

Praenotandum, 12.05.2017: This review article was published in *Numen* 40, 3 (1993): 322-342. I have changed the endnote to footnotes. Page numbers have been added in bold between square brackets. I have edited the text in a few places. I have also added a postscript summarizing Martin Prozesky's response to my review of his *Religion and Ultimate Well-being*.

[322]

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PROGRAMMATIC STATEMENTS FROM AFRICA, 1982-1992: A REVIEW ARTICLE

The scope of this article

The academic study of religions in Anglophone Africa is a product of the de-colonisation process. The adoption of secular constitutions by the new nations demanded that their universities also be secular. Departments of Divinity or Theology that had been established at the end of the colonial era, reflecting the quasi-established position of the Christian mainline churches in British colonies and dominions in Africa, were converted into Departments of Religious Studies after independence. They were usually placed in Faculties of Arts,¹ and enjoined to pay equal and neutral attention to the religions of their nations. Though Christian theology thus lost its monopoly, these departments continued to serve mainly the needs of the Christian mainline churches. Their transformation into secular institutes of learning has not yet been completed.²

The programmatic statements discussed in this article reflect that situation. They are statements on the methodology of the study of religions by scholars posted in universities in Anglophone Africa in the period 1982-1992. They must not be taken as representative of all methodological thought in Anglophone Africa in that decade. The space of this article allows the discussion of only a few of them. Nor is my collection of them complete. The very weak currencies of most African nations prevent the integration of their book publishing trades into the global book market. As a result, it often proves impossible to obtain books from them. The ones I possess were often acquired on visits. I discuss three in some detail, in chronological order, and mention the seven others that might also have been reviewed. The three which I discuss have been selected partly because of the strategic positions their authors hold in the study of religions in Africa. I conclude with remarks on the book famine in Africa.

¹ They might, more exceptionally, also be situated in Faculties of Education, because RE (Religious Education) is an examination subject in secondary schools and as such had an important place in them. Very exceptionally, departments of Religious Studies might be located in Faculties of Social Science.

² For further details and nuances, cf. Hackett 1988, McKenzie 1989, Platvoet 1989, Prozesky 1990, and Platvoet, Cox & Olupona 1996

1982: Krüger's 'fundamental science of religion'

J.S. Krüger, *Studying Religion: A Methodological Introduction to Science of Religion*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1982¹, 1988², xi + 82 pp., 1 diagram, bibliography, ISBN 0-86981-276-X, hard cover, no price stated.

[323] Jacobus Krüger (1940) is Professor of Science of Religion and Head of the Department of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Theology of the University of South Africa (UNISA) at Pretoria.³ He has a Barthian background: he obtained his PhD in 1972 with a thesis on the ethics of Karl Barth. That field caused him to move into sociology of religion and the study of religions. In 1979, he exchanged his lectureship in systematic theology at UNISA for one in the science of religion in the UNISA Department of Missiology.⁴ His triple background, in theology, sociology, and the study of religions, is apparent in this introduction to the methodology of the study of religion, in the literature cited, in the way the argument is developed, and in the positions taken. Other influences are philosophy of science and sociology of knowledge. Krüger has also published on Buddhism (1988a, 1988b, 1990) and is engaged in research on the religions of the San nomadic food gathering societies of Southern Africa. He is currently President of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa.⁵

Krüger terms this booklet a 'fundamental science of religion' (24).⁶ Its task is to reveal 'the deep lying principles operative in religion and in the scientific study of religion' (24) in order to assist the student to become 'self-consciously and self-critically aware' (3) how he may acquire reliable knowledge about the religions of men. That must lay the groundwork in the student for the more specialized equipment which the student will need in the study of specific religions or themes. The book has a preface and seven chapters.

The second chapter (5-10) discusses by means of a diagram how scientific knowledge is acquired, distinguishes science of religion from theology, and presents a first outline of science of religion. Theology, taken in a narrow sense, is defined as the committed exposition, from the point of a particular faith, of transcendent reality (7). Science of religion has a different scope and level. It describes, understands and explains all religious phenomena as a human phenomenon (7, 8, 10). Krüger, however, adds that, 'taken in a wider sense, theology could partly coin-

³ UNISA is a correspondence university with over one hundred thousand student from all over Southern Africa. Its staff are predominantly *Afrikaans*-speaking Boers who teach mainly in English. Just as UNISA is the odd one out among the universities of South Africa in type, numbers of students and recruitment region, so is its Faculty of Theology special among the Boer institutions of its kind and in particular its large and prominent Missiology Department. In the early eighties, it had three full professors in 'Missiology and the Science of Religion'. One of these chairs was held by its David Bosch. He was the missiologist proper. Another was occupied by the anthropologist Martinus Daneel, well-known for his excellent ethnographies of the Zion Christian Church and other indigenous Christian bodies of the Masvingo area of Zimbabwe. Kobus Krüger was since 1982 the third professor, specializing in Science of Religion.

⁴ In 1986, when the Department for Science of Religion was heaved off from the Missiology Department, Krüger became its first professor and head. In 1992, the name of the department was changed to Department of Religious Studies.

⁵ ASRSA was founded in 1979 and became an IAHR affiliate in 1980. Its periodical was named *Religion in Southern Africa* from 1980 to 1987, and has been renamed *Journal for the Study of Religion* (ISSN 1011-7601) since 1988.

⁶ The numbers between brackets refer to page numbers of the book that is being discussed.

cide with science of religion' - though he does not specify what 'theology in a wider sense' is, nor what part of science of religion would coincide with that theology. It must be pointed out that here, and throughout the book,⁷ Krüger speaks of 'transcendent reality' without qualifying it as a religious postulate. By doing so, he exceeds the limits of empirical falsification. I suggest that this is the sense in which his science of religion does indeed partly coincide with 'theology taken in a wider sense'. This religionism⁸ of Krüger explains why he, in contrast to the usual 'eirenic-ironic' (55) spirit of his book, raises the customary battle cries against what religionists perceive as the deadly foe of religion and the study of religion: logical [324] empiricism. In chapter three, on Metascientific Positions (11-23), Krüger accuses it of virulent anthropological reductionism, methodological, ontological and epistemological monism, an antireligious bias and inadequate methodology (12).⁹ Only after this exorcism are its contributions to scientific methodology acknowledged (12-13, 58-60). Some may be tempted to dismiss Krüger's contributions to the methodology of the study of religions on these counts. In my view, they would be ill-advised to do so, for Krüger has important insights to offer also to those who pursue non-religionist modes of study of religions.

