

Praenotandum: This introductory chapter was published in Jan G. Platvoet, James L. Cox, & Jacob K. Olupona (eds.) 1996, *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects*. Cambridge: Roots and Branches, 7-36

Page numbers are set in bold between square brackets. The layout has been changed, and the text has been revised for this publication on the internet in September 2012, and again in 2017.

[7]

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PERSPECTIVES ON THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

When we rose from the four-day conference on The Study of Religions in Africa¹ at the University of Zimbabwe, Harare, on 18 September 1992, everyone agreed that it was the beginning of a new era in the academic study of religion in the African continent. Apart from it being the first major conference attended by South African scholars and Africans from outside Southern Africa, it marked a new partnership between African and non-African scholars, the so-called ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’, in the study of the religions of Africa. It was at once decided that selected papers, duly revised, were to be published to mark this important meeting, and to make them available to scholars and students in religions and in African studies, as well as to the general public.

This volume presents the first detailed overview of the state of the study of the religions of sub-Saharan Africa in the several different regions of the continent covered by conference participants from Africa. This book is, therefore, about Africa as ‘subject’ of the study of its own religions: how scholars born and bred in Africa, or at least posted in its universities, are contributing to the study of the religions of Africa. That this book can now be produced is remarkable. It shows that the religions of Africa are no longer in significant ways merely the object of study of ‘outsiders’; and that African scholars of religions have become part of the global community of scholars of religions, especially in the last few years since modern technology has facilitated an ever-increasing communication between scholars of religions all over the world. Scholars of religions in Africa south of the Sahara are in as intensive communication with their fellow scholars in the rest of the world, and in particular with those who study the religions of Africa, as their often more limited access to the modern communication facilities (books, journals, conferences, postal services, e-mail, etc.) will allow.

In this introductory article, two perspectives on the study of religions in Africa in this age of communication and globalisation are presented first, an international and an Afri-

¹ Whenever ‘Africa’ is used without further qualification in this article, and in most other contributions to this book, Africa south of the Sahara is meant.

can, because they lie at the very origin of this book. Then the contributions to this book are discussed.

The global perspective

The recent exponential growth of communication, travel, and information tends to turn the world into the proverbial ‘global village’. This revolutionary condition is deeply affecting both the community of scholars of religions, and the object [8] of their studies, the religions of humankind. From 100.000 BP² – at which time we currently date the earliest paleontological evidence of religion, for we find that both Neanderthals³ and ‘modern men’ (*homo sapiens sapiens*) had begun to bury their dead with their personal belongings⁴ – till now humans have produced an immense variety of religions, which have affected, for better and for worse, the far flung, and often relatively isolated, societies of men in which they were practiced. With modern high-tech now linking every part of the globe, migration has intensified, diaspora have multiplied, and cultural and religious plurality have become normal, as has religious pluralism⁵ sometimes also. The dramatic increase of information and communication, which is hallmark of globalising modern society, seems moreover causally linked also to the fundamental permutations, which have appeared in some of the historical religions, and to the proliferation of new religions.⁶

The International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) is also deeply affected by this aspect of modern times: it is growing exponentially. It was founded in Amsterdam in 1950 during the 7th International Congress for the History of Religions.⁷ It began as an association of national societies with its earliest strongholds in the societies of The Netherlands (founded in 1947), Italy, France, Sweden, and Israel. It was very much a West European affair, and of Christian liberal theologians. It began to de-Europeanise, and to de-Christianise, but hardly to de-theologise, in 1955 when the Japanese

² Before present

³ The Neanderthals (*homo sapiens Neanderthalensis*) lived in Europe, the Middle East, Western and Central Asia, and Africa between 125.000 and 30.000 years ago (cf. e.g. Weaver 1985: 614-616; Putman 1988: 452-456; Phillipson 1985: 71-72, 92, 99).

⁴ I take the archaeological data on *Homo sapiens sapiens* and Neanderthal ritual burials as the earliest evidence of religious practices, and as the beginning of the documented history of religions. On these dates, cf. Platvoet 1996a: 49n14, 49n15. It is however highly unlikely that religion began only at that time. Neanderthals and modern men (*homo sapiens sapiens*) had probably both been practising religion in this and various other ways for a very long time before this earliest evidence of their religious practices.

⁵ It is important to distinguish between plurality of religions and religious pluralism. The first denotes the co-existence of two or more religions in one society; the other the mental attitude which fosters their integration into the common society. In situations of plurality of religions, attitudes of strong identity and boundary consciousness are dominant which discourage, and often severely limit inter-group and inter-religious communication. They may breed competition, enmity and war (cf. Platvoet 1995a: 25, 37-41; Platvoet & van der Toorn 1995: 3-4; for an example of religious plurality heading towards a confrontation between religions, cf. Platvoet 1995b).

⁶ Platvoet 1993a: 233sq

⁷ Earlier congresses were held in Paris in 1900, in Basel in 1904, in Oxford in 1908, in Leiden in 1912, in Lund in 1929, and in Brussels in 1935; cf. e.g. Sharpe 1986: 245-247.

Society for the Study of Religion⁸ was admitted during the 8th congress in Rome. The 9th congress was held in Tokyo in 1958. The IAHR further expanded outside Europe in 1960 when the American Society for the Study of Religion (ASSR) became an affiliate [9] at the 10th congress in Marburg, Germany, and the 11th congress was held in Claremont, California, in 1965. Canada was admitted in 1970 during the 12th congress at Stockholm,⁹ as was Poland, the first affiliate in Eastern Europe.¹⁰ By 1975, at the time of the 13th congress at Lancaster in England, the IAHR had grown to comprise eleven European national societies,¹¹ and six outside Europe.¹² By 1995, it had become a worldwide community of scholars of religions, its seventeen affiliates in Europe¹³ being neatly balanced, at least numerically, by seventeen associations outside Europe.¹⁴

That globalisation is reflected in the venues of the IAHR congresses in the past two decades: the 14th IAHR congress was held in Winnipeg, Canada, in 1980; the 15th in Sidney, Australia, in 1985; the 16th in Rome, Italy, in 1990; and the 17th in Mexico City, in 1995. Durban, in South Africa, has been proposed as the venue of the 18th congress in 2000 and will be the first ever in Africa.

Though the study of religions has become a global discipline and the IAHR constitution has procedures for the equal share of all its societies in the direction of its affairs, yet there is at present clearly a centre and a periphery, for a number of reasons. One is that the academic study of religions is young and fledgling in most nations in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. Moreover, it must often struggle for survival in conditions that are crippling for any academic discipline. Moreover, though the IAHR executive is now vigorously pursuing a policy of internationalisation, the small IAHR study conferences – often ‘by invitation only’ –, which are policy-wise its most important meetings, have nearly all been held in the Western world until very recently.¹⁵ So,

⁸ The Japanese Society for the Study of Religion had more than one thousand members in 1975. It published its own academic journal since 1916. It holds a national conference every year at which about 150 papers are read (Pye 1975: 55, 67). Science of Religion began in Japan as early as in the West. It began in the eighteenth century with Tominaga Nakamoto (1715-1746) critically reflecting about the Japanese religions of his time: Buddhism, Confucianism, Neo-Confucianism, Shinto, and Taoism (Pye 1992).

⁹ The Canadian Society for the Study of Religion (CSSR) was founded in 1965 (Coward 1991: 28-29).

¹⁰ The Polish Society for the Science of Religions was founded in 1958 (Tyloch 1989: 66), and admitted to the IAHR in 1970 (Tyloch 1984a: 9-10; 1984b: 263).

¹¹ Finland (founded in 1963; IAHR affiliate in 1965; cf. Sharpe 1975: 20), France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and West Germany (founded in 1968; cf. Waardenburg 1976: 225).

¹² Canada, Israel, Japan, Korea, Mexico, and US (see Pye & McKenzie 1980: 156, 160, 172-179).

¹³ In addition to the 11 older ones: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Russia, Spain, and Ukraine.

¹⁴ In addition to the six older ones, they are those of Africa, Australia (cf. Sharpe 1986: 248-252), China (cf. Seiwert e.a. 1989), Cuba, India, Indonesia, Latin America, New Zealand, Nigeria, South(ern) Africa, North America, and Quebec (cf. e.g. IAHR Bulletin no. 28, January 1995). Those of Africa, Southern Africa, Latin America, and North America are supra-national ‘regional’ associations; that of Québec is an infra-national regional association.

