

Praenotandum, 10.10.2017: I presented this unpublished paper at the 15th ASRSA annual conference, 28-30 June 1993, at the University of Swaziland, at Kwaluseni, Swaziland. I have slightly revised and updated the text. I have added footnotes 28, 29, 37, 40, 78, 79 and 80. In the list of references, Appiah & Appiah [2001]; Bredenkamp 1976, 1980; Platvoet 1994, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c; and Prozesky 2011 were added.

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THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN SOUTH AND SOUTHERN AFRICA A VIEW FROM AFAR [IN 1993]

This article presents a survey, and an appreciation, of the academic study of religions in South and Southern Africa. As I cannot boast of the knowledge of an insider, I borrow a simile from an Akan proverb, that of Hawk sailing on high, to express not only my relationship to this part of our discipline, but also my weak credentials for undertaking this job, and my limited goals.

Proverbs in Akan societies

The Akan of southern Ghana have traditionally cultivated the art of skilful speech.¹ Their language, of which the odd dozen Akan peoples² speak dialects, is beautiful and versatile. Two types of oral art have in particular been developed: the telling of the *Ananse*, Spider, stories,³ and the use of proverbs for oblique, persuasive speech.⁴ The Akan peoples constantly develop new proverbs to add to their impressive stock of them.⁵ They moreover not only speak proverbs, but also connect them to their story telling,⁶ parade them as designs stamped on, or woven into, or appliquéd to, the cloths or flags they wear at funerals and festivals,⁷ sculpt them as designs in wood,⁸ cast them in bronze as weights for measuring gold dust,⁹ or in gold, and more exception-

¹ See e.g. Christensen 1958; Antuban 1963: 94-98, 115; Cole & Ross 1978: 9-12

² The best known among them are the Asante and the Fante

³ Cf. e.g. Rattray 1930

⁴ See Boadi 1972, Dseagu 1975, McLeod 1976

⁵ For representative collections, see Christaller 1879, Rattray 1916, Adaye 1933, Akrofi 1958, Christensen 1958; Appiah & Appiah [2001]. Christaller 1879 and Adaye 1933 have recently (1985) been translated by Father Kofi Ron Lange svd. These translations are in manuscript form in the Library of the Basler Mission House at Basle, Switzerland

⁶ Cf. e.g. Rattray 1930: 15, 19, 45, 55, 93, 95, 99, 105, 125, 133, 145, 157, 175, 177, 253, 267, 269, 271.

⁷ See e.g. Quarcoo 1972, Cole & Ross 1977: 9-12, 38-41, 44-47, Warren & Andrews 1977: 13-15, Ross 1979, McLeod 1981: 146, 149-156, Domowitz 1992

⁸ See e.g. Rattray 1927: 271-274, Sarpong 1967: 29-31, Sarpong 1971: 23-25, Cole & Ross 1977: 136-140, McLeod 1979, Patton 1979, McLeod 1981: 112-118, Ross 1982, Ross 1984

⁹ Gold dust (*sika*) served as currency in the traditional polities of the pre-colonial Gold Coast; the weights used for measuring it were cast in bronze after the *cire perdue* method. On their morphological history, see Rattray 1923: 300-308, Kyerematen 1964: 43-54, Cole & Ross 1977: 70-85; Garrard 1979: 41-43, Garrard 1980, McLeod 1981: 122-133; on gold weights as representations of proverbs, see Rattray 1923: 308-313, Kyerematen 1964:

ally in silver,¹⁰ as the ornaments worn by the rulers and their dignitaries, such as the ornamented tops of the staffs of office of the king's speaker and of the royal umbrellas, and many other items in use at Akan courts.¹¹ Lastly, they also express them, and use them, in their dance music, both traditional and modern.¹² In these modern days, they use proverbs as the emblems of lorries.¹³ In short, proverbs pervade Akan life and culture. In public life, they were, and are, abundantly used in the speeches of the speakers of the rulers, both at courts and in the courts when administering justice; and in private life, in the education of children and in the management of the relations among co-residents in a household, e.g. between co-wives.

The Akan used several elements from their natural environment, social life and from their beliefs about several unseen worlds in their stories and proverbs.¹⁴ God, gods, ancestors, witches, forest imps, the animals of the forest,¹⁵ and man in his various positions and situations in human society,¹⁶ all play their roles in the Spider stories and speak, or are spoken about, in proverbs. One whom the Akan also make speak a proverb is *Osansa*, hawk. Sailing on high in sky, he is said to have a perfect view of the world below. He is often seen to flutter in one spot for closer inspection, and at times to descend like an arrow upon his prey. Hawk is made to pronounce a verdict upon what he observes from on high.

