of responsibility, accountability and caring. ‘Responsibility and accountability’, in turn, refer to the ethical or moral dimension of its function in society. The actions and behaviour of the school as an agent in its social space should be ethically or morally acceptable and justifiable. This, according to Strauss (2009:763), is what is referred to as social morality: the showing of the necessary respect in the course of social interaction. Each participant or agent in the school or in a nation as social space should demonstrate care for the interests of all other people and the groups they belong to. Justice, fairness and respect for others are closely related to caring for others and their interests. According to UNESCO (2015:24), the application of this norm or principle could lead to a better world characterised by peaceful and ethical actions and behaviour. Koonce’s outline (2018:101, 105, 108, 111) of an ethic of caring in which she follows Noddings (2003:24), ties in with the above, namely that it is an approach to other people – people in different circumstances, from a position of critically caring, sympathy, empathy – the creation of mutual respect and understanding, thereby creating a safe and caring atmosphere and a strengthening of relationships and reciprocity.

The following outline of post-1989 events in respectively Hungary – with special reference to the role played by the Calvinist Reformed Church which is the second largest mainstream church in the country (the largest being the Roman Catholic) – and South Africa is the result of an examination, interpretation and evaluation of events and circumstances through the lens of this theory.

## Hungary: Socio-political and educational developments in the past three decades

A new form of Government was proclaimed on 23 October 1989, on the anniversary of the 1956 revolution, only a few weeks before the collapse of the Berlin Wall on 09 November 1989. A period of ‘productive chaos’ ensued, according to Károly Tóth (1989a:27), head of the Synod of the Calvinist Reformed Church in Hungary (CRCH) in the 1980s. Tóth was influential in the post-Fall period due to the key role that he had played in Christian Peace Conferences held in the entire Soviet Bloc. In this process, he had used his political influence to the advantage of the church. As early as 1987, he had begun negotiating with state officials for free Christian religious instruction. In 1989, he instituted a committee for church schooling and broached the topic of church schools in Parliament (Editor 1989:31). Due to his efforts, three grammar schools opened their doors to Christian education in 1990, and others followed soon after. Tóth also played a key role in the re-establishment of the Association of Reformed Youth. He also promoted youth work (Tóth 1989a:27), made the voice of the church heard in the promulgation of the new *Conscience and Religious Freedom Act* (Act 4 of 1990) and contributed to the expiry of the *Contract* of 1948 that, up to then, had demarcated the scope of action of the church under Communism.

In terms of Act XXXII of 1991, the churches could gradually reclaim their ‘old’ schools, that is, the schools that had been secularised during the Soviet era (since 1948). Another law (Act CXXIV of 1997) later stipulated that the state would provide the church schools with the same subvention as the public schools as a form of compensation for the land and other church properties that had not been returned to the church. The number of applicants at the schools was so high when the schools reopened their doors that many had to be refused (Tóth 1990:78, 80). It was an ideal of these schools to be ‘better’ than the state or public schools (Tóth 1989b:7). Their first purpose, however, was to educate intellectuals for the church (Tóth 1990:80) and, in the process, bringing the masses that had been alienated from God and the church back to the church. Bishop Tóth outlined the task of the Calvinist-Reformed schools as follows: they should convey knowledge, shape character and educate for ‘free cognition’. To achieve this aim, the teachers should be of committed faith, familiar with the educational traditions of the Hungarian Reformed Church and possess a good teaching style (Tóth 1989b:7). In 1993, the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the principle of the separation of state and church (Hungary, Constitutional Court Act # 4 of 1993a, section II, article 12). It ruled that the state must remain neutral in religious matters, but this did not exclude a degree of co-operation between state and church. The Court stressed that neutrality of the state was not the same as indifference, and hence formulated the neutrality principle with regard to the state-run schools. Based on this principle, Act LXXIX (§4) of 1993 on Public Education (Hungary 1993b)

therefore stipulates: 'The possibility for children/students to participate in optional religious education and instruction organised by a church as a legal entity in state and council educational-teaching institutions shall be ensured.' Church or faith schools could therefore teach on a faith basis.