¹⁵ E.g. at Turku, Finland, in 1973 (cf. Honko 1979); in Warsaw, Poland, in 1979 (cf. Tyloch 1984c); in Aarhus, Denmark, in 1987 (Geertz & Sinding Jensen 1991); in Marburg, Germany, in 1988 (cf. Pye 1989b); in Groningen, the Netherlands, in 1989 (cf. Kippenberg & Luchesi 1991), in Burlington (Vermont, USA) in 1991; in Paris, France, in 1993; and in Brno, Czech Republic, in 1994. The exceptions were the IAHR

despite globalisation, the IAHR affiliates in the rich nations of West Europe and North America are strongly established at the its centre, [10] simply because they are the best developed and organized, their countries being affluent enough to maintain strong universities; because information, communication and transport facilities are densest there; and perhaps because North-West Europe is the birthplace of the discipline as we know it now. These North Atlantic societies are likely to continue in control in the near future because of the international economic, political, and communication patterns of relationships presently prevailing.

It was recognized by the IAHR Executive that this situation of factual inequality imposed on the societies in the centre the moral duty to actively support the development of the associations in the other parts of the globe. Such assistance is, moreover, in the interest of the discipline, and therefore of the 'central' societies themselves. It was, therefore, a mixture of this moral imperative and self-interest, which inspired the IAHR Executive to convene a study conference in Marburg, Germany, in June 1988, for the purpose of analysing in what parts of the world the academic study of religions was strong, and where it was weak, or even non-existent; why these conditions prevailed in those particular contexts; and how the study of religions might be assisted to better organise and expand where it was struggling to emerge or to survive.

The analyses presented at Marburg tended to support three conclusions. The first was that the academic study is strong in countries with a secular constitution, a liberal Protestant tradition, and cultural as well as religious plurality and pluralism, as in most nations of North-West Europe and North America,¹⁶ or with a laicist tradition, as in France. The second conclusion was that the study of religions has been structurally weak, but is emerging now, in countries which are pervasively Roman Catholic, as in the nations of Southern Europe, Latin America, and the Philippines;¹⁷ in states with a Marxist constitution, such as the USSR and China and their satellites in Eastern Europe¹⁸ and Asia; and in the margins of the Muslim world: Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Nigeria, and the Muslim diaspora of South and East Africa, West Europe, and North America. And thirdly that the academic study of religions is virtually non-existent in the 'heartlands' of Muslim world itself except perhaps for Turkey because of its Kemalist secularism.¹⁹

conferences in Beijing, China, in April 1992, and in Harare, Zimbabwe, in September 1992, the proceedings of which constitute this book.

¹⁶ And in the former white dominions of the British Commonwealth, and in some of its non-white parts (McKenzie 1989; Platvoet 1989).

¹⁷ I presume that this is also true for nations, such as Greece, impregnated by a long history of Christian Orthodox culture. Another important factor for the nations of Southern Europe may be their troubled relationships with Islam in the past.

¹⁸ The collapse of the USSR after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 has changed this political constraint fundamentally.

¹⁹ See Bianchi (1989) on the study religions in Italy; Tyloch (1989) on that in Poland; Rousseau (1989) on that in Québec; von Stietencron (1989) on that in Germany; McKenzie (1989), and Platvoet (1989a) on that in Africa; Seiwert e.a. (1989) on that in China; and Antes e.a. (1989) on that in the Muslim world. For

[11] A further conclusion from such analyses is that the cultural and religious pluralism and ideological fragmentation prevailing in the more secularised states seem to favour the development of an autonomous 'Science of Religions'.²⁰ The more pervasively, however, polities are ruled by a unified secular or religious ideology, in particular if it is of an axiomatic and exclusivist character, the smaller the chance that it will allow the academic study of religions to develop. And if it does, the study of religions will develop in the service of that dominant secular or religious ideology. However, though it was mainly the religious and cultural pluralisation of modern secular industrialized societies, and its ideological fragmentation, which enabled 'Science of Religion(s)' to develop into an autonomous discipline practising neutrality in the meta-testable matters of ontology and cosmology,²¹ it must also be stated that Science of Religion has in the past at times also emancipated itself, by gradual steps and to a smaller or greater degree, from subservience to the dominant religion or ideology.²²

One of the working groups installed at the Marburg conference was charged with exploring ways and means by which the IAHR might assist the study of religions in the universities in Africa south of the Sahara.²³ One such means was the organisation of an IAHR study conference in Africa itself on how the academic study of religions had developed there. It was hosted by the University of Zimbabwe, at Harare, from 13 to 18

the Muslim world, two possible starting points for a Science of Religions must, however, be mentioned: in Cairo's Al-Azhar University, a theology of dialogue between religions seems to be developed by Prof. M. Zakzouk (cf. Antes *e.a.* 1989: 144-147; Zakzouk 1987); and in the Middle East, 'a critical density of historians, anthropologists, and sociologists engaged in the study of their own society and writing for audiences in their own languages' now exists (Eickelman 1987: 383). By their efforts, and those of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars in the West, an Anthropology of Islam and an academic study of religion(s), secular in orientation, is being developed (cf. el-Zein 1977; Eickelman 1981; 1987: 383-395; Asad 1986; Abu-Lughod 1989: 294-298; Tapper 1994; personal communication from Dr. David Westerlund, 10.01.1996). In Cairo's Al-Azhar University, a theology of dialogue between religions seems to be developed by Prof. M. Zakzouk (cf. Antes *e.a.* 1989: 144-147; Zakzouk 1987). It seems likely that from these several starting points both religiously inspired approaches to the study of religions are emerging, such as the Islamic social science approach conceived and propagated by *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Ahmed 1986, Ba-Yunus & Ahmad 1985 and Davies 1988 (cf. Tapper 1995), and secular ones of the methodologically neutral type (cf. also the contributions to this volume by Abubakre, Haron and Tayob).

²⁰ I prefer the term 'Science of Religion', because its equivalents (*Religionswissenschaft*, *godsdienswetenschap*, *religionsvidenskap*, etc.) are established terms in most academic traditions of continental Europe. These traditions use 'science' not only to refer to the study of the 'natural' (anorganic and organic) world, but also to the study of the cultural products of the human mind as they are studied in the so called *Geisteswissenschaften*: the social sciences and 'arts' studying the languages, societies, cultures, religions, histories, etc. of humans. However, the term 'Science of Religion' is used here merely as a synonym for the (academic) Study of Religions by neutral, non-committed scholars who aim at as high a degree of objectivity in the description, analysis, and theoretical interpretation of the religions of humankind as is methodologically possible. No claim to pure objectivity is implied.

²¹ The practice of this metaphysical neutrality is the major mark of methodological agnosticism, which is the most recent major position to emerge in the methodology of the academic study of religions in the last four decades (cf. Platvoet 1990: 183-187; 1993: 229-231; 1994: 25-26; Hanegraaff 1995: 102; cf. also Pye in this volume on the 'methodological neutrality', or independence, of the IAHR towards religions.

²² Cf. Platvoet 1998

²³ Pye 1989a: 16

September 1992. The selected and revised papers read at that conference are presented in this book.

[12] *The African perspective*

Three African societies for the study of religions have so far joined the IAHR. They are the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions (NASR), which was founded in 1976 and became an IAHR affiliate in 1980; the Association for the Study of Religions of Southern Africa (ASRSA), which was established in 1979 and admitted to the IAHR also in 1980; and the African Association for the Study of Religion (AASR) which was founded at the conclusion of the Harare conference and admitted to the IAHR in 1995.

The Nigerian association belongs to the category of national societies, which was the only mode of IAHR affiliation till the mid-eighties when the first supra-national societies, those of North America, Latin America, and the first infra-national association, that of Québec, were admitted to the IAHR. ASRSA was till 1992 factually also a national association, of South African scholars and a very few from the nations which were politically or economically dependent on South Africa.²⁴ ASRSA had been conceived, however, from its very inception as an organisation for Southern Africa, in explicit defiance of apartheid, in order to break through the academic isolation which apartheid imposed on it. The IAHR conference at Harare provided the first opportunity after the de-establishment of apartheid in 1991 and the lifting of sanctions by which the international community had isolated South Africa, for ASRSA to begin to be just that, by offering membership to scholars of religions in the other nations of Southern Africa,²⁵ electing some to its executive, and holding its annual conferences also outside the Republic of South Africa.

If ASRSA is special for being a national society, which is developing into a supra-national regional IAHR affiliate, AASR is in another way unique. It is not only the IAHR affiliate for the whole continent of Africa,²⁶ but also the very first global IAHR affiliate, to wit of scholars of the religions of Africa wherever they reside. AASR aims to unite all scholars of 'African religions',²⁷ for three purposes:

1. to promote interaction between them, in Africa and worldwide;

²⁴ Namibia, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland; and the so-called Bantustans, which South Africa was in the process of creating.

²⁵ Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, and Angola. Only some from Zimbabwe have, however, joined so far.