Hawk seems the perfect simile, not only of my far-off post of observation and my business to pronounce a verdict on the overall terrain, but also, as a bird of prey, of my special interest in two elements in that terrain: the developments in methodological reflection, and the study of the oldest and the newest religions of Africa. Hawk sailing leisurely on high, and hawk diving down like an arrow, will be the division of my paper. In the first part, I will survey what I consider to be the strengths and the achievements of the study of religions in South, and Southern, Africa. In the second, I will discuss what I consider some of its weaknesses. Only after that will I quote the proverb itself and discuss whether Hawk's verdict on human affairs is applicable to my view of the study of religions in South and Southern Africa.

I have chosen the simile of Hawk sailing on high also in order to make a number of reservations. Ninian Smart reproached me for not including South Africa in my paper on the study of religions in Africa for the 1988 IAHR Marburg conference,¹⁷ though I did indicate the reasons why I left South Africa out.¹⁸ This article is meant to fill that gap.¹⁹ I have met most scholars of

44, 46, 48-54, Cole & Ross 1977: 76-81, Appiah 1979, Garrard 1980: 202-210, McLeod 1981: 128-129

¹⁰ See Garrard 1984

¹¹ See Kyerematen 1964: *passim*, Cole & Ross 1977: 134-169, Ross 1977, McLeod 1981: 87-111, Ross 1982, Patton 1984: 72, Ehrlich 1989, Silverman 1990

¹² See Opoku 1987: 193 and Nketia 1987: 202, 206 for the traditional dances at the royal courts; see van der Geest 1979, 1989, 1992 for modern popular (*highlife*) music.

¹³ See Field 1960: 134-145, Kyei & Schreckenbach 1975

¹⁴ See e.g. Rattray 1916: 54-189

¹⁵ Rattray 1916: 17-53

¹⁶ Rattray 1916: 101-164

¹⁷ Cf. Smart 1990: 302

¹⁸ Cf. Platvoet 1989: 108

¹⁹ See also Prozesky 1990a for a balanced assessment by a scholar in the study of religions in South Africa who made himself great contributions to its development and organization.

religions of South Africa, collected many of their books and articles, and studied a number, but not all of them. I know their IAHR affiliated association and its journal. Even so, my knowledge of the study of religions in South and Southern Africa is that of an outsider. In particular my grasp of the divisive political, economic and social contexts in which the study of religions in South Africa emerged and operates is not sufficient for presenting with confidence an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses. I lack a thorough knowledge of the religions, and in particular the theologies, that co-determined them. I also have insufficient knowledge of the history of the academic institutions of South Africa, and the place theology since long held in them. I would like to know in much greater detail when, why, and how the study of religions began to heave off from theology in some places, and why it is beginning to develop in it, or to separate from it, in others only now, or has not yet begun to do so; and about its relations to the modes of the study of religions outside faculties of theology and departments of religious studies.

Given these limitations, my analyses can only be provisional, and my recommendations only those of one who is an interested outsider. On the other hand, they may also be seen as those a concerned insider, as the condition of the study of religions in one region is the concern of students of religions everywhere. Moreover, the study of religions in South Africa is being integrated, or re-integrated, into the global community of the discipline now that apartheid is dismantled and the isolation it imposed upon South African academics has come to an end.

HAWK SAILING ON HIGH

The history of the study of religions in South and Southern Africa is young, vigorous, and diverse. It seems to me to have a bright future. I will deal briefly with its history, its organisation, its conferences, its field of study, and its publications.

Its history

Even though I distinguish, for reasons to be explained, between the study of religions and religious studies, the history of the study of religions in South Africa and in Southern Africa may perhaps be said to have begun in 1969 when the first department of religious studies was founded at the University of Cape Town (UCT) with Cumpsty as its first head.²⁰ Since then more departments have come into being,²¹ as well as a Department for Islamic studies at the University

²⁰ Personal communication from Martin Prozesky, August 1990; see also Prozesky 1990a: 11-12. His surmise, however, that Departments of Religious Studies 'had begun in the USA, at Western Michigan and elsewhere, in the early 1960s and in the UK, at places like Manchester and somewhat later at Lancaster University, through the initiatives of Ninian Smart', may capture their beginnings in the Western academic world, but not in global terms. The first Department of Religious Studies was founded in 1949 in Nigeria, in Ibadan University, by Welch and Parrinder (Hackett 1988: 37). The comparative study of a number of West African traditional religions (Parrinder 1949) was one of the first courses taught there. It was held that they should be studied in the same manner as the 'world religions' (Hackett 1988: 38). On the origin and development of these departments in Great Britain and Canada, see Cunningham 1990 and Coward 1991.

