

# Editorial: Religion and Social Responsibility

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In our decolonising, digitalising, and neo- and post-colonial world, the scholarly focus on ‘Religion and Social Responsibility’ is here to stay. As Smit (this issue) cogently points out, it has become common purchase not only within traditional socially-minded religious discursive traditions such as the historical Social Gospel Movement, the Catholic Church’s socially conscious and social justice statements and programmes since at least the eighteenth century, and the large variety of missionary movements of the nineteenth century, but that it has also been embraced by more conservative sectors of global religious society. Following the wide variety of social responsibility programmes developed and implemented – with a variety of measures of success – by the capitalist business sectors of the world since the mid-twentieth century, social responsibility programmes as forms of social intervention, or, for the purposes of social transformation and social and economic development, have become common cause for many institutions. With this issue of *Alternation*, we wish to place this item firmly on the scholarly agenda of not only institutions of higher learning, but also religious organisations across the religions. We also affirm the socially conscious engagement of society by the business and corporate world. After all, it is these sectors that not only drive the world economy and world development, but also, as individuals and companies, benefit the most from a continuously developing world political and socio-cultural economy.

Furthermore, within the religious and spiritual arena, and especially the scholarly study of our religions and spiritualities, it is imperative, that we continue to intellectualise the notion of ‘religion and social responsibility’. Apart from the more obvious reasons – of the support and empowering of communities of the poor and destitute – it is incumbent of religious formations to more assertively fill the voids of silence and ideological acquiescence and

uncritical endemic ideological assent in our societies. It was in this context that we made the call for papers for this issue of *Alternation*. Needless to say, in our opinion, we have only started to scratch the surface of this multiply religious-cultural challenge. Compared to our original call, and even though some issues have been addressed by scholars on other platforms, some of the main challenges that remain are, for instance: continued endemic corruption that has become embedded in the imperially created, and apartheid-entrenched ‘tribal political-economies’ of our continent; the so-called systems of patrimonialism that rule the roost across the continent; the endemic competition for (scarce) resources by poverty-stricken communities right in our midst; political and civil servants that are not held to account by civil society, and which have been only weakly challenged through ‘service delivery protests’, by impoverished, destitute and indigent communities suffering from chronic societal deprivation and abject poverty; and socio-political and so-called ‘civil war’ violence in sub-Saharan Africa, which has its roots in socio-cultural destitution socio-cultural impoverishment. We think, that, as in many other times in history, religious formations are called on to constructively engage the multiform challenges of ‘social responsibility’ in the interests of the tangible furthering of socio-cultural equality; gender, social, and ecological justice; and the unreserved promotion of the dignity and freedom of all, trans-religiously, and irrespective of religious or cultural affiliation and association. In this context, it is incumbent on religious formations on the continent, to become more socioculturally conscientised, and to collaborate ecumenically across cultural, social, and religions’ systems, in the interests of realising these goals. We know, that the religious formations do have the resources, that they have been a blessing to many millions of people over the centuries, and, not least, that they are present in the grassroots environments of our continent. They encounter the raw material realities of the sociocultural challenges of our continent’s people on a daily basis, wherever they serve. We also know, that they do have the know-how and the age-old critical resources to keep leaders, managers, principals, chiefs, directors, superiors and supervisors of any ilk or profession accountable. And, it stands to reason, that, in order to be responsive to the challenges and needs of the communities we serve, we need to promote and fast-track responsive and responsible religious, political, economic, and civil leadership, accountable governance and responsible citizenship.

The articles in this issue of *Alternation*, then, provide a few brief, and exploratory perspectives under this rubric. We think that it is incumbent on us

in the Arts and Humanities, especially in the religions – but also in the Humanities disciplines more broadly speaking, that study the religions and religious formations – to take up this topic as part of constructively engaging the complex and multiform socio-cultural challenges our continent faces, for transformation and development, the narrowing of the inequality gap, and to do this in trans-disciplinary ways, and in a multi-cultural fashion.