²⁶ Like the IAHR affiliates for North America, Latin America, and Southern Africa. As such its primary aim is to unite all scholars of religions in Africa into a society in order to promote the study of the religions of Africa, first of all in Africa itself. It must be emphasized that the AASR was not established in competition with the other IAHR affiliates in Africa, but to support and enhance them, and to assist in the establishment of national or regional associations where they do not yet exist, and to offer a 'home' for scholars of religion(s) where they are too few to establish a viable national or regional organisation. Where associations exist, AASR members are expected to join them (cf. AASR Constitutions in *IAHR Bulletin* 28 [January 1994] 2-5, esp. article 3 on membership).

²⁷ In the meaning of all religions, indigenous and immigrant, that are or were practised in Africa; cf. below my article 'The Religions of Africa in their Historical Order', pp. 46-102 in this volume.

2. to foster mutual support, and in particular the assistance which scholars of African religions in the universities in the Western nations with strong economies can raise for their colleagues in African [13] universities which struggle for survival against severe odds;
3. to promote the study of the religions of Africa in Africa as well as in Western universities which have so far severely neglected their study, for a number of reasons to be discussed below.²⁸

The AASR is, therefore, unique among the IAHR affiliates in being both a regional association – for all the scholars of religions in the continent of Africa – and a global society of the scholars of one specific group of religions, to wit those of Africa.

The structures imposed on Africa in the colonial period – from roughly 1880 to 1960 – are still powerfully present in independent Africa. One example is the several ‘metropolitan models’ after which the universities of Africa south of the Sahara were constituted, first in late colonial times, 1945-1960, when colonial authorities put the earliest ‘university colleges’ under the supervision of particular metropolitan European universities. But also after independence, for the new nations continued to follow the academic traditions and structures of the UK in the Anglophone part of Africa, of France and Belgium in its French speaking parts, and of Portugal in the Lusitophone area.²⁹ The consequences and constraints of these models are particularly noticeable in the study of religions. The Anglosaxon traditions allowed the inclusion of faculties or departments of theology/divinity and/or religious studies into the new universities Africa because of the particular Church-State relationships prevailing in UK, its dominions and its (former) colonies, and because ‘religion’ (RE)³⁰ was an examination subject in secondary schools.³¹

The French laicist tradition forbade such a benign attitude to (Christian) theology and the study of religions in the universities, and to (the Christian) ‘religion’ in schools. It replaced both with (laicist) philosophy. Its strict relegation of the practice of religion to the private sphere and removal of teaching about religion(s) out of schools and universities as public institutions left little room for the study of the religions of Africa as an academic subject in the universities of Francophone Africa.³²

In the former Belgian colonies – Zaire, Ruanda, Burundi – the strong position of the Roman Catholic Church did lead to a strong Faculty of Theology, and a Centre for the

²⁸ Some of which also caused some categories of African religions to be unduly neglected even in Departments of Religious Studies in Africa itself, as will be shown below.

²⁹ Cf. Platvoet 1989: 109-115

³⁰ Originally the subject was termed RI (Religious Instruction). Its aim was to foster Christian beliefs and morals in pupils (Jackson 1990: 102-103, 106-107) in a non-denominational manner. Its main content was Bible Knowledge (BK), or Scripture, with some (Protestant) Christian Doctrine, or Divinity, added. It was complemented by compulsory daily school worship (Cole 1990: 117-119; cf. also Cunningham 1990: 21-22; Gates 1990: 77, 82).

³¹ Platvoet 1989: 113-115, 116-117, 118-119

³² Platvoet 1989: 110-111, 116, 119

Study of the African [Traditional] Religions,³³ in the Lovanium University at Kinshasa. But the academic study of ATRs in these parts was strongly influenced by RC scholastic traditions in philosophy and theology. It was moreover conducted in the service of the indigenisation of the R.C. religion.³⁴ In the Lusitophone countries of [14] Africa – Angola, Mozambique – no academic study of religions developed.³⁵

Because of the opportunities these metropolitan models provided and the constraints they imposed, the study of the religions of Africa had fairly good opportunities for development only in the Anglophone universities of Africa, and more in particular in three distinct academic settings: the (very Christian) Departments of Religious Studies,³⁶ the Departments of Archaeology and History,³⁷ and the Institutes of African Studies.³⁸

That is reflected in this book. It deals virtually only with the academic study of religions in Anglophone Africa. The not insignificant development of the study of African traditional religions and the indigenisation of Christianity in Zaire has not been charted.³⁹ Nor has an attempt been made to solicit data on the development of the study of religions in the other French speaking universities in the former French colonies in Central Africa. In the survey of the developments in West Africa some data have, however, been included on the academic study of African religions in the Francophone universities. We have also not been able to investigate whether or not the academic study of religions has begun to develop in Lusitophone Africa.⁴⁰

The matter of this book is, therefore, mainly devoted to the developments in the research of the religions of Africa in the Anglophone universities of Africa, and more in particular in those in West and South Africa, where that academic study has developed best in the past decades. In East Africa, the University of Makerere in Kampala, Uganda, was a centre till the 1970s, and more recently the study of religions has become stronger in Kenya with Departments of Philosophy & Religious Studies established in the University of Nairobi in 1969, and Kenyatta University, also in Nairobi, in 1972.⁴¹

The contributions to this book

The contributions to this book are the revised versions of the papers presented and discussed during the IAHR Regional Conference on The Study of Religions in Africa – hosted by the Department of Religious Studies, Classics & Philosophy [15] of the

³³ It publishes the valuable *Cahiers des Religions Africaines*; cf. Platvoet 1989: 112

³⁴ Platvoet 1989: 111-112, 117-118, 119

³⁵ Platvoet 1989: 115, 119

³⁶ Platvoet 1989: 113, 116-117, 118-119, 121-122

³⁷ Platvoet 1989: 120

³⁸ Platvoet 1989: 120, 122

³⁹ But cf. Westerlund 1985: 69-87; McKenzie 1989: 102; Platvoet 1989: 109, 111-112, 116, 117-118, 119

⁴⁰ In September 1995, however, discussions were held in the University of Maputo on how to develop the study of religions in Mozambique (personal communication from Dr. Gerrie ter Haar, 23.10.1995).

⁴¹ [Note added 09/2012: Departments of Philosophy and Religious Studies have also been founded more recently at Egerton University, Njoro, established in 1979; at Moi University, Eldoret, established in 1984; and at Maseno University, Maseno, established in 2000.

University of Zimbabwe from 15 to 18 September 1992 – except for the three which, in addition to this introduction, were specially written for this volume after the conference. They are the two contributions by Jan Platvoet, and the article on the study of Islam in Southern Africa by Muhammad Haron. The latter replaced the very brief paper on the same subject Professor Salman Nadvi of the University of Durban-Westville in South Africa was unable to revise and expand for personal reasons.

The contributions to this book have been organized into five parts. Part I contains three contributions that provide a general background to this book. Parts II to IV are the substance of the book. Part II consists of four articles examining methodological issues in the study of African religious traditions. In part III, the development of the study of religions in Anglophone Africa is surveyed, in particular in West and South Africa, and to a limited degree in East Africa. In part IV, three papers discuss the study of Islam in Africa. The book closes with Part V. It consists of one paper each on the study of Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism in (mainly) South Africa.

Part I

Part I consists, apart from this introductory article, of a policy statement by Michael Pye, IAHR Secretary-General in 1992 and now its President, and two more articles in which the two central themes of this book are surveyed: the study of the religions of Africa, and the religions of Africa.

Michael Pye provides an agenda for the International Association for the History of Religions by reflecting on the ‘intercultural’ policy it should develop in these decades of rapid internationalisation. The expansion of the IAHR into Asia, Africa and Latin America demands that it develop not only strategies for an as effective communication with its affiliates in the more distant parts of the globe as the means to bridge that distance will allow, but also that it reflect on how it can serve as an academic forum for the intercultural exploration of humankind's religions. In order to be able to serve as such a forum, it must analyse the cultural differences that affect research into religions in its Western and non-Western affiliates, for ‘the shape of religion as viewed by perceptive analysts is affected by the major relevant historical determinants’ which have shaped the societies to which these analysts belong. They have ‘a strong influence on the research and subsequent theories’. The concept of ‘religion’ has, e.g., emerged quite recently from historical developments specific to Western societies, and need not necessarily be a good tool for the study of the religious aspects of societies with different cultural histories, such as the Islamic, or Eastern Asiatic, or Latin American ones, the deep assumptions of which about the very shape of religion differ considerably from the modern Western ones, and from each other, as Pye shows by an analysis of the publications of a Chinese and a Peruvian scholar of religions. The IAHR should, therefore, not be ‘wedded to any limiting view of the nature of religion’. In practice, a very wide view has been taken of the field of study of historians of religions. A limiting view would, moreover, easily become a normative and confessional one if it is meant to delineate what

'true religion' is, or 'good religion'. [16] Pye, therefore, insists that the more the IAHR becomes a global association, the more it must be methodologically free from specific religious standpoints. Methodological independence, however, does not forbid that a scholar is a believer of a particular religion, or that the study of religions is pursued in an institutional context, which is wedded intimately to a particular religion. The IAHR is neutral towards religious and other convictions and admits scholars of religions from diverse religious and other backgrounds. It is not the scholars who are to be judged, but their research: its quality will be tested at the IAHR conferences.