²¹ At the Universities of Natal (at its Pietermaritzburg campus), Durban-Westville, Witwatersrand (at Johannesburg), Transkei, Ciskei, Vendlant, and the University of the North; and in Southern Africa, at those of Bo-

of Durban-Westville in 1974, and one for Hindu studies in 1987. One of the last to emerge was the Department for Science of Religion in the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Africa (UNISA) at Pretoria in 1986. It was renamed Department of Religious Studies in 1992.²² The leading centres seem presently to be UCT,²³ UNISA,²⁴ the University of Natal at Pietermaritzburg,²⁵ the three departments at Durban-Westville,²⁶ and Witwatersrand.²⁷

Another landmark was Bredekamp's inaugural address on phenomenology at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, in 1976.²⁸ The crucial date, however, was 1979 when ASRSA was founded, and 1980, when it was affiliated to the IAHR at its IVXth International Congress at Winnipeg, Canada. In 1980, ASRSA's bi-annual journal, *Religion in Southern Africa*, also began to appear. After seven volumes, it was renamed *Journal for the Study of Religion* in 1988. Another important date was 1992, when the IAHR first regional conference at Harare enabled ASRSA to begin to integrate into the northern parts of the region also and make true its aboriginal intention of being a regional, in stead of a national, IAHR affiliate.²⁹

tswana, Namibia, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe (1980).

²² See for further details, Platvoet 1993: 339

²³ Dr. David Chidester (contemporary religious developments), Prof. John S. Cumpsty (methodology), Dr. J. Hofmeyr (East Asian religions), Dr. Ton Leeuw (African traditional religions), Dr. J. Macnamara (Hinduism), Mr. Ebrahim Moosa (Islam), Dr. Abdulkader Tayob (Islam)

²⁴ Mr. M. Clasquin (Buddhism, contemporary religious movements), Dr. P. Goosen (methodology), Ms. G. Koo-verjee (Hinduism), Prof. Jacobus S. Krüger (Buddhism, methodology, San religion), Prof. C. du P. Le Roux (Islam), Dr. G.J.A. Lubbe (Islam), Prof. I. Ronca (Islam), Ms. H.C. (Chrissie) Steijn (contemporary religious movements), Dr. S. Thorpe (African traditional religions)

²⁵ Ms. Ann E. Diesel (religion and gender, Hinduism, Judaïsm), Dr. Pratab Kumar (Hinduism), Mr. Peter S. Maxwell (methodology, Hinduism, contemporary religious movements), Prof. Ron Nicolson (Christianity), Prof. Martin H. Prozesky (Philosophy of Religion)

²⁶ In its Department of Hindu Studies: Dr. H.G. Dewa, Dr. Anil Sooklal, Dr. S. Padayachee; in its Department of Islamic Studies: Dr. S.E. Dangor, Dr. A.F.M. Ebrahim, Dr. H.R.F. Mengke, Prof. S. Salman Nadvi, Mr. A.F. Vanker; in its Department for Science of Religion: Prof. Chris Greyling (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism) Dr. Til-yavel Naidoo (Hinduism), Dr. N. Singh (Hinduism), Dr. A. Songh (Chinese religion)

²⁷ With Dr. Jocelyn Hellig (Judaïsm), and perhaps her colleagues de Kiwiet, Dromeris, Engelbrecht, Procter and Summers. I lack detailed information on this department but include it among the major ones for the moment because Prozesky (1990: 11) does so.

²⁸ 10.10.2017: Cf. Bredekamp 1976. Cf. also Bredekamp (1980: 46): 'If one takes what might be termed a phenomenological approach to the study of the History of Religions [...], one inclines to the view that *there can be no evaluative judgments about the validity of the different religions of mankind*. Our purpose is not comparative (or competitive!) but to further the study of our subject in a way that will lead to meaningful dialogue'. For Bredekamp's obituary, cf. Prozesky 2011.

²⁹ 7.10.2017: In retrospect I would rather regard ASRSA, despite its aboriginal intention, as primarily the IAHR national affiliate for South Africa and only secondarily as a (semi-)regional IAHR member for Southern Africa in view of ASRSA's quite limited success in expanding its membership and academic activities outside South Africa itself. IAHR also seems to view ASRSA as a national rather than a regional affiliate, for it does not explicitly qualify ASRSA as a 'regional association' in its list of its member associations, as it does with AASR (African Association for the Study of Religions); ALER (Latin American Association for the Study); (the defunct) EAASR (Eastern African Association for the Study of Religions of Religions); EASR (European Association for the Study of Religions); NASR (North American Association for Study of Religions); SSEASR (South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Culture and Religion); and ACSRM, the Asociacion de Cientistas Sociales de la Religion del Mercosur, admitted in 2015. Cf.