Popper's critical rationalism is discussed in a calmer mood (13-14). It is praised for leaving 'open the possibility that religious faith may be meaningful and true' (14), and for opposing 'closed, dogmatic, absolutist, authoritarian thinking'(14).¹⁰ Critical theory, as presented by Habermas (15-16), is praised for not endorsing 'the spurious positivistic split between science and life' (16) and for attacking 'the ideological justification of the technocratic society' which positivistic science has in fact become. Krüger's heart is, however, with phenomenology (16-20) and the hermeneutical school (20-23). Phenomenology establishes that 'the true humanity of man is his subjectivity' (17). Its intentionality must be disciplined to direct itself "to the things themselves" as they appear in human consciousness (18). By inducing an 'attitude of disciplined wonder', it may act as 'a proto-science, a discipline of the mind coming before science', and as 'a framework for the sciences themselves' by which 'the irrelevance of positivistic science' is overcome (17).

Krüger distinguishes between phenomenology as the method developed by Husserl, and its use by phenomenologists of religion for systematizing and classifying religious phenomena. He deplores that it was developed into an independent sub-discipline in science of religion and gradually lost contact with its origin (19, 57). He thinks that 'maintaining contact with its philosophical origin should re-invigorate the method' (19). He detects, to my mind incorrectly, signs of that in the publications of Pye, Smart, Allen and Waardenburg.

⁷ See 30, 31, 32, 34, 66, 67, 69, 70, 72, 73, 76

⁸ Cf. also 64: 'Traditional science of religion has usually worked with an *intra*-religious perspective' (Krüger's italics). On 'religionism', cf. Platvoet 1990: 186, 191, 193-194

⁹ Cf. also 16, 27-28, 34-35, 39, 44, 49 ('positivistic-neutral description [...] stem[s] from an attitude of aggressive debunking or condemnation, striking at the wrongs in any religion'), 57

¹⁰ Krüger's other enemy. Cf. also 22 on 'uncritical dogmatism' that is as 'unassailable as a tidal wave'; 27-28; and 45 on 'reified, absolutized religion' that has been 'allowed to become hardened into a chunk of thing-like solidity, forgetting that religion itself is the deposit in the field of human experience of a mystery lying radically beyond the religion itself'.

Having referred briefly to phenomenology as a school in sociology of religion and its promises, he characteristically concludes that 'science of religion should not select phenomenology or any other approach as the be-all and end-all of philosophy and methodology' (20). It must, in Krüger's view, also incorporate elements from the hermeneutics developed by Hegel, Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Gadamer and Ricoeur, which teaches us to 'respect the dignity of whatever I am trying to understand, and to allow it to speak for itself' (21), and also that understanding is a circular process, in which the object must constantly correct the understanding by the subject. Hermeneutics 'rules out [325] uncritical dogmatism' (22). It enters into 'a passionate, though critical, relation with the truth value of each symbol' which it does not dissolve. He quotes Wach (1975: 127): 'The sense of the numinous is not extinguished by it, but on the contrary, is awakened, strengthened, shaped and enriched by it' (22). Hermeneutics, which is 'furthest removed from positivism' (23), is in his eyes, the methodology of science of religion.

In chapter four, on 'The Roots of Religio-Scientific Inquiry' (24-35), Krüger weaves these strands into his fundamental science of religion. He stresses that though man is determined by his natural and socio-cultural environment, he should not be seen as 'nothing but the product of objective forces' and thus 'become completely depersonalized' (27). That would turn a methodological perspective into a totalitarian world view, as one finds in dogmatism, traditionalism, sociology, positivism, determinism, etc. (27-28). Man should be seen as also acting upon, in, and via, the world, and as encountering the 'awesome dimension of religious reality' (30) through symbols by which he expresses religious meanings, and which impress meaning upon him (30-31). He pleads for an 'action perspective' (33) in the analysis of religion and for 'responsive explanation' that analyses religion as response to the world and to religious reality (32). He also tries to defuse the traditional dichotomy between understanding and explanation by suggesting that understanding be understood to mean satisfactory knowledge and explanation as any help towards achieving it (34-35).

The heart, and best part, is chapter 5, on 'Self-awareness' (36-46): how objectivity, or sound knowledge, may be achieved in the heart of subjectivity by keeping ideas tentative and testing them for greater intra- and inter-subjective validity. By analyzing the forces operating on these processes, such as the general cultural background, the religious milieu, the ethos of the scientific community, its extra-scientific interests and ideologies, and the student's personal religion (37-43) the student will achieve *reflexiveness*: the ability of 'the investigator [to] investigate himself as investigator' (44). It is 'the scientific habit rigorously at work' (46). It enables the student to be 'self-critically aware of any hidden cargo' (65), clear distortions in himself, allow the culture or religion of the other(s) to show themselves as they are (45), and achieve 'adequacy' in their description.

That 'adequacy' is explored in chapter 6: 'On the Social Dimension of Adequacy' (47-55). It demands that the viewpoints of those whose religion is being described should serve as a primary, but not as the sole canon of the validity of a description (47-48, 53, 57, 65). Krüger explains this by distinguishing between pre-theoretical and theoretical [326] understanding, and in the former between existential, participant or insider, and outsider understanding. Pre-theoretical understanding is usually unproblematic and naive, asking for no explanation, but may occasionally become reflective and seek explanations. Theoretical explanation is both reflective - the

student seeks to arrive at understanding by explanation - and reflexive: the student investigates himself (49). It is disciplined, systematic, systematically constructed, and public (50-51). It relies implicitly on some sort of participant or existential understanding: 'truth is found via dialogue' (53). But the cooperation of believers must be critically evaluated as 'there is much more to a religion than meets the eye of the believers' (53). Theoretical understanding should also conform to, and be controlled by, the standards of the forum of expert opinion (54). It should, however, not be answerable only to fellow scholars, but also to society at large. It is the product of pluralistic society and must play its irenic-ironic role in it with unsentimental humaneness in a responsible way (54-55).