The IAHR is, therefore, not inimical to religion, nor irreligious: it is non-religious. It may accept support from religious bodies if its 'procedural neutrality' is respected. Pye's programme of an interculturally sensitive study of religions foresees that 'insider' specialists will develop in-depth analyses which will challenge and remove the facile generalisations which are now often made about religion in our profession.

The subject of the second introductory contribution is an elucidation of the term 'the religions of sub-Saharan Africa'. Jan Platvoet presents a 'history' of the religions of Africa. He orders them chronologically after the moment they appeared on the continent of (sub-Saharan) Africa. The 'indigenous' as well as the 'immigrant' religions have been included in the category 'the religions of Africa', the sole criterion for inclusion being whether or not a religion has believers who are permanent residents in sub-Saharan Africa, irrespective of the colour of their skin and whether or not their sense of identity is an 'African' one. This criterion allows him to show that as many as thirteen distinct religions, or types of religions, are being practised in Africa, but with very different spans of time, some being indigenous since palaeolithic times, and others residing in Africa since only a few decades or even years. They are, in historical order, the African traditional religions (ATRs); Christianity; Islam; Judaism; Sikhism; the Parsee religion; Jainism; the Chinese religion; Buddhism; the new esoteric religions; Baha'i; and Afro-American religions returning to Africa. The first four categories cover a wealth of variation, after region and/or modality, and have to be subdivided. Their varieties are discussed in some detail, again after the chronological order in which they appeared on the scene of sub-Saharan Africa.

Part II

Part II consists of four contributions on problems of methodology and approaches in the study of African religions, and more in particular the indigenous ones, by Jan Platvoet, Michael Bourdillon, James Cox, and Friday Mbon. Platvoet presents a long term view of the history of the study of the religions of Africa by way of examples from the study of African traditional religions. Bourdillon's contribution is a sensitive essay on the severe hermeneutical problems with which anthropologists studying African traditional religions are grappling since they have become acutely aware of the limited validity of so much of their research results by the so-called post-modern criticism of cross-cultural

studies. Cox and Mbon propose new paradigmatic models and methods for the study of African traditional religions.

[17] Platvoet divides the history of the study of the religions of Africa into two major phases, that of 'Africa as object', when its religions were studied exclusively, or later mainly, by scholars from outside Africa; and that of 'Africa as subject', when its religions were being studied also, and later mainly, by 'African' scholars born and bred in Africa south of the Sahara, or at least holding a post in an African university for a number of years. He sketches a general, and admittedly much simplified, history of the study of the religions of Africa by means of a few paradigmatic examples taken mainly from the fields with which he is well acquainted, those of the study of African traditional religions (ATRs), and in particular of the traditional religions of the Akan-speaking peoples of Southern Ghana. The outline is, therefore, not only a broad one, but also a tentative one. Its validity for the history of the other types of religions of Africa will have to be tested. His sketch rests on two assumptions. One is that all the categories of religions of Africa had been studied for a considerable time by scholars from outside Africa before they began to be studied by African scholars. The other is that both phases began mostly from poor amateur scholarship – one may even question whether some of it deserves the predicate 'scholarly' at all – to become more rigorous and reliable only in its later phases.

In the history of the study of African traditional religions, the 'Africa as object' phase moves from amateur ethnography towards academic anthropology, the contributions by liberal Christian missionaries, and more recently the historical studies in ATRs.⁴² Likewise, the study of African indigenous religions by African scholars began with African amateur anthropology and was further developed by professionally trained African anthropologists, by African Christian theologians, and more recently by African historians. His conclusion is that the best studies are the multidisciplinary ones, which combine anthropological, historical, 'phenomenological', comparative, and other religious studies approaches.

Though most anthropologists have tried explicitly to understand African traditional religions from the point of view of their believers, 'post-modern' analysis of the roles which the scholars themselves play in the production of academic knowledge has severely shaken earlier confidence in its presumed high degree of objectivity. Bourdillon spells out the constraints upon the achievement of objectivity. No observer can register

⁴² An earlier group of historical studies of African cultures and religions by German and Austrian ethnologists (Ankermann 1905, Frobenius 1898, 1899, 1933) after the method of the historical ethnology developed by Graebner (1911) for museological purposes and by Wilhelm Schmidt for the study of preliterate religions, has not been included, because it did not influence the development of the study of the religions of Africa. Cf. Brandewie (1983: 68-109) on the 'culture-historical' method of Graebner and Schmidt. These studies failed to make an impact because of the language barrier which developed after Germany had lost its colonies in Africa in World War I. Mbon's 'culture area' approach (see his contribution to this volume) seems, however, to have an affinity with the central concept of the *Kulturkreis*, 'culture circle' – a (geographical) area with a distinct cultural identity – of the Graebner-Schmidt school of German ethnology. But it is not clear whether Mbon has been inspired by that school.

all that needs to be noticed. What he, or she, notices is conditioned, directed and [18] coloured by his or her cultural and scholarly training and (research) interests. The actual collection of data is not only focused by categories established before the research, but they also condition their interpretation. These categories are never without their biases. A power relationship is present in a research situation if, as is often the case, the view of the academic observer is presumed to be superior to that of the believers studied. Data must, however, be collected by these academic outsiders, as the data which the insiders might present would suffer from other, even more severe limitations. The academic insiders, or the academic outsiders who have become familiar with a culture and a religion, seem the least biased, and therefore optimal collectors of descriptive data about a(n African traditional) religion, but their absolute objectivity can never be presumed.

Bourdillon does not, however, agree with some of the conclusions which radical empiricists have drawn from this predicament. Against their suggestion that all beliefs be experientially understood by the artful narration of the empathetic anthropologist, and be accepted, however odd they may be, as as valid as any other, Bourdillon posits that sociological analysis of causes and effects can teach us more than the artistic 'entering into' the experiences of the believers; and that there will be a need to judge some beliefs as plainly wrong.

Bourdillon has also problems with the neutrality which the Study of Religions requires from scholars, as he finds that his personal judgements do influence his own academic work. *Epochè* (suspension of normative judgement), he says, should be understood as a prescription to listen, not to 'bracket out' all previous knowledge, nor to rule out all possibility of judgements. One must have an open mind for the beliefs of others but one cannot have an empty mind. He suggests that there will be a need for criticism of both our own culture and the culture(s) studied. He pleads for the development of a philosophical ethics which reflects on the cross-cultural criteria for deciding such issues, and he makes several suggestions towards it. One is that knowledge should not to be sought for the sake of knowledge only, with total disregard for its practical value, and power implications. Another suggestion is that the academic study of religions should avoid both the cultural imperialism by which we impose the norms and values of our own culture and religion upon others, and the absolute 'neutrality' towards all and any beliefs of the academic ivory tower. The beliefs of others must be respected and (as) accurately presented (as is possible), but they must also be set into their contexts. In this process, personal judgement cannot be fully avoided.

If Bourdillon is critical of *epoche* (suspension of normative judgement) as a tool in the academic study of religions and offers a low profile interpretation of it, Cox is a great advocate of it, and of *eidetic* vision, two concepts from 'classical phenomenology',⁴³ which, in his view, can constitute a scientific phenomenology of African traditional religions.⁴⁴ Cox aims to demonstrate against Segal that phenomenology can [19]

⁴³ As developed by e.g. Gerardus van der Leeuw (1933, 1968) and C.J. Bleeker (1963).

⁴⁴ Bourdillon and Cox are well acquainted with each other's views because Bourdillon teaches in the

produce objective descriptions of a religion's beliefs through suspension of judgment and eidetic intuition. He also accepts the central dogma of the Eliadean school, that religion consists in more than purely mundane causes. It is, therefore, in his view unscientific not to acknowledge the existence of the transcendent in that description.