In a previous article, Smit traced J.T. van der Kemp's link to the British anti-slavery network, argued that his position on the exploitation of the Khoi paralleled his views on slavery, and that his civil rights activism for and on behalf of the Khoi mirrored his anti-slavery advocacy (cf. Smit 2016). In this article, 'Social Responsibility and Power I', he continues his analysis of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century archive which Van der Kemp formed part of, and here focuses on Van der Kemp's interventions for and on behalf of the Khoi (1801 – 1806) and power. His hypothesis is that starting with Van der Kemp, the interventions of Christian missions vis-à-vis the colonising governments and the frontier settler farmers, and later beyond the frontier, on behalf of the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape, were the manifestations of late eighteenth and nineteenth century 'social responsibility'. As indicated in his topic, such taking up of 'social responsibility' includes the 'power' or more particularly, in Foucault's terminology, the 'power effects' of the missions on indigenous people. In this article he consecutively provides some background related to twentieth century, as well as late eighteenth and nineteenth century notions of 'social responsibility', Van der Kemp's change of plans to not continue with mission work among the Xhosa but to switch to the Khoi, and his and his fellow missionary James Read's interventions for and on behalf of the Khoi asserting their 'freedom' and their 'civilisation'. For these focuses, he mainly draws on Van der Kemp's correspondence from his extant South African texts – mainly his diary and letters published by the former non-conformist and ecumenical colonial British mission agency, the London Missionary Society (LMS) in its *Transactions* (1804; 1806; and 1812). For 'power' or 'power relations' and 'power effects' in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he draws on the theoretical and discursive historical studies by Michel Foucault.

In 'Social Responsibility and Power II', Smit continues his research

on the social responsibility and power relations of J.T. van der Kemp (joined by James Read in 1801) as manifest in his interventions for and on behalf of the Khoi vis-à-vis the British and later Batavian colonial governments, as well as the frontier settler farmers on the Eastern Cape Frontier (1801 – 1806) (cf. Smit 2016a). Van der Kemp's own use of 'power' became manifest in his interventions for and on behalf of the Khoi, his critique of both the colonial governments and the frontier settler farmers, his assertion of the freedom of the deterritorialised and landless Khoi, and his contention that they should receive a piece of land, to be allocated by government, for a mission station, where they would be subjected to education and be 'civilized'. He expounded what these developments meant in terms of the European 'archive' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This use of power, included, amongst others, the further de-culturalisation of the Khoi. In this article, Smit takes the argument further by focusing on the 'useful education', 'analytic education', 'institutional-isation', the interaction with the colonial 'government' in these matters, and the 'pacification' of the Khoi by the mission as institution. In scholarship on Van der Kemp, and the archive, his thought and practices formed part of, there is a pre-Kantian limit, that has to be acknowledged (cf. Krom 1800,II:lxxf)].

S.A. Chembea, in his '*Waqfs*<sup>1</sup> and the Dynamics of Muslim Charity in Secular Milieus, Kenya 1900-2010', argues that *waqfs*, were the mainstay of a plethora of beneficiaries evolving into socio-economically secure constituencies of Muslims. Secured of socio-economic well-being, beneficiaries threatened and often advocated for social and political positions independent of and in opposition to political establishments. This saw the creation of state agencies to control *waqfs* as evident in both Muslim and colonial powers or institutions. State agencies did not, however, annihilate *waqfs* as envisaged but beneficiaries diversified into alternative charitable activities as provided by the Shari'a. Using James Scott's (2009) concept of 'symbolic resistance' and Talal Asad's (1986] 2009) view of Islam as a 'discursive tradition', he argues that use of uncontrolled charities like *sadaqa* and private trusts in Kenya's secular milieu do not only accord Muslims the wherewithal to negotiate the socio-cultural and economic spheres, but also provide a means to fulfilling religious obligations outside the purview of the state.

