

# Introduction

**Johannes A. Smit and  
P. Pratap Kumar**

This volume is brought together in honour of the significant research and other scholarly contributions Gerhardus Cornelius (Pippin) Oosthuizen has made to the study of Religion in southern Africa over a period of nearly fifty years. For this reason, the first essay provides a brief overview of Pippin's career, subsequent developments in the study of Religion in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, and a selection from his many mainly book-length publications. We also provide a brief overview of tertiary developments in the study of religion since 1997.

In the second essay, Michel Clasquin provides a Mahayana Buddhist reading of Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*—a story (1970). It first traces the significance of this book – e.g. that the book reached the top of the New York Times best-seller list at the time, where it remained for 38 weeks, and that the British branch of Amazon.com, rated it the 6th bestseller in the category 'Religion and Spirituality' in 2000. It then reflects on its significance in education, music, language, and film, and proceeds to provide an overview of the book's multi-level character and what we may call its history of interpretation. Arguing that today's critical consciousness of the multiple layering and constructedness of meaning, as well as the variety of possible interpretations of texts, Clasquin then proceeds with his 'reading'

In her 'The Suffering Mothers: The Hindu Goddesses as Empowering Role Models for Women', Alleyn Diesel provides an examination of the characteristics and mythology of the Dravidian Amman Goddesses of south India and indicates that their interests are women centred. She believes that this extremely ancient and unique form of religion, usually overlooked or dismissed by most scholars as too concerned with

calamity and darkness, has the potential to offer women a feminist theodicy that can explain and alleviate the suffering they experience because of patriarchal demands. She further holds that the Tamil Amman Goddesses offer a unique form of Goddess veneration of value to women, presenting them with liberating and empowering role models. Showing that the myths associated with these Goddesses (e.g. Draupadi and Mariamman) contain stories of women, both divine and human, violated, exploited and betrayed by men, but whose courage and purity brought them vindication against males whose violent behaviour threatened disruption of the social order, she maintains that recovery of knowledge of some of these myths has the potential to provide contemporary Hindu and Western women (and men) with a post-patriarchal spirituality which could assist with social transformation.

In his 'Mwali: A God of War or a God of Peace?', Leslie S. Nthoi reflects on the Mwali cult. He argues that the study of the Mwali cult in the last twenty years must take account of its past history for various reasons because it is only in the light of the evidence of earlier periods that we can appreciate the recent transformations and readjustments in terms of both beliefs and practices of the cult on the one hand, and the structure and organization of the cult on the other. Showing that much scholarly literature on the Mwali cult has stressed the cult's concern with fertility and afflictions, with the peace and well-being of the land and all its people from many diverse ethnic groups (e.g. the Shona, Karanga, Kalanga, Venda, Khurutshe, Nyai and the Ndebele), he points to its significance with regard to its prohibitions against the pollution of the earth by war and bloodshed, and that these have long been known to express paramount values attributed to Mwali, the All-Powerful, Creator and High God. On the other hand, a large part of the same literature is also devoted to the debate on the cult's involvement in politics of violence. It deals with the debate on the cult's role both in the 1896/7 rebellions in Southern Rhodesia, and in the recent liberation war and in the post-Independence campaign in Zimbabwe. The scholarly and wider political debate about the involvement of the cult in politics of violence is very much a part of the making of the cult in the current period, he argues.

N.S. Turner, in her 'Strategies for Expressing Social Conflict within Communal African Societies in Southern Africa', contrasts the ways in

which conflict is perceived in oral, communal and literate, individualist societies. She provides a brief description of each in terms of the nature of communication in conflict, and then continues to focus on the communal nature and dynamics of oral societies. She does this by unfolding this dynamics in terms of the nature of the oral mode of expression in communal society, its process of socialisation and control, and the nature of the form of dispute. Central to her argument is that communal oral societies use oral strategies in conflict expression that are different from typical strategies in literate societies. She concludes by stating that the various forms and strategies used in oral societies have particular functions, not least the forming of new communities which may transcend existing conflicts.