That recognition does not, however, imply that the phenomenologist accepts the beliefs of the religion he studies and that he shifts from science into theology, as Segal contends. Cox does not, and admits that he cannot believe in, for example, the truth of Shona spirit possession, and therefore in the particular truth claims of the religion which he studies at a specific moment. Yet, he contends that phenomenology enables him to understand and experience their belief in the reality of spirit possession as a specific expression of the reality of something meta-empirical, and therefore as [religiously] meaningful for him. The procedure he advocates for achieving this understanding is Panikkar's and Krieger's 'diatopical hermeneutics'. It achieves, he says, an understanding of another religion not by a confessional conversion,⁴⁵ but by a 'methodological conversion'. That is a 'conversion' for the sake of a 'genuine dialogue' between religions.⁴⁶ It consists in taking a position between two religions in which the Christian temporarily suspends his Christian beliefs; uses 'categories' from both religions; examines them from the perspectives proper to their own religion, with respect and trust; and takes the other religion not as merely an object of detached knowledge but as a source of existential self-understanding which transforms his whole (Christian) world view in this process of dialogical communication.⁴⁷

Cox suggests that diatopical hermeneutics proves that one can achieve a (scientifically valid) understanding of another religion without becoming a believer of it. He considers methodological conversion to be one of the many Wittgensteinian language games we can play. It is a 'conversion' with its own game rules. Cox concludes that scholars can achieve a genuine understanding of another religion – one which effects a religious transformation in the scholar – but by which they do not become believers of it; and that phenomenology, therefore, does not imply a shift from science into theology. The crucial point (of conflict) in Cox's position seems to be the claim that it is proper to Religious Studies to achieve understanding of the Eliadean, religiously transformative type, and that it yet may be claimed to be a properly scientific discipline.

Mbon examines also methodological issues, but more specifically in the academic study of West African traditional religions by Africans in Africa. Early scholars in the

University of Zimbabwe in which Cox also held a post for a few years. Their two articles may best be read as continuing their critical discussion about the two very different approaches to the study of religions which they espouse, the social-scientific one of anthropologists versus the hermeneutical of an Eliadean 'phenomenology'.

⁴⁵ Panikkar and Krieger define a confessional conversion as accepting the beliefs of another religion as true and becoming a member of it. As it involves the exchange of one religion for another, it does not, they say, contribute to an understanding between religions.

⁴⁶ Panikkar and Krieger are RC liberal theologians who are engaged in the (theology of) dialogue between religions.

⁴⁷ Cox's version of Eliade's creative hermeneutics.

field, either trained within or outside Religious Studies, showed little concern with issues of method, with the exception of Idowu. Those trained within the discipline mainly engage [20] presently in descriptions of the nature and content of the religions using foreign conceptual schemes. However, recently students and scholars in the academic study of West African traditional religions have begun to show considerable, even a compulsive, interest in methodological issues. While that is important, Mbon `cautions against allowing trees to cloud the sight and appreciation of the beauty of the forest', by imposing or employing an improper methodology, foreign to African systems of thought, in the study of African traditional religions.

Rejecting Idowu's position that African traditional religions are one, Mbon emphasizes the need to study them after the method of the culture area approach which, he thinks, will succeed in a down-to-earth, ethnic and sub-ethnic study of African religions by indigenous scholars. He defines a culture area as the entire geo-political space which a people occupies, including that to which some of its members have migrated. Its study will not only expose environmental and cultural variations in the religious elements of any cultures, but it will advance a comprehensive study of the religions of a given culture area. The advantages of this culture area approach are, he says, immense. Though the descriptive study of religions, presenting the views of the believers 'from the inside', remains indispensable as the ground floor, the culture area approach allows the organisation and analysis of many more data, and their comparison, and constitutes a much more contextualised knowledge of religions. In addition, it employs historical perspectives to account for the dynamics of religions.

However, the study of West African traditional religions is not without its problems: the hundreds of languages and cultures in Africa with no written scriptural texts, and the fact that the original practitioners and custodians of the religions are dying out, on the one hand; and on the other, the difficulty of deciphering facts about the traditional religions because most data are contaminated with non-African, especially Western-Christian, ideas and concepts. Two more problems are the many biased representations of African traditional religions, and African secrecy: custodians of these religions are reticent to expose the inner recesses of their minds. Lastly, only a few culture areas in West Africa have been able to produce a sufficient number of indigenous scholars in the scientific study of the religion and culture of their people.

Part III

The subject matter of part III is the historical development of the study of religions as an academic discipline in the universities of Anglophone Africa. It has four contributions. Two are by Jacob Olupona. In the first one, he outlines the developments in Nigeria. It has the greatest number of Departments of Religious Studies. In the second one, he surveys the study of religions in not only the other English speaking parts of West Africa, but also in some of its Francophone parts. The third and fourth articles, by Martin Pro-

zesky and Teresia Hinga, deal with the development of the study of religions in respectively South Africa and in Kenya.

Jacob Olupona's essay 'The Study of Religions in Nigeria: Past, Present, and Future' centres on six different areas in the academic study of religions in Nigeria. They are: [21] programme and curriculum development; teaching, research and publication; institutional support; internal structures and external influences; and areas of need. He examines the programmes of several Universities, which have Departments of Religious Studies both at undergraduate and graduate levels. Most of the institutions of higher learning in Nigeria offer the study of religions. Major areas of emphasis in teaching and research are the three main religions in Africa: African traditional religions, Islam and Christianity. The models of the programmes reflect regional religious dominance. In terms of research and publication, it is noticed that most scholars pursue their research on their own religious traditions and communities. They have produced substantial works in the areas of historical study of religions, theology, religious and social ethics and sociology of religion.

Olupona notes a growing interest in researches into African traditional religions. But the earliest scholars in the field have regrettably employed western theistic categories in their theological and descriptive exposition of African religions. Contemporary scholars however are correcting these notions by their use of 'phenomenological'⁴⁸ and literary approaches. Another increasingly popular area of research borne out of the unhealthy competitive attitudes of adherents of the two competing religions in Nigeria is inter-religious dialogue. It aims at promoting peaceful co-existence between people of different faiths. This has generated a lot of literature on Muslim-Christian dialogue in Nigeria.

Olupona, however, comments on one serious problem in the teaching of religions in Nigerian universities, to wit the 'book famine'. Because students have very limited access to textbooks and journals, they have to copy from teachers' dictation on which they will be tested. Lack of funds has caused reputable journals to collapse and the few that are struggling to survive are produced at irregular intervals.

Olupona closes his discussions by providing some general reflections on the current issues and future projections. There is a need to engage initially in discussion of issues facing the academic study of religion. Serious emphasis on theory and methodological issues should be pursued to help in meaningful interpretations. Courses designed as minimum standard in the curriculum of religious studies should focus not only on teaching but also seriously on analytical approaches. Educational planners should identify and encourage women scholars in the field of the academic study of religions.

Jacob Olupona's other essay, 'The Study of Religions in West Africa: A Brief Survey', examines the academic study of religion in the two linguistic and political blocks (Anglophone and Francophone) which together constitute the geographical reality of West Africa. He identifies three significant problems that one encounters when one

⁴⁸ I.e. descriptive studies, aiming to represent the beliefs of a religion as the believers experience and understand them.

compares them. Firstly, that the multiplicity of religions in cultural and social types in West Africa's regions constitutes a serious problem for any meaningful progress for an in-depth study. Secondly, that the two blocks have significantly different academic traditions. And thirdly, there is a serious disagreement among members of each group as to what constitutes the academic study of religion. In spite of these difficulties, a comparative study of the [22] two academic traditions is imperative at this time, especially given the success and significance of comparable bodies such as the Economic Community of West Africa.

Olupona's essay provides a historical brush stroke of the academic traditions of selected older universities such as the University of Sierra Leone (formerly Fourah Bay College) and the University of Liberia (formerly Liberian College). In the Anglophone countries, religious studies followed a similar pattern as those in other British colonies. They began as dependent colonial programmes controlled by and modelled after British metropolitan universities. However, after the nationalist struggles and the achievement of independence, autonomous programmes were developed whose curriculum reflected the cultural and social milieu of the new African states. Courses on West African religious pluralism and indigenous African religions were incorporated into the study of religions. In a way the new West African religious studies programmes radically differ from the colonial institutions that gave birth to them. For example, several Religious Studies scholars acknowledge that the University of Ibadan developed a religious studies programme long before any British university, the latter focusing on theological education rather than religious studies. Nevertheless, the career and activities of the indigenous Religious Studies scholars remained by and large very much tied to church activities.

In the Francophone states, a somewhat different structure developed. There, no de facto religious studies programmes exist. Rather, religion was, and is, studied by individual scholars located in other programmes in the humanities and social sciences, such as cultural studies, history and philosophy. Olupona's essay provides one detailed study, to wit of the situation in Mali, and in particular at the *École Normale Supérieure*, an institution of higher learning, but not a university, at Bamako. Given Mali's long tradition of Islam and its significance and relevance in contemporary Islamic affairs in the region, Malian scholars often express the hope that any future University established in the country would certainly give Islam a significant place in the curriculum.

Teresia Hinga's 'The Academic Study of Religion in Kenya: Contemporary Issues and Future Prospects', traces the origin of religious studies to the western missionary enterprise. At the beginning, the Christian faith was associated with literacy and 'enlightenment', and the Bible served as the vehicle for imparting this knowledge. As a result, 'Bible Knowledge' (BK) became the dominant form of religious instruction in the country in what was *de facto* 'secular' education. This lasted throughout the colonial period and extended even into the post-colonial era. The result of this mission sponsored education was that religious education in primary and secondary institutions automatically promoted the Christian faith. But just as we saw in the West African situation, after in-

dependence, Kenya's new elite and educators began to re-examine the content of mission sponsored curricula with the aim of making it more relevant to the secular goals of the new nation state.

