

# Editorial: Religion and Society

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The rising significance of the focus on scholarly discourse development on ‘religion and society’ is evident from a number of recent initiatives. For instance, the Religion and Society Programme is a £12m research initiative funded by UK research councils between 2007-2013. To this we can add the growing significance of the *Journal of Religion and Society* published by Berghahn Journals in both Oxford and New York, the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Society* of the American Academy of Religion, and the fact that we shall have a fourth international conference on Religion and Spirituality in Society in 2014 at the Universidad Nacional Costa Rica Heredia. The founding of programmes for postgraduate research (University of Aberdeen for instance), and research Centers for Religion and Society at universities (Notre Dame University, US; Victoria University; and University of Western Sydney Australia are examples) also speak to this fact. This can rightly be termed a renewed interest for scholarship in the New Millennium. This is also borne out by the seminal book, borne out by the seminal book edited by Gerrie ter Haar and Yoshio Tsuruoka in 2007, viz. *Religion and Society: An Agenda for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2007).

In their book, Ter Haar and Tsuruoka deal with a number of themes that they regarded as seminal for discourse development on religion and society back in 2007. *Firstly*, it makes some seminal contributions to two of the most pressing issues that confront the religions. These focus on the study of the religious dimensions of conflict – ‘War and Peace’ – and the articulation of technology with ‘Life and Death’. *Secondly*, it contributes some seminal perspectives on the articulation of local cultures with their

global religious counterparts as well as the vexed issue of boundary making and marginalisation which is part and parcel of much of how religions function socially. *Thirdly*, it contains sections on method and theory in the study of religion and the study of religion in one country, viz. Japan. In some detail, each of the articles in this volume of *Alternation*, makes a contribution to these different focuses. The main contribution of this volume though, is that it quite consciously engages the issues from within the southern African context or at least from consciously positioned postapartheid and postcolonial perspectives<sup>1</sup>.

In his presidential address of 2012, Johannes A. Smit points out that whereas the struggle for liberation was characterised by the prominent participation of religious formations vis-à-vis the apartheid state, their significance in the public domain has significantly diminished since 1994. For him, this raises questions not only about the state's relationship and articulation with the religions, but also about the relationship and articulation of the religions with the state and with one another as part and parcel of the one state. His article tries to carefully think through some of the challenges that not only face religious formations but also academe. Drawing on insights that derives from the academic programmes developed and scholarly work done by a few colleagues in the discipline of Religion, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College campus, he then charts a way forward. At the level of the academic study of religion, the challenge is to develop scholarly programmes that involve all the religions equally, also taking their specific sensitivities and emphases vis-à-vis theoretical generalisations and stereotyping into consideration. He then provides seven seminal perspectives that may contribute to this developing discourse. The ultimate two questions that are addressed, therefore relate to both how the religions in the state relate to the state, but also to one another in the state. On both levels, academic contributions to the development of the discourses from within the religions have seminal roles to play.

In his article, Farid Esack provides a perspective and analysis of the notion of 'redeeming Islam' - Islam as the subject of attempts by others to save it. The paper challenges the contemporary scholarship undertaken in the

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<sup>1</sup> For one of the latest contributions but still a very Western perspective, see Hjelm, and Zuckerman (2013).

academy in respect of the Study of Islam whereby such scholarship operates within a context that endorses the agenda of Empire, particularly in regard to the construction of the ‘good Muslim’ who is consistent with contemporary notions of human rights, pluralism, non-violence and Western modes of thought and being. The ‘bad Muslim’ is one who does not endorse or support this project. The consequence of this type of scholarship is that it is uncritical and unaware of the context in which it operates as well as the historico-political legacy of Muslim societies in relation to colonialism and Western violence. In addition, it ignores the pertinent questions of poverty, sustainable development, and the voices of the marginalised – important questions for much of the Muslim and Two Third World – while concentrating on questions that are framed by a Northern context.

Reflecting on the notion of ‘Comparative Theology’, P. Pratap Kumar assesses and evaluates the prospects of this notion making a constructive contribution towards building a general theory of religion. While he acknowledges the relationship between the two disciplines he examines the relationship between faith and religion which he believes is crucial to for coming to some conclusions with regard to the relationship between Comparative Theology and Religious Studies. For him, the crux of the matter is the influence of theology on the study of religion and he then addresses this issue referring to some seminal critical dialogues in the field. This problematization of the method of Comparative Theology then shows what the limits are of the theological method for comparative analysis in the study of religion. He concludes by suggesting that Comparative Theology can only serve an internal theological purpose of one religious tradition but cannot serve as the central focus and approach for a general theory of religion.