In her article, Pearl Sithole argues that traditional leadership as a form of government is finds itself in a precarious situation. This is however not caused by either the state or the traditional leaders, but derives from the fact that there is a vast difference in terms of which both the state and traditional leadership function. Whereas historical developments acknowledge the relevance and importance of both, recent globalising tendencies favour the constitution of a democratic state more than that of traditional leadership. Against this background, she argues that because of the intrinsic relationship between current diplomatic and economic system, on the one hand, and state-based democracy, on the other hand, the present form of elected government at various levels will prevail as a main political system in KwaZulu-Natal. Be this as it may, however. Since history has indicated the significance of traditional leadership, as well as its endurance, this institution, she argues, is likely to pose a serious challenge to the conscience of democratic government for many years to come

Musa Ww. Dube Shomanah's 'Circle Readings of the Bible/Scriptoratures' first reflects on the significance of the circle in African philosophical thinking. Significant is that African communities put much emphasis on issues of interconnection, interdependence, the continuity of life and relationships – even in its great diversity. The symbol of the circle captures this reality, even where death becomes relevant: it is unable to break the circle of life. This view she then contrasts with dualistic and hierarchical perspectives that often sanction exclusion and oppression. This also impacts on gender construction, but also across different ethnic, race, age, class, religious and national cultural identities and groups. The body of

her essay subsequently focuses on five main elements, namely what she sees as Biblical/ Scriptoratural and Black Biblical interpretations, Cultural/ Biblical Studies, Circle Cultural approaches to the Bible/Scriptoratures, Emerging African Women in Biblical-Scriptoratures Studies, and what 'Moving in Circles' means in this context and explication. The contribution concludes with reflections on Circle Biblical/ Scriptoratures interpretative practices.

Gospel music is an important medium used for the communication of the gospel message in Urhoboland. However, as J. Enuwosa states, very little is known about the origins, early development and nature of this medium – i.e. how the gospel music was influenced by local factors. In order to address this problem she conducted forty interviews for her article, among elders and pastors of Protestant Churches especially the Anglican Church, in the towns of Abraka, Eku, Kokori, Ughelli, Egborode, Ewvreni and Sapele. The interviewees were either contemporaries of the early Urhobo gospel music activist, or pioneers of the gospel music who are still alive. The history of this gospel music can be broadly divided into two parts, namely the era of Adam Igbedu and the post-Adamic period.

Nkwoka focuses his study on the significance Pentecostalism has acquired in Africa and especially how it has manifested in Nigeria. He first provides a brief historical setting for the phenomenon and then treats it under three headings, namely, the Bible and Pentecostal theology, the significance of the perspicuity of Scripture for Pentecostal theology and the challenge the Pentecostal movement and theology pose to mainline churches. Significant is that he analyses the ways in which the understanding of the "perspicuity" of Scripture is an enabling and empowering strategy in the Pentecostal churches, that the proof-text approach to the Bible serves the preaching of the prosperity gospel as well as the performance of healings and miracles and that the churches are more existentially relevant to the lives of people than the mainline churches and their emphasis on good theological training. Linked to the belief in God's self-revelation in Scripture, the perspicuity of Scripture is an important truth for the challenge to capacitate African Christianity he argues.

Maarman Sam Tsehla starts off his essay by interpreting two quotes – one from Keener and one from Ukpong. He argues that similar to the view that prophetic practice and intellectual acumen are not opposites in Keener's