The last chapter is devoted to 'The Concept of Religion' (56-77). Krüger may be placed in the tradition that defines religion by its function of orientation:¹¹ 'religion is essentially a response to ultimate meaning' (43). It is not, however, his aim to offer a theory, or definition, of 'religion' (IX, 56) but to explore what type of concept of religion we need, to what uses it has been put, and to investigate 'the field of dimensions underlying possible and existing definitions [of religion]' (56). The concept should be precise and reliable, reflect the understanding of the religious actors, and never be final (57, 59). It may be used as a theoretical, or constructed, concept, or as a classificatory one with e.g. typological functions, or for dimensional clarification (60-63). For extra-scientific reasons, it is often specified either substantively or functionally, which greatly changes the scope of the concept (63-65).

In their stead, Krüger prefers a broad view of religion through dimensional clarification (65-77). In tune with his religionist position, he distinguishes two clusters of dimensions, the 'objective' and the 'subjective' ones; or, that to which man responds, and the way he responds. In the first, the transcendent religious reality is central; it is complemented by man's need for a cosmology, for salvation, and for a source of salvation (66-71). The second has two dimensions: man's ambivalence to the sacred; and human religious experience, or faith, as a total response, which Krüger breaks down into religious feeling, willing, knowing, doing, and speaking (72-77).

Krüger is scholastic and revels in distinctions. He is an irenic bridge builder between closed and more open positions by his honest praxis of [327] reflexiveness. It enables him to take criticism of positions he holds dear seriously. His eclecticism allows him to integrate elements from diverse strands of theory without becoming partizan to any (IX, 10, 23, 44-46, 58, 64). He has certainly also not been eclectic enough yet. One important voice is completely absent from his choir is anthropology of religion.¹² In matters of methodology and theory development, that one voice is quite a forceful, complex and often strident choir by itself.¹³ I trust that his study of San religion will have brought that voice to his attention. It would be exciting to have a revised version of this book that incorporates the results of that encounter. It should also be an expanded version as he touches on many matters in this edition without properly explaining them. That allows him to pass over certain contradictions too lightly or opt out of an unwelcome difficulty

¹¹ See Platvoet 1990: 190-191

¹² As is the field which it studies: preliterate religions. The fields which Krüger has studied, Christian and Buddhist scholastic thought, have moulded his manner of analysis and presentation.

¹³ Cf. e.g. Morris 1987

too easily. All in all, however, this version is, for all its brevity, a remarkable contribution to the ongoing methodological debate.¹⁴

1984: Prozesky's explanation of religions as contingent experiments in euonic drive

M.H. Prozesky, *Religion and Ultimate Well-being: An Explanatory Theory*. London: Macmillan, 1984, X + 256 pp., bibliography, index, ISBN 0-333-32498-6, hard cover, no price stated (= Library of Philosophy and Religion, 20)

Martin Prozesky (1944) is Professor of Religious Studies and Head of the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies in the University of Natal at Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. After undergraduate studies at Rhodes University, at Grahamstown, South Africa, and at Trinity College, Oxford, UK, and graduate studies at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge (Mass.) and Harvard Divinity School between 1965 and 1973, he obtained his D.Phil at the University of Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1977. He taught Systematic Theology at Rhodes University in 1969, and Comparative Religion in the University of Rhodesia from 1971 to 1976. He teaches at Pietermaritzburg since 1977, specializing in concepts of human nature, explanation theory, and Friedrich Schleiermacher in Philosophy of Religion; and, in the Study of Religions, in religion in South Africa.¹⁵ He detached the Department of Religious Studies from the Department of Divinity and transferred it to that of Philosophy. He is foundation member of the Association for the Study of Religions in Southern Africa (ASRSA) and a member of its executive since 1979. He is also the founder of ASRSA journal, which he edited till 1992.

Prozesky's book is an exercise in religious and philosophical anthropology (12, 102). It seeks to explain, after the rules set for [328] explanation by modern philosophy of science (68-98), religion, and mankind's religious history, from a constitutive mark of man, his finitude (140-142). This predicament forces man to engage constantly in a creative drive to maximise well-being (92, 228). However, Prozesky not only aims to explain past religious history as a man-made historical sequence of more or less successful euonic experiments. He also sees modern secularity (213) as its graveyard (224). The long age of transcendentalism (151, 154, 189) is drawing to a close (212-217, 224). To forestall 'the triumph of materialistic naturalism' (236), Prozesky calls for a 'radical religious renewal' (224) that relativises all belief, actions, and ritual, but not faith. Prozesky finds the basis for it in insights formulated by the young Schleiermacher (176, 225). It is this Schleiermachian inspiration which turns his book into an exercise in philosophical theology and invalidates it, in my view, as an empirical explanation of religion, as I will more fully show below.

The book has five, mostly very long chapters. In the first chapter (1-14), Prozesky sets out seven shortcomings in existing views of religion. They fail to notice the provisional nature of human knowledge and of world-views. They are conceptually parochial and produce distorted information on other religions. They fail to emphasize salvation as the central notion in religion.

¹⁴ For another, generally appreciative review, cf. Ben Yosef 1986

¹⁵ For some of his other publications, cf. Prozesky 1980, 1981, 1985, 1990a, 1990b, 1992, and de Gruchy & Prozesky 1991

They also fail to explain religion, and its rejection. And the theories of ‘authoritative sceptics’ (6) are guilty of ‘subjective reductionism: the doctrine that religion involves no more than human factors’ (6-7, 92-93). The main reason for these shortcomings is insufficient attention to problems of method. They can now be remedied because Hick, Smart and Cantwell Smith paid proper attention to methodology; because historical scholarship drew a comprehensive picture of the religions of mankind; and because philosophers have specified what would constitute adequate explanation (6-8). These strides forward set the scene for Prozesky's enterprise to explain religion in terms of man's ‘basic drive to find the greatest possible well-being’ (10) by the identification of its causes and by showing that religion is ‘their natural and logical effect’. Prozesky terms the method he uses ‘experiential, phenomenological and philosophical’ (12).