Starting from the definitional problem related to the phenomenological approach to the study of religion, Nisbert Taisekwa Taringa points out that the phenomenology of religion has been criticized for failure of identity and critical nerve. Scholars who use this approach have been accused of taking a role that amounts to not more than a reporter, repeating the insiders’ unsubstantiated claims while invoking methodological agnosticism as justification for doing so. Against this background, his article explores the problems and possibilities of balancing critique and caretakership by critically examining the aims and methods of a particular

nuance of phenomenology of religion called the historical-typological phenomenology of religion. The article's finding is that by taking a critical stance on the aims and methods of the phenomenology of religion, religious studies scholars can be able to insist on the *sui generis* nature of religion and at the same time be able to move from caretakership to critics. This has great significance on the issue of the role of the scholar of religion as a public intellectual.

In her contribution, Nelly Mwale points out that studies on the public role of religion in Zambia have largely concentrated on the history of Christianity in the third republic when political expressions of religious beliefs became more apparent. The issue is that Christianity was firmly embedded in the Zambian society at independence and its mission-educated leaders fully understood the importance of the consent and blessings of the churches. Against this background, and using qualitative document review and thematic analyses, the article explores the role of the Roman Catholic Church in Zambia's political independence (1890 to 1964). The general impression is that Christian missionaries in Africa supported colonial rule is pervasive and historians as well as students of mission history seem to have taken it for granted that missionaries were agents of colonialism. The Catholic Church, which from the 1990s to the present has been championing human rights and democracy in Africa, is not exempted from this 'charge'. In general, mainstream Christian churches and organisations were in fact opposed to African independence but were ultimately won over the idea. The article positions the Roman Catholic Church in the political affairs of Zambia amid its apolitical claims. It argues that the Church contributed to Zambia's political development (here taken to mean the emergence of national sovereignty) directly and indirectly through the provision of education, health and pastoral services and the publication of pastoral letters though not to say it never erred. On this latter point, the article points out that the church also had lost opportunities and that it could learn from these and do better in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Zambia.

The role of women in Economic development is important to the building and the sustenance of African communities. Nevertheless in most African countries, participation in the economic sphere has been dominated by men with a few women participating in both the private and the public sector. In her article, Beatrice Okyere-Manu addresses this issue and points

to the factors that have contributed to this gender gap, as well as analyse the ethical dimensions of this problem. She argues that various economic policies have failed to benefit black women because of the deeply embedded patriarchy in South African society, and the different ways that patriarchy is implicit even in policies that are supposed to promote restorative justice. She then explores the patriarchal barriers that prevent black African women in post-apartheid South Africa from fully participating in the economy and challenge the diverse faith communities comprising of Christianity, Islam, Hindu, and African Traditional Religion to revisit the teachings of their core values in order to provide a contextual voice within this complex patriarchal society. They should aim at building a just economy in the new South Africa. For any informed discussion on contextual and socially relevant economic development policies in the country, an exploration of patriarchy from a comparative ethical perspective is important she argues.

Auwais Rafudeen focused his research on the Orion Cold Storage Sage. In November 2011, Cape Town meat importers Orion Cold Storage was accused, principally by the South African National Halaal Authority (SANHA) – a major halaal certifying body in the country – of deliberately mislabelling certain non-halaal meat products and then selling these off as halaal to its customers. Some of these products included pork which was then relabelled as sheep or veal. Since Orion had a large Muslim customer base, and because some of its products had been certified halaal by another major halaal certifying body, namely the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC), there was a considerable public outcry amongst Muslims, which was exacerbated by national television coverage of the issue and social media. The issue rapidly extended beyond the initial court case against Orion and became a public debate about halaal procedures and standards in general and the legitimacy of the MJC as a halaal certifying body. Against this background Rafudeen's article analyses reasons for why the saga unfolded in the way it did. Utilising an analytical framework developed by Shaheed Tayob in a seminal work on halaal in South Africa, it argues that the positioning and public engagement of protagonists during the saga was importantly shaped by market considerations in a competitive halaal industry. The article also argues that an analysis of the relevant players' actions primarily in terms of such considerations does not take into account the theological dimension to this

saga and so it seeks to illuminate this dimension by relating halaal to legal and methodological discourses within the Islamic tradition.