view, the same is true for African prophetic faith and intellectual pursuits and practices. This view is worked out from different angles over and against modern schizophrenic views that drives a dividing wedge into this notion of integratedness. His view is that intellectual pursuit and prophetic vocation coexist symbiotically in a true, brave and noble life. Such an assumption in African context, he sees to hold too, that there is a need to focus on one's cultural context as the primary subject and objective of one's life pursuits. His contribution then shows this integrated view to inform the intentions of African scholars—which is also central to the views and practices of the African hermeneut. Contextually, and following Ukpong, this derives from the unitive and not dualistic view which Africans have of reality, their common belief in the divine origin of the universe and the interconnectedness between God, humanity and the cosmos, the significance of the African's sense of community, and that of the focus on the concrete rather than the abstract or theoretical. These assumptions are then further developed with a broader perspective on what it means to be a scholar 'in an Africa way' – also including views on how this view engages 'global' scholarship and the commitments this view entails. The essay concludes with a few perspectives of the significance of prophetic activity in one's own 'hometown'.

Recognising the challenge that African theologians develop a hermeneutical model which could be applicable to different African cultures, Denzil Chetty sees the kinship, clan or family system as such a social construct which could be usefully developed for biblical hermeneutics in Africa. Drawing on the work of social anthropologists, he provides a definition of kinship minimally recognising that kinship has to do with the allocation of rights and their transmission from one generation to the next. These rights may include rights of group membership – e.g. clan and tribe membership – succession to office, inheritance of property, locality of residence, and type of occupation. In terms of this view, he then develops the hermeneutical model based on the integration of an African and Biblical kinship structure with which the relevant ancient texts can be read in a paradigm of common understanding and shared perceptions, amongst local African inhabitants. He calls it a 'Mudzimu Hermeneutics' as 'Mudzimu' is an African spirit in the VaHera clan of the Shona people with parochial self-interest in the survival of one's own immediate kin. As such, 'Mudzimu',

literally translated, means 'family', and as hermeneutic can be characterized as departing from 'African Kinship'.

The new government policy of openness and constructive engagement in the Peoples' Republic of China has enabled religious groups to consolidate their position after the destruction of the Cultural Revolution. In his 'The Steel Hand of Domination in a Velvet Glove of Hegemony ...' J.A. Loubser explores the extent and limits of this new-found freedom. For this, the concept of hegemony is applied to the present religious discourse. In the light of the relative scarcity of updated documentation, the author draws on first-hand impressions during a recent study tour to religious institutions in China. A preliminary conclusion of the paper is that the hegemonic ideology of the Party has effectively mobilised various factors—among others, innate patriotism, effective bureaucratic control, the memory of past trauma, and the desire to be socially acceptable. This hegemony has been internalised by religious groups to such an extent that a relevant social critique is impossible.

Suleman Dangor starts off his contribution by referring to some general perceptions of *jihād* as well as more particular understandings deriving from Islamic texts, commentary and reflection. This is followed by a section where he explores and analyse the causes of conflict in the Muslim World. He then focuses on the various dimensions of *jihād*, demonstrates that peace is the norm in Islam and assesses the current prospect for global *jihād*. He concludes by pointing out that there are certain sentiments within Islamic tradition and faith which will not tolerate certain unacceptable actions against Muslims.

Hassan Ndzovu starts his contribution by unpacking the interconnectedness between religion and politics and shows that such interdependence has long history. His view is that all aspects of life are to various degrees influenced or determined by both religion and politics. He holds that this view is especially true of both Islam and Christianity as it manifested in history. Currently, in the Islamic world, about fifteen countries have Islam as the official state religion. He then proceed to provide further perspectives on the interrelatedness of religion and politics in global context, develop an Islamic view on it, and then turns to the challenges of radical and politicized Islam in Kenya. He acknowledges that in the world system, this is currently a difficult issue, but that is why it should be studied.