In chapter two (14-67), religion is explored in its global perspective with the help of the experiential and phenomenological methods. Its ‘eight defining characteristics’ (18) are set out. The first one is the benefit which believers experience from it. Having referred to evidence in William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and in publications by Sir Alister Hardy (19-21), Prozesky adduces further proof for it from the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Zoroastrianism, the Hindu religious [329] tradition, Buddhism, and the religions of China. He concludes that ‘a pervasive concern for well-being’ (45) is found in religions of all times and places of which we have reliable information. ‘Well-being’ is the condition characterized by happiness, health or prosperity, which some religions, and some scholars, term ‘salvation’ (49). Three more marks are that ‘religious life everywhere involves experience of certain highly significant forces which believers regard as directly responsible for the benefits they so assiduously seek’ (54); transcendence: these forces ‘manifest or give access to a superior but imperceptible order of reality’ (54),¹⁶ which ‘people sense as something profoundly real’ (58); and as a demand ‘to be wholly engaged [with]’ (58). The four last traits are the plurality of religions (59-62), their being conditioned by their contexts (62-64), the special role played by the founders of the axial faiths (64-65), and the secular challenge to modern religion (65-66).

In chapter three (68-98), Prozesky first surveys central issues in the philosophy of explanation as they apply to the humanities, the social sciences and the study of religions (69-82). Then the essentials of explanation are set out (82-91) and a strategy for explaining religion is devised (91-96). ‘Explanation’ is here an argument showing ‘why a phenomenon exists or works in a particular way’ (69) by a deductive-nomological (DN), or covering law, approach. In that approach, a problem is explained if the solution to the problem can be logically deduced from one or more laws of nature and from statements specifying the original conditions of the problem (70). This approach is based upon a world-view that sees the universe as ‘an orderly aggregate functioning according to regular, uniform processes which can be discovered through observation and formulated very accurately as testable laws of nature’ (72). Though many authors disagree that the DN-approach can be applied to human behaviour, Prozesky holds that teleological, or goal-referring, explanation of human behaviour is logically compatible with a law-covering one if ‘people's actions reveal uniformities that could be stated as testable generalizations’

¹⁶ Mark that Prozesky does not write that these forces *are believed to* manifest an imperceptible order of reality (my italics). Mark also that that reality, though superior to the perceptible order, is not distinct from it; cf. 157

(77). Religion is such an area because it universally satisfies the need of humans for well-being (81-82). Following Popper, Prozesky stipulates four requirements for its adequate explanation: it must be testable; it must not be known to be false; it must also be independently testable, or non-circular; and it must use laws of nature (87). Following Popper, Prozesky stresses the tentative nature of explanatory theories: they are developed by conjecture and refutation. They are nets, of ever finer mesh, 'cast to catch "the world"' (90).

Against theories that explain religion either naturalistically or religiously, Prozesky proposes to explain it in 'an open-ended empirical [330] attempt' (97) from two globally constant characteristics: the desire for well-being, and the powers operating in a largely unseen, transcendent realm to which believers look for its satisfaction (94); and from a number of originating conditions. The two characteristics are explored in chapter four (99-152); the originating conditions in chapter five (153-236).

Prozesky terms the two marks of human existence the cosmological and the anthropological factors. The cosmological one is constituted by 'reality at large' (100, 101) which he defines as whatever 'affects us beyond sight and hearing' (100-101). It is this complex and confusing concept, which is the crux of Prozesky's fusion, and in my view confusion, of empirical methodology with trans-empirical religionism.¹⁷ It comprises not only aspects of testable reality, physical, such as germs and gravity (101), and historical, such as 'the good will or ill will of others' (101), or beliefs in gods, or theories explaining religion, but also elements of non-testable 'reality', such as 'the powers known to believers as spirits' (101), and elements which might belong to either, such as 'the causes of tragedy and death'. The inspirator of this (con)fusion is Schleiermacher's early concept of religion as *Gefühl und Geschmack fürs Unendliche* ('feeling and taste for the Infinite'). Schleiermacher made the metaphysical part of perceptible reality by assuming that 'all perception involves an influence by the perceived on the perceiver'.¹⁸ By doing likewise,¹⁹ Prozesky converts the two into a combined 'reality', to which the methodology of explanation developed by Popper and others in modern philosophy of explanation cannot be applied because it contains a part that cannot be tested, and which moreover cannot be identified. Prozesky's proposal therefore conflicts with the first of Popper's requirements. As it cannot be known to be true or false, it can neither, in my view, comply with the second of his conditions.²⁰

The rest of chapter four (102-152) explores the anthropological factor: the natural and universal euonic drive in man which is directed by his affective sense (100, 104, 113-117) and derives support from his cognitive faculty for theory building. In the face of the mysterious and

and below.

¹⁷ See also 146, 152, 153, 157, 190, 225-226, 228, 232, 233, 234, 235 for further statements on this 'unseen transcendent reality' (228) which he terms both a 'natural reality' (228), because it is part of our ordinary existence and not in need of an explanation in terms of a supernatural intervention or revelation (235), and a 'spiritual reality' (235).

¹⁸ Schleiermacher 1799/1879: 52, cited in Prozesky 1980: 76

¹⁹ E.g. 118: 'where there is an effect, we may look for a cause'; see also 81, 157, 190, 225.

²⁰ I do not understand, nor agree with, his statement that 'those who accept the new, empirical approach to knowledge cannot deny that there *is* a spiritual reality quite different to physical existence without themselves departing from that approach' (214, my italics). I do agree that they cannot deny that there *may be* such a reality

unknown, man used these faculties for developing all-embracing mega-theories, in particular the religious cosmologies of the transcendentalist age, from the familiar and the known (124-125). Though they are 'products of finite human ingenuity' (125), they easily establish themselves in human thought as reliable, hide their human origin, and acquire immense covert power over human minds (126) because they transcend empirical proof and disproof (129). Even so, they are not immune to paradigm shifts and quantum leaps, as man's religious history shows (127). Under the influence of regional and other contextual factors (142-146) human religions diversify as they do through the variety of [331] human cultures, histories and the occasional great religious luminary. As a result, 'change rather than durability [is] the norm' in human religious history (149).