<http://iahr.dk/members.php>

Its organisation

ASRSA now organizes some eighty scholars in the study of religions in the universities in South Africa,³⁰ some of its apartheid dependencies,³¹ Swaziland,³² Botswana,³³ Namibia,³⁴ and Zimbabwe,³⁵ i.e. from nearly all Anglophone Southern Africa, with the exception of Lesotho, Zambia and Malawi. As is clear from this listing, most of its members are posted in Departments of Religious Studies, or of Science of Religion, or of Islamic or Hindu Studies, in Nermic (a special research institute), or in more explicitly Christian-theological institutes, such as Faculties or Departments of Theology, or of *Sendingswetenskap*/Missiology, or of Biblical Studies. As is the case with most scholars of religions elsewhere, most members of ASRSA came to the study of religions from some Christian theological discipline. Many of them study religions now in institutional structures that are not funded by churches, or on behalf of churches, and pursue their studies free from normative control. A number of its members, however, are posted in church-linked institutions and research religions in conjunction with, or for the sake of, Christian theology.³⁶ Individual scholars in such church-governed academic institutions may, however, develop, and teach, a study of religions that is as non-normative, or more non-normative, than that of their colleagues in departments fully free from supervision by churches.

Those in Departments of Islamic or Hindu Studies seem to have similar backgrounds, and variation in relationships, in respect of their religions and religious communities as their Christian colleagues.

³⁰ Apart from those mentioned above, in notes 3-7, they are Edwards in the Dept. of Divinity at Rhodes University, Grahamstown; Oosthuizen at Nermic; Daneel and Kritizinger in the Dept. of Missiology in the Faculty of Theology of Unisa at Pretoria; Crafford and Van der Merwe in the Faculty of Theology, Dept. of *Sendings- en Godsdienstwetenskap*, of the University of Pretoria; Du Preez in the Faculty of Theology of the University of Stellenbosch; Smit in the Dept. of *Sendingswetenskap* in the University of Oranje Vrijstaat at Bloemfontein.

³¹ Mazibuko and Mostert in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Zululand at Kwa Dlangezwa; Brew, Mosothoane, Myakaza, Nogwina, Pato, Rathete and Sokutu in the Dept. of Religious Studies of the University of Transkei at Umtata; Thom in the Dept. of Religious Studies in the University of Ciskei at Alice; Hofmeyr in the Dept. of Biblical Studies in the University of Venda at Sibasa; Van der Merwe in the Dept. of Biblical Studies of the University of the North at Sovenga

³² Kasene and perhaps others in the Dept. of Theology and Religious Studies in the University of Swaziland at Manzini, Swaziland

³³ Amanze, Fasholé-Luke, Friezen, Kealotswe, Mongai, Ocaya and Parrat in the Dept. of Religious Studies in the University of Botswana at Gaborone, Botswana

³⁴ Hunter and perhaps others in the Dept. of Religious Studies of the University of Namibia at Windhoek, Namibia

³⁵ Gundani, Mandivenga, Shoko and Verstraelen in the Dept. of Religious Studies, Classics & Philosophy of the University of Zimbabwe at Harare, Zimbabwe

³⁶ See Prozesky 1990a: 11-12. In the *Afrikaner* universities, the normal place for a Department of Religious Studies/Science of Religion is in a Faculty of Theology - as it is in the Netherlands, Germany and the Scandinavian countries. In the other universities, it is in the Faculty of Arts - as it is in French, Italian, and the new (post-1960) British and American universities. In the first configuration, churches may, or may not, directly or indirectly, influence on the manner, and the measure of academic independence, in which theology, religious studies, and study of religions are pursued, depending on the relationships prevailing between the state and these churches. The second configuration is more laicist and more strongly secular, and usually allows of greater, if not full, academic independence. UCT is (brilliantly) exceptional in having located its Department of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences. That, however, did not prevent some sections of that Department from being 're-theologized' in recent years, nor some of its study of religions from having a clearly religious agenda and inspiration.

Five of ASRSA's members are posted in other departments and, or faculties. They are two anthropologists: Kiernan of the University of Natal at Durban, and Bourdillon at the University of Zimbabwe; one is a biomatematician: Koen at the University of Bophutatswana; one lectures in English: J. Martin at the University of Western Cape; and one in Afrikaans: Ms. I. Leroux at the University of Vendlalnd.