In his article, Roderick Hewitt addresses the matter of 'Ecclesial Lead-

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<sup>1</sup> In Islam, *waqfs* denotes 'religious endowments'.

ership and Social Responsibility within the African Context of Economic Injustice’ in Christian context. His article explores the phenomenon of ecclesial leadership and its relationship with social responsibility within Sub-Saharan Africa, where many nations are experiencing economic injustices. It argues that failure to adequately engage with the neo-liberal economic order has resulted in ecclesial leadership that is increasingly losing public trust as perceptions of the leaders and the offices that they control are being corrupted by their insatiable appetite for financial greed. Contemporary ecclesial leaderships are caught in an ethical conundrum through their inability to negotiate the spiritually disarming, attractive and additive lure of the ideologies of neoliberalism and neo-conservatism that are weakening the effectiveness of religious leaders who are easily entrapped because of their ‘love of money’. Their inability to exercise critical distance from the infectious and addictive lure of greed has compromised the authenticity of their integrity and the witness of the church’s mission in the world to be in solidarity with people that live on the margins of society (Keum 2012:14-16). The fall in ecclesial standards of leadership in exercising authentic social responsibility within communities of oppressed peoples living on the margins has now placed the need for ethical formation at the centre of ecclesial leadership within the African context. The fast growth in urbanization with millions of Africans being attracted to cities for work, study and living, has led to the rise of many independent charismatic/ Pentecostal communities led by self-styled charismatic ‘Prophets’, ‘Apostles’ ‘Bishops’ and ‘Pastors’. They operate an all-inclusive ecclesial business with vast budgets within the communities of the poor that are experiencing socio-economic injustices that are fallouts from the neo-liberal economic policies that have been and continue to be adopted by their governments. The article concludes that the ethical formation that is needed to address the lack of credibility and public trust of ecclesial leadership serving communities experiencing socio-economic injustices, necessitates, in Christian context, radical reformation in which leaders rediscover what Orbery Hendricks describes as ‘the politics of Jesus’. Christian leaders need to rediscover the true revolutionary nature of the historical Jesus’ teachings and practices (2006:5-10). Within the African context it will necessitate engaging in a spirituality of resistance against life-denying forces, and to practice justice as a matter of faith confession and praxis. This would mean that African ecclesial leaders would embrace matters of economic and environmental justice, which are not only social, political, and moral issues but at the core, a

matter of confessing the Christian faith (The Accra Confession 2004).

Focusing on migrancy in the context of forced migration, and the social challenges faced by refugees, Nelly Mwale and Joseph Chita address the 'the Church's Social Responsibility in Zambia', engaging the issue of the Catholic Church's response to the 2016 prejudiced attacks on 'Others'. They especially refer to the events of April 2016, when Rwandan refugees and other foreign nationals in Zambia sought refuge in a Catholic church after days of violence. They were targeted after claims associating them with a series of ritual killings. Residents from compounds in Lusaka were reported to have resorted to riots and violence in a quest to defend themselves against the perceived threat from the refugees. They investigate the Catholic Church's response to these 'xenophobic' attacks in Zambia's residential compounds to mirror the church's role in social responsibility in contemporary times. In their case study they used data produced from document reviews (media reports) and recorded interviews with Priests from St. Ignatius parish. This was thematically analysed and interpreted. They conclude that the Catholic Church, guided by its social teaching was not only a mirror of society, but also a place of refuge by hosting the refugees and condemning the violence in various compounds in Lusaka, through pastoral letters and homilies.

Arguing that religion as a form of situated knowledge, and that it has historically influenced a gendered conception and acquisition of knowledge, Storia Sietisho and Lilian Cheelo Siwila address the topic of 'Religion as Situated Knowledge for Social Transformation: A Case of the Mashobye Manyano Women of Limpopo Province'. As one of the dominant voices in society, they argue, the Mashobye Manyano has created and maintained social hierarchies by inculcating and discriminating against the equal identity, interest and experiences of women. As a result, emerging ideologies, historical and socio-cultural factors normalized thought patterns of particularly an inferior and dependent perspective about women. In most of the African countries, missionary and colonial teaching undermined women's indigenous knowledge and agency with respect to food production and experiences as heads of households. Through the Victorian family model, women were removed from participating in agriculture, to the domestic sphere where they had to perform duties of housewifery. In terms of the challenge of transforming the prevalence of poverty, hunger and diseases in Sub-Saharan Africa and rural areas of South Africa in particular, it is argued, that religion continues to constrain processes of positive knowledge construction about women's roles and activities, when

these are mostly limited to private space. The aim of the article is to explore ways in which the Women's Manyano organization could be an agent of transformation in communities of women in the rural areas, for food autonomy and maternal health.