That history is the subject of chapter five (153-236). It aims to show 'the initial conditions or activating circumstances in which the spiritual life emerges and develops historically' (153) and by doing so to satisfy all conditions for a proper explanation of religion. By presenting these, Prozesky intends not only to explain the origin of religion, and its history, but also why unbelief arose, and what quantum leap religion now should take in order that we may continue to experience 'the promptings of a mysterious cosmic context' (234) in this age of secularity in which we perforce must be metaphysical agnostics (227).

Prozesky explains the origin of religion from 'a groping of the mind in the dawn of rational consciousness' (156) by which it discovered that true and total satisfaction is beyond its limits and abilities, and from the then 'natural conclusion', on the basis of 'causal awareness', that man may have recourse for it to 'a multi-personal cosmos' (160). This 'spirit-hypothesis' was fertile because the forces of the unseen cosmos were conceived by analogy to human beings, which implied that they were controlled and amenable to discovery (163).

Thus the long age of transcendentalism began. Prozesky divides it in three major stages, each brought on by a new 'activating circumstance': (1) mythological naturalism, which he subdivides into animism, polytheism, and incipient monotheism (164-184); (2) the other-world hypothesis, which he subdivides into spiritual monism and universalist monotheism, and in which he stresses the role of the 'great luminaries' who founded the 'axial faiths' that have dominated the last two millennia of the transcendentalist age (184-210); and (3) the present age of secularity that may become the 'twilight of the spiritual age' (235) and may see the triumph of materialistic naturalism (210-228).

Of the first phase, I only need to remark only that Prozesky uses 'animism' not in the sense Tylor gave to it, but in that of popularizers and journalists which has denigrating connotations of being spirit-ridden, primitive and superstitious. In line with that low opinion of these religions, Prozesky considers all mythological naturalism 'obsolete' (217, 231) and doomed to disappear, because 'spirit-causation has been completely displaced by science' (184, 211-212, 214-217, 231). Of the second phase, I mention only that it sprung, in the theory of Prozesky, from 'a radical critique of spatio-temporality': imperishable well-being cannot be achieved in this life but is possible and sought in an here-after (184-187, 230). This quantum leap in religious history transformed religion as naturalistic explanation into religions of [332] supernatural salvation. As

without being inconsistent.

is shown by the many adherents they gained, their euonic success far exceeded that of mythological naturalism (186). Prozesky is correct in dating this quantum leap from the times of Moses to those of Muhammad, and to connect its emergence to the technological and economic developments in certain societies (195-200). But I question whether Moses should be included among his 'great luminaries': he seems to have mainly served the function of legitimating developments that took place several centuries later. I also suggest that the exceptional role which Prozesky attributes to the other luminaries rests also for the greater part on the mythology created for them by their followers, who thereby legitimated and secured achievements of a collective nature.

In respect of the third phase I may remark that Prozesky is correct to suggest that the technological and other developments of the last two centuries are propelling human religious history into a second quantum leap that will more radically transform it than the first one. It is, however, a great pity that Prozesky's analysis of this phase is not that of a detached scholar but of an engaged reformer. It causes him not to observe its traits from the position of a neutral outsider, but to wage war on two fronts. He conducts a minor war against 'flint-souled' (162) materialists by accusing them of 'subjective reductionism: the doctrine that religion involves no more than human factors', such as 'illusion born of fear, ignorance, oppression or whatever' (6, 92-93, 145); and of dogmatism: they absolutize the view that there is no other reality than the present one (213). They condemn us to the 'materialistic naturalism' (236) of 'the brute facts' (235).

His major battle is, however, against the 'religious theories' (93) of 'supernaturalist' (96) believers, particularly the 'dogmatic religionists' (213) whom he also calls 'transcendentalist zealots' (218, 227). Religious theories fail to account for the plurality of religions and for unbelief. They explain religion 'as justified fidelity to the evocations of an objectively real, transcendent world of spirit, accurately perceived by the eye of faith' (93). To invoke spiritual causes is circular. Moreover, one cannot establish which spiritual cause must be invoked (96-97). Mana and the numinous are 'natural forms of cosmic awareness' and can be perfectly explained without the postulation of an independent reality and a special religious sense to perceive it (157).

Prozesky objects strongly to the conclusion that his refusal to explain religion by means of revelations from a realm above the perceptible one would amount to 'another piece of subjective reductionism' (190, 209). That is not so because 'the experienced effects of objectively real but mysterious cosmic forces' (190) are asserted. Divine [333] self-revelations cannot be ruled out, but cannot be used to explain religion as they cannot be falsified. Moreover, they need not be used, as mankind's religious history can be fully explained without them: 'theistic belief [...] arose naturally as a direct consequence of the impact on our affective sense of a largely unseen, forceful cosmos' (191, 209). The belief in revelations also involves several other severe logical difficulties (192-195). Prozesky, however, admits that 'theistic traditionalists' (222) have several defence mechanisms against the new age, such as compartmentalising faith and reason, paradoxalizing the new knowledge in order to save traditional dogma, exploiting the grave ethical problems of modern existence, and demonizing the modern age (215-220). As a result, 'there is every likelihood that traditional theistic religion will continue to thrive', but at the cost of alienation from modern developments (220). He is more sceptic of the changes of survival of the liberal theists who pursue several adaptive strategies (220-224). These will, he predicts, 'ultimately

prove frustrating and transient' (224). The one option left is 'the new version of faith [...] that works with rather than against the modern views of knowledge with its relativity, critical attitudes, creativity, openness to new data and radical uncertainty about answering ultimate questions', and conceives 'the divine as an inherent force in the universe' (225).