Its conferences

This is the fifteenth annual conference which ASRSA has organized. It is the first conference ASRSA holds outside South Africa in pursuance of its aspiration to serve the academic study of religions in both South and Southern Africa. In conjunction with the IAHR and the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Zimbabwe, ASRSA also took part in the organisation of the first IAHR regional conference in Africa, at Harare in September 1992, and in the founding of AASR, the continent-wide and global association for the study of the religions of Africa.³⁷

Its particular field of study

The particular qualities of the religious scene in South and Southern Africa provide the young study of religions both with a fascinating field of study directly at hand. The field of study ranges from the oral religions of the San aboriginal food gathering communities through those of later arrived, indigenous agrarian and cattle rearing Bantu peoples, some with early forms of state building and military traditions,³⁸ through the present day forms of the indigenous Christian churches, the Diaspora forms of Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism of the various groups of more recent white and Asian immigrants, the forms of dominant western Christianity of the mainline churches of the earlier white settlers and more recent white immigrants, to the reformist, charismatic, pluralising, synthetizing, esoteric, secularizing currents and counter currents in each of them. These religions constitute a field of study as complex, dynamic and turbulent as is South African society itself: a society in deep turmoil through deep economic and ethnic divisions, and at the brink of a new age. They constitute a unique 'social laboratory of religions'.³⁹

Its publications

As religion and religions are a dominant feature of public life and in most private lives in South and Southern Africa, the study of religions is in great demand both as a secular discipline and in church-governed types of academic training. It is more likely to expand than to contract in the foreseeable future.⁴⁰ To cope with the demand for it, scholars in South and Southern Africa have in the last decade developed an impressive range of publications, from textbooks for relevant, lo-

³⁷ 7.10.2017: AASR's field of study has meanwhile been expanded to include the religions of the African Diaspora, i.e. to the religions of Africans in sub-Saharan Africa and worldwide.

³⁸ They may be studied for a minor part as autonomous religions, and more often now as the submerged but vital parts of immigrant religions; cf. the analytical concept of 'plural religious allegiance'.

³⁹ Prozesky 1990a: 10

⁴⁰ 9.10.2017: This was, in retrospect, perhaps a too optimistic prediction, for after 1994 the academic study of religions went through turbulent times during the post-apartheid reform of the universities of South Africa that aimed to redress the inequities of the educational system along racial lines of the apartheid period.

calized teaching at especially the undergraduate level, to methodologies for research of the Southern African scene by graduate students and scholars. They are the first results of programmes of research that are primarily relevant for local teaching but also constitute the specific contribution of scholars from South and Southern Africa to the global academic community.

Among the textbooks are, in chronological order, Mandivenga's *Islam in Zimbabwe*;⁴¹ Daneel's *Quest for belonging*;⁴² Bourdillon's *Religion and Society*;⁴³ the *Southern African Guide to World Religions*, edited by de Grutchy & Prozesky (1991);⁴⁴ Thorpe's two volumes on African traditional religions and 'primal religions';⁴⁵ and Chidester's imposing *Religions of South Africa*.⁴⁶ In a special category are the two volumes that were produced in the Religious Education Project of the Dept. of Religious Studies, Classics & Philosophy, the Dept. of Curriculum Studies of the University of Zimbabwe, and the Faculty of Theology of Utrecht University:⁴⁷ they lay the groundwork for a textbook on African traditional religions for use in the secondary schools of Zimbabwe.

Among the methodologies are Krüger's *Studying religion*;⁴⁸ Prozesky's *Religion and Ultimate Well-being*;⁴⁹ Bourdillon's *Religion and Society*;⁵⁰ Cumpsty's *Religion as Belonging*;⁵¹ and Cox's *Expressing the Sacred*.⁵²

My information on the research programmes and the publications which report their results is probably severely incomplete. The following may, however, be mentioned: the publications by Oosthuizen on Pentecostalism among Indians in Durban, on Rastafarians in South Africa, and on the Muslim Zanzibaris of South Africa;⁵³ and on social change;⁵⁴ the volume he edited on the indigenous churches in Southern Africa;⁵⁵ those of Hodgson on the Xhosa;⁵⁶ the studies of Edwards on Xhosa Zionist practices and of *amafufunyana* spirit possession;⁵⁷ Bourdillon's

⁴¹ Mandivenga 1983

⁴² Daneel 1987

⁴³ Bourdillon 1990

⁴⁴ With contributions by Prozesky (introduction, 1-12), Chidester (primal religions, 13-32), Nicolson (ancient religions, 33-42), Maxwell & Naidoo (Indian religions, 43-83), Hofmeyr (Buddhism, 84-110; Chinese religions, 101-118), Hellig (Judaism, 119-147), Christianity (de Grutchy, 148-202), and Islam (203-238). It is curious, and questionable, that the editors choose the term 'world religions' to cover all these religions. This use virtually empties this in itself already questionable term of all specific meaning. *A Southern African Guide to the World's Religions* would have been more appropriate.