In 1999, there were 212 elementary church schools (137 Roman Catholic, 51 Calvinist Reformed, 16 Lutheran, 2 Jewish and 6 other), and 177 secondary church schools (117 Roman Catholic, 44 Calvinist Reformed, 13 Lutheran, 1 Jewish, 2 other) (Fedor 2018). Teachers in faith-committed schools could also be selected based on their faith. The problem was that most teachers had, by that time, been trained in accordance with atheistic precepts and showed little interest in serving in the church schools (Fodorné Nagy 2006:173–175; MOL 1957–1988:XIX-A-21-e-1957-1988; Tomka 1992:24). The first teacher education college of the Calvinist-Reformed Church was opened in Hungary in 1990 under the leadership of Ferenc Fodor, Minister of the Reformed Church in Nagykoros. The College later (in 1993) morphed into the Károli Gáspár Reformed University in Budapest. This university educated religious education teachers, but much of the expertise to do so, lacked at the time. In 1990, Parliament assigned university status to two Reformed theological seminaries, namely those in Budapest and Debrecen. The restitution of two other institutions (Sárospatak and Pápa) was still under consideration at that point in time.

By 1990, 70 104 learners were registered for Calvinist-Reformed religious education lessons (Tóth 1990:80). The increase in the numbers of religious education students was high, springing up from none to hundreds in various places (Nagy 1994:99–101). Also, in this case, there was little expertise about how to teach the children. The first theoretical book on Christian Faith Education appeared only in 1996, followed by a syllabus for religious education and the development of textbooks and instructional materials for teachers. The number of those attending the churches also increased in the early years after 1989, but their numbers have since begun dwindling (Gábor 2017:6; Tomka 2009:64–79; Tóth 1994b:4, 79).

There have been two other threats to the Christian faith, in general, and to the Christian churches and education, in particular, in the post-1990 period: first, the persistent presence of socialism; and second, the rise of alternative 'religious organisations'. Although the Hungarian Communist party (officially known as the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party) had dissolved itself in 1989, it gradually raised its head again in the form of various new political configurations. Its membership was at its highest in 1987 with 883 131 members (Réfi 2009:66). Although it had never enjoyed the support of more than 10% of the population, it exercised absolute power in society. The members of the former Socialist Workers' Party, together with their closest family members, remained intent on retaining the old pre-1989 political system, mainly because of the personal

advantages that it had had for socialist workers. Therefore, they took pains to ensure that their political influence remained great – mainly in the economic domain. Reports by ministers, psychologists and sociologists such as Bagdy (s.a.:95–119), Horváth (2014) and Bölcskei (1999:200) indicate that the effects of Communism have been persistent to this day in that it still, in many ways, affects the value preferences of the descendants of those who lived and suffered under Communism.

A large variety of alternative religious communities sprang up after 1990, resulting in a boom of religions (Tóth 1993:77; 1994a:91). These groups took advantage of the religious lacuna that had been created by the demise of Communism (Medyesy 1992:95), but they also were increasingly hostile to the historic mainstream churches (Tóth 1992:7). Many of their members blamed the Christian churches for having collaborated with the Soviet regime prior to 1989 (Kozma 1992:5–6; MOL 1957–1988, XIX-A-21-a-H-31-4/1958; Ravasz 1992:372). By the early 2000s, there were roughly 350 such organisations that were registered as 'churches', compared to the 104 churches in the four times more populous Poland and to the mere 75 churches in France at that time (Antalóczy 2014:4). Many of these organisations used the word *church* in their names in order to receive tax advantages (Antalóczy 2014:5). The revision of the *Conscience and Religious Freedom Act* (Act 4 of 1990; promulgated as Act CCVI of 2011: The Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion and on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Denominations and Religious Communities Act) put an end to attempts by non-ecclesiastic organisations to obtain economic and political advantages under the new regime.