Similarly focusing on the agency of women and women's movements, AbdulGafar Olawale Fahm's topic is: 'Muslim Women and Social Responsibility in Nigeria: Contributions of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN)'. He explores the various ways in which the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) has acted as a socially responsible organisation in Nigeria. Since the 1980s several Muslim women-led organisations have emerged in the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria, some of which have formed social networks to advocate for Muslim women's rights. In line with these developments, and, in order to identify the contributions of FOMWAN in Nigeria, this article looks at the emergence of the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) – an organisation that was established more than three decades ago. Drawing on empirical evidence from activities of FOMWAN and using historical and descriptive approaches to analyse the data, this study outlines how FOMWAN strategically engage in development projects and thus further their own vision of development. The research discovered that FOMWAN envisages a world where women are completely enabled to be good role models in making beneficial impacts in society. FOMWAN supports the religion of Islam in Nigeria through *Da'wah* (invitation and propagation), the establishment of educational institutions and other outreach activities. It also works towards the improvement of the conditions of the people, both rural and urban, especially women, youths and children through training, the provision of quality education, health, and humanitarian services, micro-enterprise schemes and advocacy, as ways of playing its social responsibility role in society. This research will add to the body of knowledge on Muslim women, especially as it relates to Nigeria, and provides some insights into Muslim women organisations operating in Nigeria.

Contextualising his contribution in current discourses on globalisation and multiculturalism as 'spaces of disjuncture and identity fissures', Zorodzai Dube addresses the question of the role of religion (Christianity) in terms of these discourses. In his 'Theorising Steve Biko's "Human Face" Challenge alongside Gabriel Marcel's Embodied Hermeneutics', he takes his interpretive perspective from views by Biko. He contextualises Biko's statement that

religion has a human public face, and put this perspective in dialogue with Gabriel Marcel's concept of embodiment. The paper concludes that a religion that has a public human face promotes empathy or interconnectedness, providing a conceptualisation of a religious anthropology anchored in empathy, participation and inter-subjectivity.

In their 'Confronting the Exclusive Dominance of Christianity in Zimbabwe's Advanced Level Divinity Syllabus through Africanisation', Dennis Masaka and Sarah Yeukai Mukungurutse focus their research on syllabus and curriculum reform. In the light of the Christian religion's exclusive dominance of the Advanced Level Divinity syllabus (9154) in present-day Zimbabwe, they argue that it should incorporate the religion of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. *Firstly*, they situate the exclusion of indigenous religion from the syllabus in the context of the colonial experience that demeaned and considered 'traditional religions' as unqualified to be part of the syllabus. This has given rise to the exclusive dominance of the Christian religion in the syllabus. *Secondly*, the current Advanced Level Divinity Syllabus is critiqued with the objective of highlighting that the exclusive dominance of the Christian religion ought to be contested. *Thirdly*, they argue that it is necessary for the Zimbabwean government to Africanise the curriculum so that it genuinely accommodates both the indigenous people of Zimbabwe's religion, but not excluding other religions, including Christianity. This is a matter of justice that seeks not only to establish parity between the religion of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe and others, but also to reject the contestable position that there are some religions that are superior to others. Though some have attempted to critique the dominance of the Christian religion in the so-called 'Religious Studies' syllabus, no-one has pointedly and systematically undertook to propose the Africanisation of the Advanced Level Divinity syllabus in present day Zimbabwe in the manner that they have done. The novelty of this article thus resides in its attempt to constructively engage Africanisation discourse in curriculum reform, in order to democratise the Advanced Level Divinity syllabus in present day Zimbabwe.

The contribution by Ezra Chitando, Henrietta Nyamnjoh and Damaris Parsitau comprises of a brief engagement of 'Pentecostalism and Social Transformation in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya'. They argue that, as Pentecostalism enjoys unparalleled growth in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, greater attention has been paid to its problematic expressions by some scholars, than its positive effects. Media images of the abuse of believers in



different contexts have been widely circulated. These include sexual abuse by charismatic (male) prophets, financial scandals, as well as the degrading treatment of clients/members by forcing them to eat grass/snakes and other questionable acts. While conceding that these aspects are challenging, this article seeks to provide a more balanced perspective by highlighting the extent to which selected Pentecostal churches in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya have sought to contribute to social transformation and social reconstruction in their respective countries. By examining the sermons and teachings on personal responsibility and having effective marriages, by the Pentecostal leaders, the article contends that they mobilise their members and audiences to become agents of social transformation. The article highlights the potential role of Pentecostalism in social transformation and social reconstruction in the selected countries.