A.L. Pitchers directs his study to the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* (one nature) Church. It focuses on this church's 'theology', was inspired by a visit to Ethiopia, and draws on some available scholarly material and web resources. Mostly, however, he works with data collected in on-site interviews. His aim was to ascertain to what degree could possibly play a significant role in assisting the country to develop to a stage where it would match its former glory, or how it could contribute towards the notion of the 'African Renaissance'. This meant that he had to examine the doctrines of the Church and ascertain how these could constructively impact on society. After providing a brief background on the origins of the church, he consecutively deals with the place of the trinity, the position of Mary, the monophysite doctrine of Christ, the concept of salvation, the doctrine of the last things, the E.O.C.'s relationship with other churches, the church's theological training, the reaction of the Ethiopian people to famine and hardship, and possible 'lessons' for South Africa deriving from the E.O.C.'s contribution (or not) to transformation. Ultimately, he sketches a bleak picture, especially when reality is compared to church mission statements.

In his study, Hendrik R. Tjibeba provides a historical-chronological perspective on the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) schism from the Rhenish Mission Society (RMS) in Namibia during the year of the schism, 1946. He first provides some background information, e.g. the events related to Mangona Maake Mokone's break from the Methodist Church in South Africa in 1892, the rising tide of the founding of African 'independent' churches in southern Africa, the RMS and the Nama people in the South of Namibia during the first half of the twentieth century, and the RMS during the period, 1914-1945. This is then followed by a detailed study of significant documents and letters written during 1946. He shows that there are a few Nama leaders who played a formative role in the founding of this important church in the country, and that this event was an important conscientising precursor of the political struggles against the apartheid government, and the 1960 uprisings.

Manila Soni-Amin engages the processes through which the teaching of religion in South Africa went before it came to the current situation where it is known as 'Religion Education'. She provides a few historical perspectives on education in South Africa, highlighting some of the elements in politics and philosophy that informed the country's

education systems. The first two sections deal with education during colonial times, and apartheid with its philosophy of Christian National Education. The main section of the contribution treats significant events and signposts on the way of developing Religion Education in post-apartheid South Africa. Central to her analysis is the significance the decision to foster pluralism and the multi-religious study of religion has for the country.

P. Pratap Kumar looks at the history of the indenture and passenger Indians in South Africa and discusses the strategies that the Indians have used in making readjustments in the new country after their arrival from India. In the initial few decades the Indian not only denied his own identity, the system also denied economic and cultural and social opportunities. They were displaced from time to time making attempts to establish deeper roots into the South African soil more difficult as time went on. Almost until the mid twentieth century their citizenship was delayed. In spite of all the hurdles, the Indian community exhibited extraordinary resilience and managed to make profound changes in their own life styles and reinvented their own traditions and made substantial adjustments in the new land and emerged as a unique South African Indian community with their own identity among other South Asians in Diaspora. In the process they were not only assimilated into a new culture, but more importantly worked towards the firm establishment of diversity and difference.

Itumeleng Meko starts his contribution by unpacking some of the challenges modern Africa faced and continues to face in the aftermath of the colonial period. He sees the main problem in that there is a general perception of 'the so-called independent or liberated Africa' whereas, in reality, this does not apply. The conditions of the African people are worse than what it was during the colonial period in many senses. Against the background of these and related perspectives, Meko then consecutively addresses various issues related to the ideological and political dimensions of African Intellectuals' liberation, the possibility that African Leadership can chart the political direction for democracy, Molefi Kete Asante's – and otehrs' – views on African intellectual emancipation and thought, the role of the African leadership in mapping Africa's economic direction, and the question of foreign debt in Africa. He concludes by addressing to closely related points, namely whether the West can help Africa to resolve her problems, and how Africans can help themselves. Here he finally reflects on



possibilities for (and obstacles) to African initiatives. The 'structures' – including forms(s) of democracy post-independent Africa inherited from colonial powers – do not deliver to the people, nor do they foster political accountability. This is the main area, he argues in conclusion, where Africa needs a second liberation.

J.A. Loubser's review article 'Before Gandhi: Leo Tolstoy's Non-violent Kingdom of God' deals with Tolstoy's most significant religious publication. It sheds light on the ideological background for Mohandas Gandhi's Satyagraha movement. The unsolved problem of violence makes Tolstoy's challenge to non-violence relevant for today.

School of Religion and Theology  
University of KwaZulu-Natal