The last decade was more or less a period of consolidation. The Fundamental Law (i.e. the Constitution of Hungary), which came into effect on 01 January 2012, commences with the words: 'God Bless the Hungarians' and later continues with: 'We recognise the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood ...'. The intention of the Fundamental Law was to reconnect public education with its Christian roots and to embody a return to the situation before Soviet domination. It stipulated that education in Hungary should be a resumption of the education before 1948, that is, before the onset of Soviet domination. In this spirit, the new *Legal Act on Public Education* (Act CXC of 2011) was promulgated. Section 35 of the Act stipulates: 'In state primary schools, ethics classes or, alternatively, religious and ethics classes organised by an ecclesiastically authorised person shall be included in compulsory curricular class activities.' Application of this stipulation began in 2013 and has now been introduced in the entire public-school system (religious education lessons have always been compulsory in church schools). A new syllabus for religious education lessons was introduced in 2012. The churches now also maintain 22 institutions of higher education (Fedor 2018), mainly for the training of ministers and for teacher education. While state-financed, they are managed by the churches.



Although 'Hungary has given up the principle of ideological neutrality' (Szathmáry 2014:1) as evidenced by the various acts of Parliament as related, and although it acknowledges Christianity as its organic principle, a significant proportion of its citizens remains deeply secularised in their private lives. Although many parents nowadays send their children to church schools, they do not do so for confessional reasons, but because they deem these schools to be 'better' than the state or public schools (Hutter 2016; Novák 1989:7). Around 15% of the children in Hungary now attends church schools from kindergarten to grammar school (Fedor 2018.). According to observers, such as Pusztai (2006; 2007; 2011), the children in these schools have an advantage over their counterparts in the public or state schools in that they show greater altruism. They are more socially conscious and useful, are less career orientated, are hard workers and show respect to others and are more community conscious.

## Socio-political and educational conditions and developments in South Africa before and after the fall of the Wall

The *Bantu Education Act* of 1953 terminated the pre-1948 system of control of education in South Africa: education or schooling for white people was henceforth managed by the Minister of Education (Barnard 1979:140; Barnard & Coetzee 1975:179). Education or schooling for black people, people of mixed race and Asians was provided, financed and controlled by missionaries and other non-governmental organisations, and managed by separate education departments. Following the passing of the Act, those examination institutions that had not been closed during the transfer of control to the State were put under the control of principals and teachers who were committed to the ideologies of apartheid and Christian National Education (CNE) (Hartshorne 1993:197). No form of religious education was legally prescribed or enforced by any of these departments for 'non-white' education. According to Christie and Collins (1984:162), the Christian ideals of an egalitarian and communal society in which everyone aspired to a common culture that was both Western and Christian, were struck a severe blow. While the syllabuses (of the different school, college and university subjects) for non-whites, as such, allowed alternative interpretations, both the textbooks of this period and the teachers were strongly biased toward the Christian-National Education approach, according to Hartshorne (1993:243). The move to Bantu education, based on the 1953 Act, was therefore opposed by the non-Afrikaner segment of the population, by the so-called non-whites as well as by the English-speaking missionaries who controlled some of the schools and the white and black teachers who taught in them. Among others, they objected to the indoctrination that went with Christian-National Education, because, in their opinion, it tacitly supported apartheid, which they regarded as an unchristian philosophy to be treated with suspicion.

Education for the white section of the population was regulated by another act, namely the *Act on National Education Policy* of 1967 (Act 39 of 1967). This Act stipulated, in line with the Constitution at the time, that education for white South Africans should be under state control and 'should possess a Christian and a broadly defined national character' (Barnard 1976:8). It embodied the Christian education ideals and aspirations of the white Afrikaner population of South Africa. The Act stipulated in Article 2(1)(a) that:

education in schools maintained, managed and controlled by a State Department (including a provincial department of education) should display a Christian character, but the religious convictions of the parents and the learners should be respected as far as religious education/instruction and religious observations are concerned.

Those sections of the white South African populace which were not content with this arrangement, could establish, manage, control and maintain schools in line with their own views (Bingle 1970:26).