In conclusion two more difficulties may be listed apart from the crucial problem set out above about the extent of testable and empirically explainable 'reality'. One is that Prozesky's theory explains every phase and aspect of human religious history so neatly and completely - its origin and development, all the diverse sorts of religions that emerged or will emerge, belief and unbelief - that it comes close to explaining nothing (see his own remark on 168). His explanation is as all-embracing as a world-view and has all the self-confirmatory properties of it. That is in line with his Schleiermachiian drive towards new religious radicalism. That drive causes him to take the position of an engaged participant in religious history in stead of that of a non-committed outsider. It prohibits him to survey present day religious transformation in a comprehensive and neutral way. My other reservation respects the traditional tripartite structure of human religious history presented by Prozesky. It seems tailored to suit the needs, the limits, and the reconstructive intents of Prozesky's theory. Present insights seem to require a more complex account of its overall development.

Even so, there is much to admire in this book: his forceful style, the clarity of his presentation, and his audacity to develop an all-encompassing, revolutionary argument. I am amazed that it has not caused a great stir.²¹

[334]

1991: Olupona's civil religion: the king as the patron of all religions

J.K. Olupona, *Kingship, Religion, and Rituals in a Nigerian Community: A Phenomenological Study of Ondo Yoruba Festivals*. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1991, 194 pp., 2 maps, ills., 1 appendix, bibliography, index, ISBN 91-22-01382-2, paper cover (= Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion, 28)

Jacob Kehinde Olupona (1951) is Associate Professor in the Afro-American and Black Studies Program of the University of California Davis. He was born in Ute, in Ondo State, Nigeria. He obtained a BA in Religious Studies from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and an MA and, in 1983, a PhD in Comparative Religion at Boston University with a thesis on the interaction of traditional religion, Islam and Christianity among the Ondo-Yoruba. Among this large, but little studied subgroup of the 40 million strong cluster of Yoruba peoples of South-West Nigeria he did fieldwork between 1979 and 1986 for his PhD and this book. He was a senior lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies at the Obafemi Awolowo University, at Ilé-Ifé, Nigeria, from 1983 to 1989. He was then appointed, first to Amherst College in Maine, USA, and then to the University of California, Davis. He has held fellowships and visiting professorships at Amherst College, Selley Oaks College, Muhlenberg College, Bayreuth University and Smith College. His research is on religion and politics in Nigeria (see Olupona & Falola 1991), the study of reli-

²¹ For three other reviews, see Chidester 1985, Lawson 1987, and Badham 1987

gions in Africa,²² Yoruba religion in American urban cities, and on African churches and religious movements in the USA. He is the coordinator of the steering committee of the African Association for the Study of the Religions (AASR), a continent-wide association for scholars of religions in Africa and a global one for scholars of the religions of Africa that was founded at the first IAHR regional conference in Africa in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1992. AASR has applied for affiliation to the IAHR.

Olupona's book is on the cementing role of kingship rituals in present day Ondo. It proves Prozesky's prediction premature. The core of the book is set out neatly in the invitation which a chief addresses to the people of Ondo on behalf of the *oba* (ruler) every year on a day in July: 'Silence, silence, silence. The king greets you all. He says, when the Christians had their festival, he celebrated with them. When the Muslims had theirs, he joined them in celebrating it. When the *orisa* believers [of the traditional Ondo-Yoruba religion] had theirs, he joined them [also]. *Ajailaye* [praise name of the ruler] says that his festival is in nine days time. Let the person on the farm come home. Let every person celebrate with [335] him' (74). The traditional religions of Africa prove versatile. Their deeply ingrained traditions of adoption and adaptation enable them to share a society even with intolerant immigrant faiths, cede certain spheres to them, detect new opportunities and develop there in quite a vigorous way.

The modern focus of Ondo religion on kingship is the product of colonial time. Restored and bolstered by the British (31-33), the *oba* became the potent symbol of Ondo identity, unifying the Ondo people in a period of fast transformations and strong centrifugal forces. In this cult, Ondo traditional religion developed functions equivalent to those of the 'civil religion' discovered by Bellah for the USA with its strict separation of religion and state. Olupona describes its historical and socio-structural setting and its genesis in chapters I and II, highlighting the strains, political and other, which underlie the modern balance of power. They are those between aboriginal groups and the Ondo invaders; between patrilineages and the quarters as the bases of the military organisation; between the five royal houses among which succession to the throne rotates; between the higher and lower chiefs; between the holders of political and religious offices; between males and females.

In chapters III, IV and V, he describes the system in operation. The rite of accession of a new ruler and the annual celebration of his kingship are discussed in chapter III. The myths, rites and festivals of the gods Oramfe and Ogun, who, each in different ways, legitimize the royal cult, are discussed in chapters IV and V. In chapter VI, he examines the now lapsed puberty rites for girls in order to shed light on the riddle of the 'central female focus' (155) in Ondo patrilineal society, and the cult of Aje, the goddess of wealth and fertility, by women. Olupona concludes his book with a sketch, in chapter VII, of the history of Christianity and Islam in Ondo society in the past century, and with an interesting adaptation of Robin Horton's theory on micro-macro shift²³ to the civil religion function of the cult of royalty in Ondo.

Olupona in his introduction (13-21), and David Westerlund in his preface (9-10), present this book as a model for the next generation of studies in African religions, and in most respects

²² See Olupona 1990 and Platvoet, Cox, & Olupona forthcoming

²³ Cf. Horton 1971, 1975a, 1975b

it deserves to be presented as such. The Christian theological bias of the Parrinder/Idowu/Mbiti generation²⁴ has been abandoned. Olupona follows Ray (1976) in combining 'phenomenological' with anthropological and historical methods of description and analysis and of abandoning comparative generalism in favour of ethnographic specificity. Olupona does not extrapolate from Ondo religion to continent-wide 'African traditional religion', but just presents it for what it is: the cult of kingship in a particular Nigerian town.

He analyses it at three levels: the descriptive one, the functional one, and the [336] 'hermeneutical' one. The first two are, in my view, the virtues of this book; the third is its major weakness. Olupona terms the first level 'morphological phenomenology' (19). Its aim and operation are, however, identical with those of an anthropologist: to provide an accurate description of a symbol system from the point of view of 'the actors'. Empathy is required as much in an anthropologist's description of it as in that of a phenomenologist, and the anthropologist too must practise *epochè*. Both must investigate, at this descriptive, or morphological level, the influence of historical and contextual factors (e.g. ecology) on the form, or shape ('*morphè*'), of a cult. Its functions are analyzed at the second level. It is this type of research which anthropologists have pioneered and in which they have made the greatest advances. This level is crucial in Olupona's book. It enabled him to discover the civil religion function of Ondo rituals of royalty.