Hinga examines two major changes in this new scheme. First, the advocacy role religious education played was discouraged and in its stead, new curricula emerged that addressed the relevance of Bible studies to the moral and social life of the new nation state. Rather than simply asking the students to read, understand and narrate the Bible stories, relevant hermeneutical and exegetical questions were now raised [23] in the context of the new nation state. Second, religious educators had to respond to the pluralist state of the new nation. Other religious traditions, outside the Christian faith were acknowledged as worthy of study in their own rights and hence Religious Studies ceased to be synonymous with Christian education. The new dispensation obviously affected Religious Studies programmes in the University as well. Unlike before, when theological programmes constituted the core of religious education at this level, students were now exposed to new methods and theories for studying the variety of the religious traditions of their country.

Hinga also raises several important questions, which incidentally scholars continue to wrestle with even today. What methods best suit the study of religions in the African context? Given the irreparable damage foreign armchair scholars have done to these traditions, who can best represent African traditions, the 'outsiders' or the 'insiders'? While she does not argue that 'outsiders' have no place in the study of African religions, she thinks that African scholars themselves should be given a significant voice in the study of African religions. Such a move, she hopes, will enable us to correct the foreigner's biased representations and put an end to the colonial legacy of seeing Africans as mere 'objects' of study. Hinga pleads for the promotion of a 'close partnership' between foreign and indigenous scholars, such as we see increasingly taking place today.

Finally, Hinga looks at the lack of adequate resources and sources for the study of African religions and predicts that, unless urgent steps are taken to correct these problems, the future of the academic study of religions in Africa is indeed uncertain.

Martin Prozesky's essay 'South Africa's Contribution to Religious Studies' comes at a time when South Africa's apartheid policy is being dismantled and religious studies scholars are re-examining the significance of their discipline in the new South Africa. He warns that South African scholars should not simply take refuge in the comfortable position of South African religious plurality, but rather to take seriously the 'apartheid context' in which religions have evolved and grown in the country. This offers a much more viable option as it would challenge South African scholars to take seriously the importance of the academic study of religion in a very complex socio-political situation. While the overwhelming majority of South Africans adhere to the Christian tradition, yet it was the Christian tradition that provided the backdrop on which the horrendous evil of apartheid was fashioned. Against this background, it behoves scholars of religion to go beyond mere phenomenological description and interpretation of the South Afri-

can religious pluralism to ask and engage in more critical study of their respective traditions in their socio-political contexts. Prozesky argues that it does not mean that the study of the ultimate values and truth claims of the individual religions is not worth pursuing; but what it means is that the social dimension of religion deserves more emphasis than it is hitherto given. One has noticed a move in this direction in recent South African scholarship. For example, in 1994, at the inauguration of the South African Academy of Religion, a conference was organised around the theme of 'Religion and Civil Society in South Africa'.

Prozesky also provides an overview of South Africa's religious studies tradition as reflected in the programme of her universities. With the exception of a few universities, most universities are linked to theological studies, hence there are far more theologians than historians of religion. While this is understandable, since [24] most of the scholars have been caught between the two divides of apartheid and anti-apartheid campaigns, the situation can no longer continue in a new South Africa. One of the major achievements of the region is the creation of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA), which continues to be the focus of *Religionswissenschaft* in Southern Africa. Though based in South Africa, ASRSA as a regional organisation endeavours, but not without problems, to cater for the needs of all its Southern African members. But, in spite of its problems, the Association has made significant progress, especially in its public stance against apartheid. It has achieved this by committing itself to its charter which is 'towards maintaining and achieving a just and peaceful society', especially at a time when it was very unpopular to do so in South Africa.

Prozesky also examines several important contributions religious studies have made towards the development of the universities and the society in the fields of undergraduate education and research in general. In the former, the programmes have focused on a broad range of religious traditions of the world, thus allowing for 'a deeper and wider appreciation' of these traditions through the varieties of courses that are offered. But he also observes that these world religion courses tend to run better in politically less significant areas of the country. In the latter, in academic research and publications at post-graduate and faculty levels, scholars have focused on very broad areas of concerns, especially methodological, theoretical and empirical works, though most tend to be theological in nature. The socio-ethical implications of these works have also not been missed.

In spite of these successes, one must note that research and publications in indigenous religions tend to be scarce or even non-existent, even though the study of these traditions forms the base of the history of religions in other African countries. In this regard, Prozesky remarks that there are very few historians of religion who focus on indigenous religious traditions per se, and they tend to be more studied by social anthropologists in the South African context. Finally, he raises other serious questions that concern South Africa's future: what happens to religious studies as South Africa undergoes profound political and social changes? As more blacks are enrolled in the universities, and

religious studies are tuned towards more secular based programmes, will the discipline as it is currently composed still maintain its tone and identity? Prozesky's observation seems quite prophetic because there are indications that these issues are already making waves in the Departments of Religious Studies in the country.

Part IV

Part IV has three articles, two on the academic study of Islam in Africa: one by Abubakre on how it has developed in Nigeria; and another by Haron on its growth in South Africa; and one by Tayob on the development of Muslim identity in South Africa in the past decades.

[25] Deremi Abubakre's essay 'The Position of the Academic Study of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa: Nigeria as a Case Study' is an examination of the various traditions of Islamic studies in the country with perhaps the largest Muslim population in Africa.⁴⁹ As a prelude to this paper Abubakre presents a brief history of Islam in the continent tracing the various sources through which the classical Islamic tradition reached the North, West and Eastern African regions. From this context, he then focuses on the beginning of Islamic learning in West Africa, and the contribution of prominent Muslim scholars to the educational and cultural growth of Western Sudanese empires, and of Mali, Bornu and the Hausa city states of Northern Nigeria. During that period, prominent scholars served as advisers, teachers and judges in the courts of kings and rulers of the ancient kingdoms and cities of western Sudan and the Guinea forest kingdoms of West Africa. Through the activities and works of these Muslim initiators, numerous classical Arabic texts and memoirs were produced. They have been deposited in centres of Arabic and Islamic Studies such as the Universities of Ibadan and Ahmadu Bello, Zaria, in Nigeria, and today they now serve as testimonies to the importance of the West African Islamic heritage of the period.

Abubakre also examines the study of Islam in the colonial period. He argues that unlike the previous era, that saw the flowering of Islamic learning, the colonial period did not augur well for Islamic education. The advent of colonialism, and subsequently Christianity, meant the displacement of Islamic influences in the region. The lure of Christian education and the new medical and social services that were produced as part of the Western missionary enterprise became avenues for Christian proselytization and consequently the conversion of Muslim children to Christianity. As a response to this development two forms of Islamic education emerged during this period: the piazza school and Western style Islamic education. The former was the more traditional Quranic and Arabic schools where learning was done by rote. This form of school went through some reforms to incorporate western pedagogical style. In the West Africa region it was championed by a well-known Muslim scholar Adamu 'Abuddahi I-Iluri of Nigeria. The latter developed as a more direct mirroring of the Christian mission schools. They are the modernized Muslim secondary schools where Arabic and Islamic

⁴⁹ That of Egypt may be larger (personal communication from Dr. David Westerlund, 10.01. 1996).

subjects are taught alongside the traditional secondary school curriculum. This was more widely adopted and popularized and was championed by Muslim movements such as the Ahmadiyya Muslim mission, and educated Islamic scholars such as Al Hajj Harum Rashid, and even by Christian scholars such as E. W. Blyden. Abubakre then looks at the study of Islam and Arabic in post independent Nigeria. With Nigerian independence, foreign embassies from the Middle East encouraged the teaching of Islam and Arabic in Nigerian schools and colleges through the granting of financial resources and book donations. They also provided scholarships for Nigerians to undertake further training in their home countries.

Abubakre assesses the biases and negative attitudes of some Christian writings on Islam. He sees them as the reason why Muslim scholars have been very critical of non-Muslims teaching Islam. Next, he examines the teaching of Islam in Nigeria and West [26] African universities today, focusing on the two models in use. The first model, which he condemns as inadequate, is the one which offers Islam as one of the three religions in African society, the two others being Christianity and African traditional religions. The second, which he sees as the ideal, is where Islamic studies exists as a separate subject and is offered in greater depth. While it is correct to say that Islam is given more in-depth treatment in the second model, one should also add that the two models equally have their pros and cons, and to argue that the first model is inferior to the other, as Abubakre does, is to misunderstand the purpose for which this model was set up and adopted by most universities after Nigeria's independence in 1960.