As mentioned, the approach to education, as described above, did not appeal to the non-white section of the population. For them, this approach was yet another demonstration of how apartheid was enforced and practised. The white community was accused of using Christianity (Calvinism) as 'a reinforcing mechanism to the apartheid creed' (Christie & Collins 1984:161). This situation nevertheless remained in place for the next two decades despite heavy opposition from the non-white population and despite severe external political pressure exerted on the apartheid government for its policy of racial and ethnic separation. Space constraints prohibit a detailed outline of all the strategies followed by the apartheid regime to keep the system in place, and of all the strategies invoked by the opposition in attempting to ensure the demise of the apartheid dispensation such as the introduction of People's Education in the 1980s.

Then, in 1989, came the historical turning point signalled by the Fall of the Berlin Wall and of the USSR. Following the struggle against apartheid and after long negotiations, the new fully democratic South Africa was born. The advent of the new dispensation in 1994 also brought a new approach to religious education. A new policy with respect to religion in education and schooling in general was expected in view of the stipulations in chapter 2 (The Manifesto of Human Rights) of the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that was promulgated in 1996.

Christianity was, and still today is, the dominant religion in South Africa, both in terms of absolute numbers and percentage of the total population. According to the 1996 and 2001 censuses, the number of Christians in South Africa increased from 30.0 million in 1996 to 35.8 million in 2001 (out of around 50 million in total); Christians as a percentage of the total population grew from 76.6% in 1996 to 79.8% in 2001 (RSA 2004). (The 2011 census did not include religious

affiliation as a factor.) Despite this majority, the post-1994 legislator in South Africa struggled with the question, as Lisovskaya (2018) wrote with respect to the situation in Russia post-1989:

... how does one bring religion ... into the school of a constitutionally secular state? And how can this be accomplished in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society in such a way that minority rights are not violated? (p. 312)

Deliberations about religion in/and education in South African schools took nearly a decade after the birth of the new socio-political dispensation. The Ministry of the National Department of Education responded to the question above with the proclamation of the National Policy on Religion and Education (RSA 2003).

The policy currently regulates three aspects of religion in/and education: (1) Religion Education as a normal or academic school subject (§17–53); (2) religious instruction (§54–57), which comes down to comparative teaching *about* religions; and (3) religious observances (§58–65), which are to be observed equitably and equally in public schools. In effect, all forms of *confessional* religious education were banned from public and/or state schools. Private schools with a religious ethos or bias could continue offering their particular brand of confessional religious education.

## A rebirth of Christian religious education in Hungary and South Africa respectively?

Any form of religion was banned from the school in the erstwhile Eastern Bloc during the early 20th century. As described, this trend was reversed after 1990, either through recognising private schools with a religious ethos (as in Russia and Hungary) or by allowing a return of the dominant religion in public schools as in Hungary and also in Armenia (cf. Terzian 2014:27–52). In Hungary, as outlined, Christian religious education regained a relatively strong foothold in public schools. Christian religious lessons were introduced in all schools, the establishment of faith-based schools was allowed, a Christian teacher education college was re-founded, and this morphed into a Christian university; ethics classes, presented by duly authorised ecclesiastics, are now offered in all schools. Furthermore, institutions of higher learning are being maintained by churches and financially supported by the state. All of these developments since 1989 seem to point to a rebirth of Christian religious education in Hungary.

The recent resurrection of Communism in Hungary could be an offshoot of the secularism that has recently begun rising in Western Europe and North America. The agitations of human rights proponents and the increasingly multicultural make-up of the societies in Western Europe and North America seem to have compelled the education authorities in several countries to either remove religion and Religious Education from the schools as part of a secularisation drive, for example

in Norway (cf. Hagesaether & Sandsmark 2006), or give students the option of attending religious education classes in one of a limited number of recognised religions such as in Belgium where students can choose between one of six religions (cf. Loobuyck & Franken 2014). Up to now, Hungary seems to have escaped the full impact of secularism (i.e. distancing oneself from all forms of religion and from religious institutions), but the signs are there that secularism and communism might threaten the status quo regarding religious education in the public schools.