The third level is the 'hermeneutical' one, in the Eliadean tradition of 'creative, or total, hermeneutics' (Eliade 1969: 36, 57-71) with its stock of religionist concepts and its avowed intention to re-create and change modern man by the '*planétisation*' (Eliade 1969: 69) of the culture of archaic man as the true *homo religiosus*. Olupona's functional analyses are thus 'complemented' by another type, such as the change in 'ontological' status (60) of the king-elect by his 'pilgrimage to the centre' (61). That ritual is said to be an 'archetype' and a 'divine model' (68), and therefore a 'primordial act' (69) by which the actors participate in a 'transcendental reality' (69). When the king walks around a tree thrice, he is said to circumambulate the *axis mundi* (69) and then to ascend 'the primeval mound' (69).²⁵

I have two problems with such exercises in Eliadean hermeneutics. One is that they are not supported by, or necessary at, either the descriptive or the functional levels of interpretation. They are creative. They present Olupona's spiritual interpretation of the descriptive data in the terms of the global Eliadean religion of *homo religiosus* as adhered to by some modern liberal or post-Christian university-trained religious elite. The other is that they will be welcomed in Ondo by certain intellectuals and some traditional believers as strengthening the position of Ondo traditional religion vis-à-vis its competitors on the religious market, and by the political establishment as a new legitimation of its civil religious function. It creates an additional prop under a colonial construction. Their interpretation as re-enactment of primordial events (68, 70, 74, 76, 82, 93, 106, 107) seems to me to add religion to religion, and to interpret Ondo religion in a manner not unlike that of the earlier generation of West African scholars in Departments of Religious Studies.

²⁴ See for criticism, Westerlund 1985 and Westerlund 1991, and my review of Westerlund 1985

²⁵ See for other instances 70, 74, 76, 82, 92, 93, 106, 107, 121, 129, 146, 154

[337] I must explain why I think that Olupona's ethnographic data do not support his Eliadean interpretations. I am aware that it is presumptuous for me, who has no specialist knowledge in Ondo language, history, society and religion, to make strong claims in this matter. Still, the data presented in chapter V, on Ogun as anterior to Ondo immigration (112, 120), and Sonyinka's judgement that Ogun is the 'completion of Yoruba cosmogony', coupled to the fact that the cult of Oramfe in Ondo religion and politics is historically datable as later than the Ogun cult, seem to me not to allow the 'cosmization' interpretation which Olupona attributes to the Oramfe mythology and cult (107), and to kingship rituals in their trail (68, 70, 74, 76, 82). It is more consistent with the views of the Ondo believers, more safe and more adequate, in my view, to interpret the Oramfe cult as the mythology and legitimation of a post-primeval, historical event: the Ondo migration and the establishment of their political power in the Ondo region.

A few minor criticisms: the maps are too small and do not show all the relevant towns. It is a great pity that the photographs have been printed four to a page. Chapters II and III are not fully synchronized in spelling and information: ch. III repeats information already presented in chapter II; kingship is said to rotate among five royal patrilineages (48) in ch. II, and among four (60) in ch. III; the highest rank of chiefs is spelled *Ehare* [44] in ch. II, and *Eghare* [60] in ch. III. Ch. III seems to have been written earlier and is more heavily Eliadean in perspective. Olupona might also consider whether he might replace the term 'magical' by 'miraculous' in some places and dispense with it altogether in others. 'Magical' introduces either a western, elitist or a co-believer bias that cannot be squared with the interpretations of the believers who perform or solicit these 'medico'-religious or other services.

Other programmatic statements, 1990-1992

The limits of this article forbid me to review in like manner other books that would qualify to be included after the criteria for this article. They are Michael Bourdillon's *Religion and Society: A Text for Africa* (1990);²⁶ Anil Sooklal's *Children of Immortality* (1990);²⁷ Shirley Thorpe's *African Traditional Religions* (1991) and her *Primal Religions Worldwide* (1992);²⁸ John Cumpsty's *Religion as Belonging* (1991);²⁹ David Chidester's *Religions of South Africa* (1992);³⁰ and James Cox's *Expressing the Sacred* (1992).³¹

²⁶ Bourdillon is Professor of Social Anthropology in the Department of Sociology in the University of Zimbabwe. He has done fieldwork among the Korekore-Shona of Zimbabwe and in the Calabar region of Nigeria. He is author of an authoritative ethnography of the Shona peoples (Bourdillon 1976/1987) and has edited a book on Christianity south of the Zambezi (1977) and another on sacrifice (Bourdillon & Fortes 1980).

²⁷ Dr. Anil Sooklal is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Hindu Studies in the University of Durban-Westville (South Africa) and Secretary of ASRSA. For a review of Sooklal 1990, see Platvoet 1992.

²⁸ Dr. Shirley Thorpe is, or was, Lecturer in the Department of Science of Religion at UNISA. I have reviewed Thorpe's books in Platvoet 1993.

²⁹ Cumpsty founded the Department of Religious Studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Cape Town in 1969. He is Professor of Religious Studies at UCT.

³⁰ Chidester is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Cape Town and Director of its Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa. He is noteworthy for his book on Jonestown (Chidester 1988) but has published five more books apart from these two.