⁴⁵ Thorpe 1991; Thorpe 1992; see my review of them: Platvoet forthcoming

⁴⁶ Chidester 1992

⁴⁷ Nondo 1991; ter Haar, Moyo, & Nondo 1992

⁴⁸ Krüger 1982; see also Krüger 1981; for a review of Krüger 1982, and of Prozesky 1984, see Platvoet forthcoming (b)

⁴⁹ Prozesky 1984; cf. also Prozesky 1980, 1981, 1986, 1988a, 1988b, 1989, 1991

⁵⁰ Bourdillon 1990; see also Bourdillon 1980

⁵¹ Cumpsty 1991; see also Cumpsty 1980, 1982, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990

⁵² Cox 1992. Apart from these books, I may also refer to the following articles: Chidester 1985a, 1985b, 1987, 1988a; Hammond-Toke 1982; Lawson 1987; Maxwell 1986

⁵³ Oosthuizen 1975, 1982, 1985, 1989, 1992

⁵⁴ Oosthuizen *et alii* 1985

⁵⁵ Oosthuizen 1986

⁵⁶ Hodgson 1980, 1982, 1984, 1985

⁵⁷ Edwards 1983, 1984

third revised edition of ethnography of the Shona peoples;⁵⁸ Daneel's completion of his ethnography, now in three volumes, of the Southern Shona independent churches;⁵⁹ Lubbe's studies on Christian-Muslim relations and pluralism in South Africa,⁶⁰ and those of Le Roux,⁶¹ Tayob,⁶² Dangor,⁶³ Nadvi,⁶⁴ and Nicolson;⁶⁵ Leeuw's thesis on the South African rain ritual;⁶⁶ the collection of studies on the relationships of the Christian churches to the UDI and postcolonial governments of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, edited by Hallencreutz & Moyo;⁶⁷ the publications by Naidoo and Sooklal on Hindu 'reform' movements in South Africa,⁶⁸ and by Naidoo on the Parsees in South Africa;⁶⁹ by Diesel on Hindu fire⁷⁰ walking in Natal; the studies of Kiernan on Zulu Zionist churches;⁷¹ and the discussions of Banana's claim that the Bible should be rewritten.⁷²

Finally, there are the publications which have resulted from research on religions outside Southern Africa.⁷³ I should also mention *Al-Ilm; Journal of the Centre for Research in Islamic Studies*, published by the Dept. of Islamic Studies of the University of Durba-Westville, of which volume 12 appeared in January 1992.

Conclusion

Surveying the brief history of the study of religions in this region of less than a quarter of a century (1969-1993), the way it has been institutionalized in the universities, and how, for closer interaction, it has organized itself in a learned association with annual conferences and a periodical; and weighing this incomplete record of its publications so far, a foreigner posted afar can conclude only that his discipline has achieved much so far. Its institutional setting seems quite secure,⁷⁴ its organization efficient, and its publication record impressive. Hawk, sailing on high, would approve. But what about hawk diving down?

HAWK DIVING DOWN

One major weakness of the study of religions in South and Southern Africa seems to me to be precisely its concentration in Departments of Religious Studies. RS is a vague term. Institution-

⁵⁸ Bourdillon 1987

⁵⁹ Daneel 1988

⁶⁰ Lubbe 1986a, 1986b, 1990

⁶¹ Le Roux 1981

⁶² Tayob 1989, 1990

⁶³ Dangor 1991

⁶⁴ Nadvi 1991

⁶⁵ Nicolson 1991

⁶⁶ Leeuw 1987

⁶⁷ Hallencreutz & Moyo 1988

⁶⁸ Naidoo 1985, 1992; Sooklal 1986, 1990; cf. Platvoet 1992: 275-277 for a review of Sooklal 1990

⁶⁹ Naidoo 1987, 1989

⁷⁰ Diesel 1991a, 1991b

⁷¹ As collected in Kiernan 1990a, and some of his more recent ones: Kiernan 1988, 1990b, 1991

⁷² Mukonyora, Cox & Verstraelen 1993

⁷³ Among them: Chidester 1988b, 1988c; Dangor 1990; Krüger 1988a, 1988b, 1990; and Tayob 1988