Garth Mason's paper focuses on Frances Banks' spiritual life and her education career which has significance for the embellishment of both the historical landscapes in spirituality and progressive educational thought in South Africa. It argues three points: first; Frances Banks is an important figure in the history of South African spirituality and education; second her struggles with patriarchal authority have important repercussions for gender studies. Third, her leaving the Community of the Resurrection has implications for an understanding of orthodox spirituality.

In his article, Irvin G. Chetty addresses the question of whether indeed a new configuration has surfaced that has been called the 'New Apostolic Reformation' (NAR), within South African Pentecostal/Charismatic circles, since 2000. The adherents of this movement have sounded a call for the Pentecostal/Charismatic church, in particular, to return to what they describe as the 'Apostolicity' of the church. The emergence of this New Apostolic Reformation is more than a South African phenomenon. C. Peter Wagner, almost a decade and a half ago, in his book, *Churchquake* contended that there were, at least forty thousand 'Apostolic' churches representing approximately eight to ten million members in the USA. He asserted that this New Apostolic Reformation is also rapidly growing in all of the six continents and is the 'greatest change in the way of doing church since the Protestant Reformation'. In South Africa the following New Apostolic Reformation groupings have emerged, namely the New Covenant Ministries International (NCMI), Grace International (GI), Congress World Breakthrough Network (C-WBN), International Strategic Alliance of Apostolic Churches (ISAAC) and Judah Kingdom Alliance (JKA). A number of theories have attempted to explain the emergence of new religious movements (NRMs), inter alia, deprivation, revitalisation, and brainwashing. This study focuses on one of these theories, namely, revitalisation, but also favours a holistic approach to an understanding of the NAR. The article also engages the nature and extent of their deviation from 'mainstream' Pentecostal doctrines and practices.

Herbert Moyo's article argues that current research and scholarship in pastoral theology in Africa is influenced by Western knowledge systems (WKS) and culture at the expense of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems

(AIKS) imbedded in African Traditional Religions (ATRs) that are contextual relevant and can be valuable to pastoral care givers. Moyo argues that Christian pastoral care givers can benefit from objective research of AIKS imbedded in ATR and culture as this will unearth African paradigms, worldviews, and Ubuntu/ botho traditional concepts. The author looks at current research in ATR being done by Christian theologians, the training of pastoral caregivers based in western paradigms and the resilience of ATR and African culture as treasure for social construction and state construction in Africa. Western knowledge systems are different from African knowledge systems therefore WKS cannot be pre-packed as solutions for African challenges. The article also seeks to propose research and teaching in pastoral theology that can be relevant and effective for African challenges. Instead of the Christocentric form of inculturation that we currently have, the article proposes a dialogical approach that will treat the two religions objectively through research and teaching.

In their article, Welly den Hollander and Madhubala Ishvir Kasiram describes part of a doctoral study that developed a training programme for pastoral counsellors for assisting persons infected with and affected by HIV and AIDS. The Intervention and Research Intervention Research Model (IRM) as developed by Rothman and Thomas (in De Vos *et al.* 2001) was used to review pertinent literature informing the development of the product (the training programme). The article is based on two aspects: firstly the literature that was considered relevant in guiding the development of the training programme, in this instance, post foundationalism, contextual and narrative therapy; and secondly, the pilot programme itself used Muller's (2003) post foundational framework, to accommodate its refinement and ongoing development as a product.

In their research-based article Madhubala Ishvir Kasiram, N. Ngcobo and D. Mulqueeny outlines how HIV/AIDS affects men's and women's adjustment to positive living. It explores issues of challenge, survival and sexuality and offers culturally appropriate and sensitive life skills that may be adopted in schools, families and communities. Life skills education for risk reduction and living positively in the area of HIV and AIDS needs to be carefully planned and executed, or else it runs the risk of increasing risk taking behavior (Visser 2005), an important consideration that this article heeds.

Finally, Peter Sandy focuses his research on the fact that nicotine addiction is a public health problem that increases medical morbidity and mortality. Individuals with mental distress have higher rates of smoking and poorer cessation outcomes than those without mental distress. Individuals with schizophrenia tend to smoke more than those with other diagnostic categories. They are also more likely to smoke high-tar cigarettes than individuals with other forms of mental distress. They are therefore not only more likely to be addicted to nicotine, but they are also at an increased risk of developing serious health complications. Despite this, individuals with schizophrenia are generally unlikely to seek help to quit smoking, a function of a decreased level of motivation and inability to do so. In spite of this, this service user group is rarely involved in smoking cessation activities.

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