The next paper by Muhammed Haron focuses on the academic study of Islam in South Africa. Unlike Nigeria, where Islamic studies has been an integral part of the academic life for a long time, the discipline is a young one in South Africa with its relatively small number of Muslims.⁵⁰ After a brief description how apartheid affected South Africa's universities and the development of the study of Islam, Haron describes in historical order, and assesses, how Islamic – and the affiliated Arabic, Persian and Urdu Studies – developed recently in South Africa in five centres: at the University of Durban-Westville in Durban since the mid-1970s; at the Rand Afrikaans University, in Johannesburg, since 1979; at the University of Cape Town since the mid-1980s; and at the same time at the University of South Africa in Pretoria; and how it is being developed presently in the University of Western Cape, at Bellville. He also surveys the study of Islam outside these academic centres: at South African *darul-^culums* (Muslim 'seminaries'); at the Islamic College of Southern Africa, which serves as a bridge for graduates of the *darul-^culums* into Islamic Studies in the universities; and in research institutes and by researchers not affiliated to universities. Haron shows a clear preference for the social scientific approach pioneered in Cape Town and Bellville over the more traditional

⁵⁰ The number of Muslims in South Africa was 352,993 in 1980, which is roughly 1% of its total population (Mahida 1993: 60). Mahida gave nearly the double number of Muslims in South Africa in 1992, to wit 604,000, or 2% of the population of South Africa (Mahida 1992: 51).

philological and historical approaches used in Durban-Westville, Johannesburg and Pretoria.

An example of this social-scientific approach in the study of Islam in South Africa is the contribution to this volume on Islamic revivalism, Muslim identity, and nation building in South Africa by Abdulkader Tayob. Focusing on the largely theoretical issues of the relationship between national identity and Islamic resurgence, and using the South African situation as a case study, Tayob proposes that the emergence of the Islamic identity in the Islamic revolution movement – noticeable especially among middle class youth and professionals in South Africa – should be viewed within the broader scope of the quest for national identity in the modern African states, and certainly so in South Africa. Contrary to those who see Islamic resurgence as anti-modernist, as a return to old time traditional structure, Tayob sees it as part of modernisation. He then illustrates how the convergence of Islamic and national identity in two predominantly [27] Muslim states, Iran and Pakistan, has worked out and argues that even in a country with a Muslim minority such as South Africa, such connection is not far fetched. To prove his thesis, Tayob outlines three phases of Islamic resurgence in South Africa, each phase demonstrating a new way of understanding and practising Islam and a new context for South African nationalism. He believes that similar consequences and connections between Islam and national identities could be found in other countries in Africa, especially in Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda, in spite of their historical and political differences. How far this theory can be applied to these other countries remains to be seen, especially in view of the other religious identities competing with Islam for the soul of the nation in places such as Nigeria.

Part V

The concluding part of this book has one essay each on the study of Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism in Africa, and more in particular South Africa. The one on the study of Christianity is by Verstraelen and proposes a new model in a prescriptive manner. That on the study of Hinduism in South Africa by Sooklal, and that on the white Jewry of South Africa by Hellig, are descriptive of how these religions, and their study, have developed.

Frans J. Verstraelen, of the University of Zimbabwe, is critical of how Christian history is being taught in Africa in his ‘Doing Christian History and Thought from within an African Context: A Project in Scaffolding’. He proposes a new model for teaching it in the African context. Starting with Walker’s widely acclaimed *A History of the Christian Church*, Verstraelen argues that this classic excludes and ignores that part of Christian history which lies outside the Euro-american purview. He calls for a global interpretation of Christian history that goes beyond this myopic view of Christian history. Following E.H. Carr’s classic lecture *What is History?*, he argues that a history of Christianity must be undertaken from the perspective of the entire Christian community, that is of all the ‘peoples who in the fullest sense are part of history’, and of both the elite

and the underdogs. In doing so, he calls for a radical revision of what is currently offered as the History of Christianity. Even the recently published and acclaimed *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, Verstraelen argues, shows Euro-centric biases and neglects a large aspect of Christian experience from the Third World perspective, which make it unsuitable for an ideal Christian history text. He suggests an agenda in three parts towards a new Christian history from a non-Western context: (1) a fresh examination of early Christianity from a non-Western perspective; (2) a presentation of 'Southern Christianity' from early Christianity till the beginning the Western missionary expansion; (3) a reassessment of the formation of Christianity in the Third World in the colonial and post-colonial era.

In respect of the first part, Verstraelen argues that an ideal early church history should reflect non-Western perspectives also, because it has a central place in all churches. Adopting the approach of the Brazilian scholar Eduardo Hoornaert, he argues that such a historical account should view Christianity as a popular movement rather than [28] the faith of a 'small enlightened elite' as we currently do. In other words, it should desert the Eusebian tradition that tends to favour an 'imperial theology' and rather reflect the total experience of all the members of the community of faith.

In terms of the second part, a church history should also be a well rounded interpretation that goes beyond the one-sided explanation which privileges Hellenistic Christianity. Verstraelen examines the need to create a separate syllabus on Southern Christianity which will allow for a fuller coverage of the place and role of Christianity in the Southern hemisphere, as opposed to the predominantly Northern Christianity covered by traditional (Western) Church historiography. That Christianity, hitherto outside the purview of Hellenized (Greek) and Latin (Western European) Christianity, is more relevant to the historical and theological situations of the 'Third World' peoples.

Finally, Verstraelen calls for a reassessment of Christian history in the Third World in the colonial and post-colonial periods which will allow for dialogue and reflections among members of the Third World themselves on an agenda relevant to their historical, social and existential situations: a re-examination of old but relevant issues such as the incarnation of the gospel in the Third World regions of the world. This last point is similar to Teresia Hinga's observation in Kenya that the scholars themselves should have a space of their own to dialogue and reflect on their own existential situations. Verstraelen lists some serious studies that are already taking place in this regard in ecumenical circles in Asia, Latin America and Africa.

Anil Sooklal's essay, 'The Hindu Diaspora: Challenge of the South African Context', begins with a series of questions on the identity and status of Hinduism in South Africa. Hinduism entered South Africa through the Indian immigrants in the 1860s and it has since then gradually adapted itself to the South African situation. To begin with, Sooklal examines the scholarly study of Hinduism from the time of the establishment of the Hin-

du Studies Department in the University of Durban-Westville in 1987,⁵¹ to the present time. First, as in other scholarly disciplines examined earlier on, the Hindu Studies programme was also affected by the apartheid policy. The Indian government's tough stand on apartheid prevented the recruitment of qualified scholars from India to teach in the programme. In addition to Durban-Westville, which has a fully fledged programme in Hinduism, some courses on Hinduism are taught in the Department of Religious Studies in a few South African universities. It is absent in several other universities in South Africa. Sooklal also asserts categorically that 'although there are sizable pockets of Hindus in other African countries, notably in East Africa, none of the African universities in those nations offers a course in Hinduism'. That seems unlikely in view of the data presented by Teresia Hinga in her contribution to this volume. She states that in Kenya, students may follow courses in [29] Christian, Islamic or Hindu RE (Religious Education) in secondary schools, and that 'this pattern is also reflected at the university level'. Sooklal's bland assertion would seem to need substantiation by research into the calendars of the universities of East Africa.

The practice of Hindu tradition takes two forms in South Africa: the religion of the temple and popular Hinduism, i.e. Hindu derived new movements. Both forms of Hinduism are preached and given significant space in Hindu communities all over South Africa, according to Sooklal. This is possible because Hinduism generally does not raise any significant debate about orthodoxy or heterodoxy, as is often the case in other religious traditions. It has a broad understanding of what constitutes a religious tradition or *dharma*. It is also the case that in scholarly discourse about Hinduism, the multidimensional expressions of the tradition (belief, praxis, behavioural, social and even psychological dimensions) are all taken seriously. In addition, Hinduism in South Africa, has always been seen in reference to both its homeland origin and its expressions in the diaspora everywhere else. Hindus who live abroad do not cast aspersions at Westerners who have adopted one form or other of popular Hinduism (neo-Hindu spirituality).

Sooklal then traces the growth of Hinduism from its beginning in 1860 to the contemporary period i.e. from the first group of immigrants arriving in what is often called the period of the 'passenger Indians'. This was when Indians came to South Africa not as indentured workers but freely under 'the ordinary immigrant laws' as traders and merchants. Today, Hindus comprise about 60% of the one million Indians in South Africa and although they constitute a simple religious community, nevertheless they consist of several subgroups and subcultures, dictated by differences in languages, doctrines, ceremonies and rituals. One should also note that the religious life and activities of Hin-

⁵¹ One may dispute whether the academic study of Hinduism in South Africa – and in Africa at large for that matter – began only in 1987 with the establishment of the Department of Hindu Studies at the University of Durban-Westville. That passes over in silence the work of individual scholars before 1987 in both the University of Durban-Westville and other universities, mainly in Departments of Religious Studies in South Africa as well as e.g. in Kenya, and their teaching courses on Hinduism in those departments. For research into East and South African Hinduism before 1987, cf. the section on Hinduism in Africa in Platvoet's contribution to this volume on 'The Religions of Africa in their Historical Order'.

dus have also been affected by their historical circumstances. At the time of their arrival, Hindus lacked trained priests to minister to the new community and also the new arrivals were more concerned with their own survival and the requirements to support life than with any other thing. Then, after this initial stage, when they felt the necessity to keep their religious tradition and faith alive, they went to India for qualified Hindu priests who came and began to establish the tradition. This gradually developed into strong linkages among the South African and Indian Hindu communities.