⁷⁴ Cf. however footnote 40

ally, it allows for several modes of study of religions, from Christian-orthodox through non-denominationally liberal to agnostic and even atheistic. What one mostly finds in it is a type of study of religions that is free from financial and doctrinal control by mainline churches, critical, well-informed, and espousing an unorthodox, liberal theology of religions. That enables it either to teach and research other religions, or to allow academics of other religions to teach and research theirs. The narrow walls of teaching a religion after a particular theological tradition are broken down, and the vast variation and dynamics in a religious field, and the length and breadth of human religious history, become the object of teaching and research. However, not without a centre, or paradigm, in human religious history and a fundamental presupposition. It is these two points only that I will discuss.

The paradigm

As far as I can see from my limited studies of South and Southern African religious studies, the centre widened, for most of its members, from an orthodox version of the Christian faith, to a liberal theology, often in the manner of modern philosophical theology, and critical, cultural-historical analysis of human religious history, but with its centre in the 'axial faiths': the major religious traditions, or 'world religions', or religions of salvation, as they emerged in the first millennium BCE. They seem to constitute the very paradigm of human religiosity for most scholars of religions in Southern Africa. Apart from their critical, contextualizing historical study, showing up their historical relativity, the dialogue and interaction between these religions is held to be the main shaper of future relations between them, of their doctrines, and of humankind's religious history in the coming decades. Other present-day formative processes, shaping, or reshaping, quite different religions, go unnoticed because of this focus on the history and present-day interaction between the axial or world religions. They are on the hand, the newest religions of mankind: those that have emerged in the 19th and 20th centuries - I term them the religions of the second axial age - with traits radically different from those of the religions of the first axial age; and other hand, the religions of oral, food gathering and early food producing societies, and the pre-axial religions of early civilisations.⁷⁵

As a result of the focus on the axial faiths and their interactions, attention to the traditional religions of Africa has been studiously neglected in Religious Studies in South and Southern Africa. Except for Janet Hodgson, who disappeared from the research scene in the mid-eighties, and perhaps Glenda Kruss, with whose research and publications I am not yet familiar, the two articles by Edwards,⁷⁶ the few pages by Chidester in de Grutchy and Prozesky 1990, a chapter in Chidester's 1992 book, and Thorpe's 1991 book, this field has been left to theologians, missiologists, anthropologists and archaeologists.

This not only excludes a prominent section of the Southern African, and African, religious scene, and a fundamental part of its religious history, from the study, research and teaching in Departments of Religious Studies, but, more importantly, excludes Religious Studies scholars

⁷⁵ Cf. Platvoet 1993c, 1998a, 1998b

⁷⁶ Edwards 1983, 1984

from the fertile and dynamic theoretical developments in two major areas of the study of religions. One is the anthropological-sociological, and other social-scientific studies, of the by far oldest types of human religions: those with histories that began in palaeolithic times, or at the time of the neolithic revolution, or at the dawn of the sub-tropical river valley city state civilizations. They are religions that are co-extensive with their societies and have no urge for expansion or imposition. The other group are the so called 'new religious movements', a term that is unfortunately generally accepted and shows that the religions of the 19th and 20th centuries have not yet historically and analytically been granted a place on a par with other religions. In my view, however, it is analytically more fertile and revealing to compare the recent processes of transformation in the so called 'world religions' with those emerging in the so called 'new religious movements' than to marginalize them as the separate field of marginal, esoteric cults fit for cranks.

The tenuous links of methodological and theoretical developments in Religious Studies in Southern Africa with those in anthropology of religion seem to me to thwart its development. Anthropologists not only have the same aims as scholars of Religious Studies: the neutral, objective, non-normative, accurate description and translation of the beliefs, religious behaviour, organisation and, in as far as accessible, religious emotions of preliterate (and nowadays semi- and at times fully literate) believers, and the non-reductive analysis of the morphology and other-than-religious functions of these religions in their societies and ecological situations. They have also been better equipped to do this job, and, more importantly, have more fought amongst themselves about the correct approaches to them and about the interpretation of their research results in terms of new theories and paradigms to be tested in further research.

It is an ideologically motivated myth, which also serves institutional interests and antagonisms, that social scientists are all positivist reductionists. Some of them certainly were, and are, of that mind set. But as such they also have contributed to both the substantive progress, in terms of description and analysis of specific religions, and the methodological debates in anthropology of religion and in the study of religions at large, either by seeing more sharply than others certain empirical non-religious functions of religions, or by engendering the opposition of those of their colleagues in anthropology of religion who had professional or private sympathies for their object of research: religion(s). As far as I know, in the last half century, most scholars in anthropology of religions have studied them with an explicitly non-reductive intent. It is they who have made the most important contributors to anthropology of religions. Several of these anthropologists are privately religious, and some of them may be held to have as 'religionist' an approach to religions as many of their colleagues in religious studies. This brings me to my second point.

