

Jan G. Platvoet 1998, bespreking van J.S. Krüger, *Along Edges: Religion in South Africa: Bushman, Christian, Buddhist* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1995), in *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 51, 1 (Januari 1998): 50-51; also in: *The African Association for the Study of Religions [Newsletter]* no. 9 (June 1998): 16-18

Review

Krüger, J.S., *Along Edges: Religion in South Africa; Bushman, Christian, Buddhist*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1995; VIII + 368 pp.; indices, illustrations; SA-Rand 65; ISBN 0-86981-907-0

Jacobus Krüger is Professor of Science of Religions and Head of the Department of Religious Studies at UNISA (the University of South Africa) at Pretoria. In the book under review, he has welded twenty essays into a coherent whole. These essays neatly reflect his methodology for the study of the religions, and the fields in which he works: Buddhism and South African aboriginal religion.

The essays are grouped in four parts. In part I (pp. 19-74), Krüger discusses the philosophical foundation of his methodological position; in part II (75-138), how religions may be studied; in parts III (215-247) and IV (274-333), he paints a vast canvass from long before *homo habilis* (139-197) to San (or Bushmen) religion and the religious pluralism of modern Southern Africa (79). The book is permeated by Buddhist philosophy (15, 287-290): its ‘centreless knowing’ (24, 48-50) is integrated into Krüger’s ‘conditionalist’ theory of man, which in its turn is inspired by modern views of the cosmological and biological evolution (143-197), and by such authors as William James (41-43), Jung (43-45, 68-71, 284-287), and Whitehead (45-48, 69-71).

Krüger has devised his conditionalist theory of the human predicament as an instrument for exploring the spaces between the Christian, Buddhist and Bushman religions (98, 258), for recovering the dynamics of the religious history of humankind, for ridding South Africa of its ‘religious apartheid’ (28, 105, 121, 258, 264), for toppling ‘Euro-Christian-centric discourse’ (203), and for constituting ‘the religious worldview of the new *Homo religiosus africanus*’ (186).

Krüger’s conditionalism conceives of man as a dynamic relationship with God and nature ‘comprehended in the widest context perceptible’ (23, 43). Presenting his theory as a naturalist and empiricist religious metaphysics (12, 22, 24), Krüger refuses to accept what he terms ‘religious apartheid’: the nature-supranature dichotomy with its ‘external God’ (63), eternity and an immortal soul, ‘in which the church and the biblical text somehow retain supracontextual status’ (264). The divine, he says, is not a ‘trans-empirical reality’ (43), but ‘the radical depth dimension of *this* reality’ (26, 184-185, 206, 251). It ‘can be probed, or at least suspected, by the highly sensitive (“mystical”) outreaches of our sensorium’ (29, 39). It can, therefore, be experienced by man as that ‘indeterminate “more”’ that fringes ‘the flux of relationships without definite boundaries between things’ by which our experiential world is constituted (42). Following Jung, Krüger holds that God, who is the *consensus gentium*, is established only by, and

in, the human psyche. The latter reveals what lies at the edges of human experience through the workings of the unconscious (44-45). It enables human religious intuition to discern truth in the 'radically contingent matrix of reality itself' (50).

Krüger rejects my analysis, in *Numen* 40, 3 (1993): 322-327, that his is a 'religionist' position (86, 105), perhaps because he restricts that category to positions inspired by 'supranaturalist revelationism' (27). The passages I have cited, however, show that his is a religionist position indeed. By that I do not censure it but merely categorise it as basically religiously inspired, with properties different from other methodological positions in the Science of Religions. With some of the properties prominent in Krüger's 'Science of Religion' I concur wholeheartedly, such as the integration of his thoroughly relativist (117-119, 128-131) Philosophy of Religion (100-137) with his critical Science of Religions (79-107); his call for a (Christian and other) theology informed by Science of Religion (27); his critical reflexiveness in matters of methodology (81-86); the vast perspectives he opens. But I reject others, such as his Schleiermachian romanticism, in which the meta-testable 'mythic' and 'mystical' dimensions of (trans-)cognition are vital (126-134, 145, 147, 287-290); his extolling of the 'liberating, therapeutic value' (85) of religious inclusivism (55-59, 90, 101, 151); and the combination of the study of religions with the production of new 'conditionalist religion' (108-124, 189, 203), which he defines as 'faith without an object', and as one that has abandoned 'the craving to survive eternally' (193-194, 253).

In part II, Krüger proposes a model of eight dimensions for study of religions, the first four constituting a science of religions, the second four a complementary philosophy of religion. Krüger says that his 'integral' paradigm falls 'altogether outside the currently accepted models of science of religions' (78). That view is too modest. It grants supremacy to models (which he fails to specify) which they do not actually enjoy, for in the Anglo-Saxon Departments of Religious Studies several philosophers of religion hold important positions in Science of Religion. Krüger's suggestion, however, that 'religion co-emerged with humanity itself' and had already reached 'a fair level of articulation' with *Homo erectus*, i.e., more than 1 million years ago (157), is not, as Krüger thinks, an 'extrapolation within reasonable bounds' (163), but creative hermeneutics (in the meaning which Eliade attached to that term). The discussion of San religion and healing dance in chapters 18 and 19 is the climax of the book, but it ends, unfortunately, in an anti-climax in the brief final chapter 20, on rock engravings as mandalas.

I strongly recommend this passionate and provocative, yet reflexive book. Those who order it are likely, however, to be frustrated, for UNISA seems not equipped to serve customers worldwide. By not improving its distribution, it does a disservice to the academic community.

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