For her, “‘The Glory is Here!’ Faith Brands and Rituals of Self-Affirmation for Social Responsibility in Kenya”, Loreen Maseno focused her research on female Pentecostal-Charismatic (PC) church leaders, and their quest to legitimize their leadership at a variety of levels in society. This quest for acceptability and legitimacy to the congregation they lead, as well as in the public sphere, can be daunting especially in the context of a male dominated religious field such as we have in Kenya. Some female PC leaders in Kenya manage the desires and beliefs of their audiences through religious programmes and slogans that enhance social participation and solidarity. This article examines the programme and slogan ‘The Glory is Here’ broadcasted by one Kenyan female PC Televangelist and church leader, Margaret Wanjiru of Jesus is Alive Ministries (JIAM). Through the faith brand ‘The Glory is Here’, Wanjiru, in the marketing of religion, distinguishes herself from others in the market place and promotes her product and services in order to develop a consumer base. The research found that the programme functions as an empowering ritual of self-affirmation. Her faith brand, as well as her programme, are focused on women, and incorporates and combines repeated rituals of self-affirmation. Thematically, they include seminal topics from Women’s Theology, such as community, empowerment, liberation, a critical ecclesiology, Christology, ecology and missiology. She is seen as a trailblazer for women, and, taken together, her programmes are seen to serve to enhance women’s self-affirmation, solidarity and inter-subjective communal and social support, and solidarity.

In his article, ‘Where ‘heaven and earth’ Meet: Religion and Social

Responsibility’, Jaco Beyers provides some insights as to the very notion of religious participation in social responsibilities. He questions the question: Does religion indeed have a social responsibility? In his view, there are two possible positions on this question: (i) it is obvious that religion has a social responsibility and should act upon it; and (ii) it is not so obvious that religion has a social responsibility and should refrain from social participation in social issues. Both positions are supported by good arguments. The *first* position is supported by the assumption that human nature is filled with virtue and humans have the moral capacity to influence society in a positive way. The religious idealists are convinced that an utopian society can be created on earth; almost make heaven touch earth. The *second* position is underlined by the argument that human virtue and moral capacity is over-estimated. Reinhold Niebuhr (1936) elaborated on this matter. Society is however much rather governed by self-interest and ignorance even under the veil of religion. There are dangers (i.e. reductionism, selectivism, antagonism and utopianism) involved when religion participates in social activities. The discussion here wants to present a *third* possible way by suggesting a tempered approach when religion participates in social activities. Rather, individuals ought to be educated to act morally and responsibly in society.

We then present these articles as a sample of critical scholarly analyses and reflections on our topic of ‘Religion and Social Responsibility’. All the ideas, concepts, and critical analyses and viewpoints covered by the various articles, have significance for our developing scholarly discourse – both at the level of the production of knowledge in the academy, and at the level of the material and immaterial cultural productions of conditions that enhance the empirical well-being of our people. We believe, that, since current research, and teaching and learning across the African religions, have shown the remarkable involvement of the religions and the discursive religious traditions in participatory social action in, with and for communities, this phenomenon is in need of further study and intellectualising on our continent. The ways and means in which religions and religious formation traditions have formed part of a large variety of interventions for and on behalf of fellow citizens are not only extremely important in themselves, in the minimising of the traumatic impacts of colonisation, and interventions in the interests of peace and justice in contexts of violent action and conflict, but also crucial for us, as scholars to study. Acknowledging the intra-religious, but also trans-religious taking up of social responsibilities for the well-being of people in dire socio-economic,

socio-ecological or socio-political context, the scholarly fraternity need to respond likewise. And, in line with our original call for papers, we also think that, with this issue of *Alternation*, we have only touched the tip of the proverbial iceberg. So, we foresee, the development of further research in this direction, in line with the many topics and sub-topics related to this theme.

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