The presupposition

Prozesky correctly stresses that most teaching and research in Religious Studies in SA, and I may add in Southern Africa, is independent of 'theology or church funding and control'. He also holds that it is 'independent of the agendas and the values of the religions being studied'.⁷⁷ That

⁷⁷ Prozesky 1990: 11-12

may still be partially true, though I do have my doubts in that respect for significant parts of Religious Studies in South and Southern Africa.⁷⁸ One reason for that doubt is that, notwithstanding phenomenological suspension of personal religious values and views - or more precisely because of the very need for it -, the fundamental ideological paradigm governing nearly all study of religions in Religious Studies is the *homo religiosus* theory. It is a non-denominational, inter-axial faiths natural theology, or philosophical anthropology, that prevents students in religions from taking a position that is metaphysically fully neutral, and a place of observation, for description and contextualized historical analysis, outside and above their object of research. It is this religious control, internal to the Religious Studies scholar, which, together with certain strategic motivations, seems to me to block a fruitful interaction, in methodology, theory formation and the development of fully neutral conceptual tools of analysis, with the anthropology of oral, African traditional religions, and the newest religions. It results in the constant condemnation and exorcism of social scientific approaches, and the failure to pay that measure of attention, in teaching and research, to these two types of religions which they deserve on the grounds of their relative importance in human religious history and in the religious scene of South Africa, Southern Africa, Africa, and of the world at large. The *homo religiosus* paradigm prevents the study of religions in Religious Studies from being a fully secular, fully neutral discipline. It keeps it in competition and contest with other ideologically motivated approaches, the positivist and the orthodox-theological ones. It causes it to engage, in Eliadean fashion, is creative and total hermeneutics which has reformative, therapeutic and even totalitarian intentions.⁷⁹

Now all this should not be taken to mean that religionist scholars do not make significant contributions to the study of religions at large, and that an anathema or ban should be published against them. They do make significant contributions, also in methodology, theory and concept development, and they have a proper place in the study of religions. My aim is only to point out the limitations inherent to their position and point to ways by which they may enlarge both their contributions to, and position in, the study of religions. By the equal attention to all types of religion, with privilege for none, to all historical conditioning and morphology, and all functions, religious as well as other; by increased communication on the substantive and theoretical levels, with all other branches of academic study of religions, the scholars of religions in religious studies will enter into progressively widening fields of research and better fulfil the task for which they are paid with the money of the taxpayers and contribute to the harmonious developments of their societies and the global community of mankind.

⁷⁸ 10.10.2017: As I set out in greater detail in Platvoet 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1998c.

⁷⁹ 10.10.2017: My article in *Numen* (1993a) was followed by a response by Prozesky. He argued in it that I had failed to grasp that his position was a naturalist one, for he held that 'all religions are the product of human creativity alone, activated in response to unseen [...] *wholly natural* forces in the cosmos' (Prozesky 1984: 343). Having recently studied his response again as well as his book, I had to conclude in my Postscript to Platvoet 1993a/2017: 'Though the indications of this naturalist position of Prozesky appear only quite late in his book, and are quite meager and very few, I can now only plead guilty of having misunderstood and misrepresented the core of Prozesky's explanatory theory of the history of the religions of humankind' (cf. for greater detail the revised version of Platvoet 1993a/2017 with Postscript at my website)..

What did Hawk say?

The Akan proverb runs: 'Hawk says: whatever God made is good'.⁸⁰ That verdict suits Hawk sailing on high quite well, even when we divest it of its religious intent and apply it to the mundane matter of the development of a branch of learning. Hawk diving down might wish to modify the verdict, and express the hope that whatever has developed here may progress to even greater fruition by removing, if circumstances allow, the confines within which it has worked so far. I am quite aware that this is not just a matter of personal choice. Certain choices can only be made if the circumstances allow them to be made. Not only do we study religions as products of humankind's cultural history. The study of religions itself is also a product of that same history and should, in methodology, be subjected to the same critical reflection on the cultural factors that enable and promote, or inhibit or thwart its growth and functioning.

Bunnik, 24.06.1993

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⁸⁰ 10.10.2017: *Osansa se: 'Adee a Onyame ayé, nyinaa yé'* (Appiah & Appiah [2001]: 907, proverb 5247

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