How has Hinduism fared as a diaspora religion in South Africa? Two problems are faced here. Traditional Hinduism never succeeded in adapting its institutional structure to the larger South African cultural and religious context. It is still practised as a foreign religious tradition. Moreover, under apartheid, anti-Indian legislation, especially in the early period, brought untold hardship and an identity crisis upon the Hindus. Sooklal also comments on the role of the Indian sage, Mahatma Gandhi, in South Africa in ameliorating not only some of the sufferings of Indians but also in providing impetus to the oppressed South African blacks.

The foreign and hostile environment in which Hinduism is practised has had a profound impact on the religion itself in several ways. First, as Hindus became merchants and traders, the ritual ceremonies, which are more tailored toward the agricultural seasons, became difficult to carry out. Second, the loss of competence in the vernacular languages of India means a loss of important connections with the Indian religious tradition and culture. Third, the patriarchal extended family system (*kutum*), which had bonded [30] the Hindu kinship groups together for ages and which serves as an important ingredient for introducing the young into Hindu values, norms and traditions, has eroded. Fourth, and most importantly, the apartheid policy of the South African government brought about a deterioration in the diplomatic relationship between the South African and Indian governments and consequently the isolation of the Hindu community in South Africa.

In response to all these problems, neo-Hindu movements developed alternative organizational structures under which Hindu identity, ritual life and cultural practices were adapted to the culturally foreign and politically hostile South African environment. The traditional norms and values were reinterpreted to fit into the complexities of contemporary South African society. In so doing, it also rejuvenated the traditional temple model by *sabhas* (associations) that Sooklal referred to earlier in his essay and which still remains the preferred model of worship and religious practice in 'orthodox' Hinduism. At this same time this reinvigoration of 'orthodox' Hinduism gave the alternative neo-Hindu model a legitimate space in the Hindu community. In a sense, Hinduism in both its traditional and popular forms remains a relevant aspect of Hindu society in contemporary South Africa till the present time.

Sooklal concludes by noting that today Hinduism competes favourably well with other religious traditions, whether with a home grown tradition such as Christianity or a diaspora tradition such as Judaism and Islam. At the same time it retains a strong link with

the Indian subcontinent, which ultimately subconsciously remains the yardstick by which all Hindu traditions outside the homeland are measured.

Jocelyn Hellig's essay on the study of Judaism in Africa, and more in particular in South Africa, begins with a historical sketch of Jewish presence in Africa and its interaction with Africans, from the time of the patriarchs to the contemporary period. At the early period, two significant events linked the two together: the Jewish presence in Egypt and the Jewish diaspora that were triggered by the second exile. Thus Africa became one of the earliest settlements of Jews outside of Israel. The first major region with a sizable Jewish presence was North Africa. With the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, however, the Jewish population there dwindled to virtually zero. The second and the longest Jewish settlement is South Africa. Hellig labels the South African Jewish community a 'New World Jewish community', because it resembles those in e.g. the USA and Australia. South African Jews account for about 77% of the total Jewish population in Africa. However, as a community, Jews enjoy the status and privileges of a white group in South Africa, because of its past policy of apartheid and racial discrimination.

The study of Judaism is characterised by two approaches: devotional and the scholarly critical methods. The first is an intensive study of holy texts for the devotional life and religious practices of the Jews. This will include the study of the Hebrew bible (*Tenakh*), the Talmud, and a series of books and commentaries on those two texts. The second is the academic study of Judaism. It focuses on the history, literature and institutions of the Jewish peoples. While the first method has been useful in the current revival of Jewish orthodoxy, the second approach falls within the domain of religious studies programme and Judaica Departments in South African universities. The two approaches form the pivot of Jewish studies in contemporary South Africa.

[31] The central tradition of the South African Jewish community can be described as 'Anglo-Litvak' in that the bulk of the Jewish population is made up of Jewish migrants from Britain who arrived in the 19th century, and from Eastern Europe, especially Lithuania, who entered South Africa between 1880 and 1931. They constitute less than 0,5% of the South African population.⁵² Half of the group lives in Johannesburg while one quarter resides in Cape Town. The practice of Judaism reflects the mixture of the two, Anglo and Lithuanian Judaism. Hellig characterises it as 'conservative traditionalism'. A large percentage is affiliated to orthodox synagogues though not all practise the life styles expected of orthodox Jews. While they hold on to the ethos of piety and the love of tradition typical of Eastern European Judaism, the form of their organizational arrangement leans heavily towards Anglo Judaism. It is also correct to say that their attraction to religious traditions is mellowed by a form of religious pragmatism influenced by

⁵² The 1980 census gave the number of Jews as 0,4% of the population of South Africa, and that of 1991 as 0,2% (cf. Prozesky & de Gruchy 1995: 237). Hellig (1995: 156) gives their number as 'about 100,000' or '0,3% of the entire South African population, and 2% of the white population'.

the harsh economic situations under which their East European forebears practised their faith.

The result was that the mainline South African Judaism has always inhibited the growth of reformed Judaism and has always favoured Zionist ideology. Small as the Jewish community might be in South Africa, its history has witnessed several interesting developments, especially when seen in the complex context of the South African situation. Two developments should be mentioned here. One is the upsurge of movements often termed ultra-orthodox. The other is the emergence of Zionism as a result of several factors among which is the South Africa apartheid racial policy. It inadvertently promoted Zionism as an ethnic and natural form of identification. In a sense Hellig's argument is similar to Tayob's who also sees the development of Islamic revivalism within the parameter of South African nationalism and as a response to apartheid policy.

Hellig also examines the development of the academic study of South African Jewry. From the period after the Second World War to the early 1980s, the field was dominated mainly by Jews. While some of them wrote on the positive contribution of the Jewish community to South Africa, others examined critically the relationship between Jews and South African society. From the mid-1980s, non-Jews also joined Jewish scholars in describing various aspects of Jewish history and social life especially in the context of the various issues in the wider South African society, such as anti-Semitism, apartheid, and the plight of the South African blacks.

What was the institutional structure that formed the pivot of Jewish education? For the growth of the Jewish community and the religious upbringing of their children, various schools were established such as Jewish day schools for secular education. Much more religiously oriented schools were set up by the *Haredi* ('trembling', or God fearing) groups of highly orthodox Jews. In higher education, several universities provide curriculum and fully fledged departments for the teaching of Judaism. In most of the South African universities with a significant religious studies programme, courses in [32] Judaism are taught as part of the general curriculum and in a few others, departments of Jewish Studies were established, such as the universities of Cape Town and Witwatersrand.

Finally, Hellig examines the controversy and scholarly debate surrounding the identity of three ethnic groups in Africa who have made claims to Jewishness: the 'Falashas' (*Beta Israel*), the Lemba, and the Bayudaya. She reviews some of the extensive scholarly works on these three groups and shows that the debate is inconclusive. The search for their authentic identities and their relationship to Judaism will continue into the next century.

In conclusion

The perspectives outlined in this introduction, as well as the summaries presented, show that the academic study of religions has reached maturity in sub-Saharan Africa, notably in Anglophone West, South and Southern, and East Africa. This is all the more remark-

able because it has been developed in environments which are normally crippling for academic work. African scholars must often research, teach and publish in nations with poorly performing economies and very weak currencies, political turmoil or repression, and ill-equipped universities with huge student numbers. The African scholarship surveyed in this volume demonstrates that the religions of Africa are now not only studied mainly by academics in African universities, but also that it has become an integral part of global scholarship, and has begun to play its role on the international scene. Not only is the period of Africa as an isolated object of curiosity for outsiders – *ex Africa semper aliquid novi* –⁵³ irrevocably past; Africa has become subject, instead of object, of the study of the religions of Africa. African scholars also study them as integral parts of the global scene of human religiosity: as the dynamic transformations of long and short histories of interactions with the religions of humankind. And they study them in a critical dialogue with scholars everywhere else in the world and with their study of the religions of mankind past and present, in Africa and in the five other continents. It is therefore proper that scholars from Africa and the world will converge on Durban in South Africa in the year 2000 for the 18th International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), fifty years after it was founded in Amsterdam, and one hundred years after the first international congress was held in Paris.

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⁵³ Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, 3: 28

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