Based on developments in South Africa after 2003, one could speak of a double-sided coin regarding the status of religious education. On the one hand, the answer to the question of whether one could speak of a rebirth of religious education must be favourable. A more socially just and equitable dispensation was inaugurated in schools after 1994: the task of providing confessional religious education since 2003 has fallen where it arguably belongs, namely with the parents and the religious institutions such as churches. On the other hand, the answer must be somewhat negative: since confessional religious education has been privatised and is now out of the public arena, it is uncertain to what extent this form of education is still being provided by the parents and religious institutions, and how effective their instruction has been. There are signs that this important facet of education is being neglected – a circumstance that might have been playing into the hands of secularism (the distancing of South Africans from all forms of religion and hence from the mores [ethics and morals] that flow from religious commitment). The new National Policy on Religion and Education (RSA 2003) arguably might also have led to a de facto divide between the state (school) and confessional forms of religion in South Africa (cf. Swami, Paluri & Koshy 2017:4), despite the Minister of Education's claims to the contrary.

South Africa, as a *socio-political space*, has come up with a workable solution that provides space for comparative religious instruction, Religion or Religious studies as a regular academic school subject and for religious observances in schools. However, the banning of *confessional* religious education from public schools remains a cause of concern. Its removal from the public school *might* already be having negative consequences for the ethical or moral conduct of the general population. The moral base of South African society has clearly deteriorated in the last two decades: increased law- and normlessness, widespread corruption, xenophobia, service delivery uprisings, rioting, xenophobia, strikes, an increase in crime and a general lack of social capital are the order of the day.

We intentionally used the words 'might be having negative consequences' above, because, in our opinion, the current situation in South Africa is much too complicated to blame the current deterioration of morality and moral values solely on the banning of confessional religious education from the public sphere. Many other factors – some of which are typical of a developing country – might also have been contributing

to this unfortunate state of affairs; factors such as the after-effects of the struggle against apartheid, societies changing worldwide, the growth of secularism, the advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a tendency towards personal self-determination, the human rights culture, the impact of neoliberal economic policies, the new free-from-religious-restraints environment, a stagnant economy, unemployment, poverty, disillusionment with the 'new' political dispensation, and several more.

On the other hand, the notion that religion is a precondition for morality is deeply ingrained (McKay & Whitehouse 2015:447). Former President Nelson Mandela, for instance, seemed to have entertained this notion. He averred, among others, that the spiritual malaise that South Africa(ns) were suffering from by 1997 could be ascribed to 'a lack of hope and faith. [This] helps fuel the problems of crime and corruption and hinders our efforts to deal with them' (Moral Regeneration Movement 2018). Thompson (2018:11) likewise contends that the values that people live by are intrinsically linked to broader life-conceptual (personal philosophical) and religious questions. He (Thompson 2018:192) goes so far as to remind us of Nietzsche's challenge: in the absence of God (who might have provided a fixed set of values), by what criterion can one judge what is right? This link between religion and morality is probably not as direct and simplistic as Mandela and Thompson's utterances seem to suggest. Therefore, McKay and Whitehouse (2015:465, 449) correctly suggest that we should approach the relationship between religion and morality in terms of a 'fractionated view' of both; both can be endlessly assembled and reassembled in culturally and historically contingent ways. This implies that some aspects of religion may promote some aspects of morality, just as others serve to suppress or obstruct the same or different aspects.

The connection between religion and morality, nevertheless, remains important (Scheepers & Van der Slik 1998:679) in a multicultural and complex social space such as South Africa where people are constantly confronted with the relativity of moral judgements (Thompson 2017:242). The deprivation of many children from exposure to confessional religion-based values might have been the cause of much of the moral laxity (i.e. lawlessness and crime, and even anomie) that South Africa is currently experiencing. If anything, this moral depravity has increased since 2003 (Prins 2019:20). In 2016, Science and Technology Minister, Naledi Pandor, lamented, with reference to self-enrichment, rent-seeking, nepotism, corruption and gravy train excesses, about 'the low ethics, immoral conduct, and corruption of the political movement for which (Chris Hani) sacrificed his life' (Saunderson-Meyer 2016). There is also an abundance of evidence regarding immoral behaviour among young people in the form of violence, threats of violence, assault and robbery, alcohol abuse, drugs and weapons. These findings, according to the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (2017), 'must be contextualized within the family and community environments in which these (young

people) live'. A comparison between Hungary (where confessional religion education is offered in the public schools) and South Africa seems to suggest that faith- or confession-based ethics and morality training in the schools *might* affect crime levels. The 2016 murder rate in Hungary was 1.34 per 100 000 of the population whereas it was 34 in South Africa; the total crimes perpetrated per 100 000 in Hungary was 41.42 as opposed to 58.94 in South Africa (Nation Master 2019a). (The connection between the presence or absence of confessional religious education in public schools and crime level requires further research.)