³¹ Cox was Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies in the University of Zimbabwe from 1989 to early

In conclusion: the study of religions in a book-famished region

Poverty breeds isolation. Isolation and poor funding are disastrous for the academic enterprise. In most nations of Africa south of the Sahara, [338] universities struggle with severely curtailed budgets, too many students, and staff depleted because the salaries are so meagre, that they are either forced to take on additional jobs, to the detriment of academic work, or to find academic posts in richer nations. A severe book famine prevails. In the last few years, the budgets allocated to the libraries have been severely cut and the prices of books from the northern hemisphere have skyrocketed due to the constant depreciation of the currencies of the southern nations against those of the industrialized world. University libraries can buy only a tiny portion of books produced in the North and maintain subscriptions to only a few periodicals. As neither students nor lecturers can afford to buy the books produced in the West, the few books that have been bought by the libraries are not only in constant demand, but also keep 'disappearing' from the shelves, even after costly modern security systems have been installed.³²

In this situation, two strategies seem necessary if the study of religions is to develop in a continent in which there is not only a great need of it, but in which it is also greatly in demand. First, it seems of paramount importance that books be locally produced, or imported from other nations with weak currencies. Books so produced or imported have become the mainstay of academic life in Africa. Import restrictions, due to shortage of foreign currencies, poor distribution and advertising, and the weak buying power of the local market, however, severely limit the local publishing option for African scholars. It is, moreover, also necessary that African scholars publish in the international market for they have important contributions to make to global scholarship. But the books they publish abroad should also, and even first of all, become available to their own students and those in other African nations. The solution to this problem seems to be that the publishers who dominate the international market team up with publishers in Africa and enable them to produce editions in Africa at locally affordable prices. Through such ventures, other international publications may also be channelled into the African book market, thus counteracting the isolation and retardation which is bred by poverty. The newly founded AASR and the other African IAHR affiliates should consider this as their most pressing assignment and solicit the assistance of the international community of scholars and publishers for devising effective solutions.

[339-340: endnotes]

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1993. He is now a staff member of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World in the University of Edinburgh.

³² This generalized picture is based on my experiences in Ghana in 1980 and before, and in Zimbabwe between 1985 and 1992, and on views aired by several participants in the IAHR regional conference on The Study of Religions in Africa that was held at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare from 15 to 19 September 1992. It seems representative of the universities of all the nations of Sub-Saharan Africa except South Africa's 'non-

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Postscript, 15.05.2017

When I offered this article for publication in *Numen*, sometime in late 1992, I also sent it to the three authors whose 'programmatic statements' I reviewed in order that they might respond to it and point to any inadequacies in my analysis of their positions. Kobus Krüger and Jacob Olupona opted not to respond. Martin Prozesky, however, did send in a detailed reply, because 'in some important respects Platvoet's interpretation of the book is at variance with what I intended to convey' (343).³³ It was published in the same issue of *Numen*, immediately after my article (pp. 343-347). I summarize his objections to my analysis.

His first point is crucial. He writes that his book was meant to convey his 'position that all religions are the product of human creativity alone, activated in response to unseen [...] *wholly natural* forces in the cosmos' (343, his italics). And he refers to pp. 228 and 234 in his book for having explicitly stated this position (343). It is, however, only on p. 228 in his book, that Prozesky qualifies the 'unseen, transcendent reality' as 'natural',³⁴ i.e. as referring only to the cognitively 'transcendental'/'unseen' character for earlier humans of the *empirical* (cosmic) reality of which humanity is part. This implies that he did not take the 'unseen' and 'transcendental' in his book in a 'spiritual', 'meta-empirical', 'supernatural', or religious sense, but in an epistemological or cognitive meaning as referring to man failing to understand his position in the universe, because it 'transcended', exceeded the abilities of, human comprehension (until now), and therefore, and for 'euonic' reasons, producing the religions of humankind to cope with this failure to understand and intellectually grasp the natural, empirical (cosmic) reality of which we are part.

Though the indications of this naturalist position of Prozesky appear only quite late in his book, and are quite meagre and very few,³⁵ I can now only plead guilty of having misunderstood and misrepresented the core of Prozesky's explanatory theory of the history of the religions of humankind, for he is its author and he insists in this response that this purely 'natural' epistemological meaning of the 'unseen' and 'transcendent' is 'the theme of [his] entire book' (343). He correctly maintains therefore also that his approach to the claims of religions in respect of 'unseen'/'transcendent'/'meta-empirical'/'spiritual'/'supernatural' realms and beings is as agnostic and neutral as is mine (343). It follows also that his book is an 'exercise in religious and philosophical anthropology' only in a disciplinary sense, and does not involve any personal religious belief on his part (344), as I had assumed. It also follows then that he did not fuse, and confuse, empirical methodology with trans-empirical religionism, as I asserted. But he admits that 'there are passages whose neutrality of expression, or whose ambiguity, might have given him [me] this notion' (344).

³³ The page numbers between round brackets refer to Prozesky 1993

³⁴ Prozesky 1984: 228: 'Our cosmic setting implies that there is a *natural*, unseen, transcendent reality comprising the forces that we neither understand nor control ...' (my italics)

³⁵ On further inspection, I find one more passage: 'the present theory [invokes] only known, *natural*, mental processes' (Prozesky 1984: 176; my italics). Having been corrected on Prozesky's naturalist approach, I may discover a few more by closely rereading the entire book.

Prozesky also rejects my suggestion that his theory is indebted to (his earlier work on) the young Schleiermacher's 'youthful calls for radical religious renewal [...], least of all anything that smacked of supernaturalism'(345). He adds that I exaggerated his criticisms of fideism and positivism because of my worries about him taking a stance within religion (345); and that his theory is true to Popper's requirements of empirical testability, since he cites 'as the cosmological clause of religion only factors within the ordinary, natural experience of human beings' (345). Likewise, though he is sympathetic to recent religious radicalism, he has no personal involvement in it (346). I incorrectly, he says, restricted the cluster of 'basic human characteristics' explaining religion, to wit 'our desire for eudaimonic well-being, our anxious vulnerability and our creativity, as well as our finitude', to the latter only (346).

Final points: Prozesky does 'not think that [modern] secularity is the graveyard of all religions' (346); his section of *San religion* (1984: 181-183) is at odds with my representation of his supposedly derogatory treatment of mythological naturalism as animism (346); and he would have wished that I had discussed much more thoroughly the 'academically most important' problem of theories explaining too neatly everything and thereby ending up explaining nothing (346-347).

Despite these many defects in my review, Prozesky concludes by commending me for providing an acceptable account of his complex argument, congratulates me that I invited him to respond to it, and for providing an opportunity for critical attention to scholarly work done in Africa (347).

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