Based on the notion of a link between religion and morality, a case could indeed be made for a return to *confessional* religious instruction in all schools in South Africa.

## Conclusion

A comparison between Hungary and South Africa regarding the impact of the Fall of the Wall and, subsequently, of the USSR on religious education (*in casu* Christian education) is possible, because they both form part of a globalised, inter- and transnational world. The comparison shows that developments with respect to Christian education tend to unfold in accordance with the historical and socio-political conditions and contexts of countries (i.e. as respective social spaces).

At the time of the Fall of the Wall, Hungary was a Central-East-European communist country, and South Africa a southern African, apartheid-governed colonialist country. The former had a relatively developed, literate and culturally relatively homogeneous Magyar population, and the latter a less developed, less literate and arguably more diverse population consisting of at least 11 discernible ethnic groups, each with its own language, customs and value system. Both these populations were subject to unpopular, suppressive governments in the period after the Second World War: Hungary under communist rule, and South Africa under apartheid. Hungary was governed by a communist minority with robust Soviet support and South Africa by a government dominated by a relatively small white population strongly opposed to any form of socialism or communism and with a strong belief in the separate development of race and ethnic groups. The Fall of the Wall and the collapse of the USSR brought relief to both – although in widely different ways. The communist regime in Hungary was replaced by a more democratic social-democratic government, and the apartheid regime in South Africa by a fully democratically elected government. Communism, nevertheless, still retains a presence in both countries.

The two countries' respective dispensations with respect to religious education (*in casu* Christian education) pre-1989 were also quite different. In Hungary, the communist dispensation was openly hostile to Christianity and resultantly drove this religion as well as Christian education underground, whereas in South Africa, the white-dominated



government favoured Christian-National education for the white population. They seemed not to be much concerned about what form of religious education the other population groups preferred, but strove to impose Christian-National education also on them. In both countries, the populace showed passive as well as active resistance to the policies concerning religious education. Because the post-1989 religious education reforms in the two countries clearly had different starting points, and the socio-historical and cultural-political conditions prevailing in them differed markedly, their solutions with respect to the future of Christian education in schools were also different. In Hungary, Christianity and Christian education, in many respects, reassumed its former status as the dominant religion, whereas in South Africa, particularly after the proclamation of the National Policy on Religion and Education (RSA 2003), Christian education as well as other forms of confessional religious education was privatised. Although this issue merits further and deeper research, the difference in approach to the status of confessional religion in the public schools *might have led* to a difference in the general crime rate in the two countries. The absence of faith- or confession-based ethics and morality training in the public schools in South Africa the schools attended by the vast majority of learners, *might* have been a contributing factor (together with other factors typical of a developing country) to the fact that South Africa has been shown to be one of the least lawful countries in the world (Nation Master 2019b).

Therefore, the question whether one could speak of a rebirth of Christian education in the two countries can be answered ambiguously. In some respects, one could indeed speak of such a rebirth in Hungary. However, there seems to be cause for deep concern about the future of Christian education in that country (in view of the rise of anti-Christian trends such as secularisation and a de facto divide between state and church). In South Africa, the de facto privatisation of religion through the relegation of religious education to the parental home and to religious institutions might have had a negative effect on the morality demonstrated by citizens in the public sphere. In terms of the social space and ethical or moral action and function theory, the two countries compared in this study represent quite different socio-political and religious spaces and hence also quite distinctive solutions regarding the current status of religious education.

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The authors declare that no competing interest exists.

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J.L.v.d.W. general line of argumentation, and sections concerning South Africa; SN sections concerning Hungary.

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## Disclaimer

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## Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for carrying out research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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