BOOK REVIEWS

Reviewed by S. van Eersel, Nijmegen

As the title of this book suggests, the author wants to provide a starting point for a dialogical and creative theory of religious education based on the principle of relationship. A phenomenological analysis of contemporary sociological, philosophical and theological perceptions of relationship should answer two questions: can the concept of relationship contribute to a positive and constructive approach to both the theory and the praxis of the religious learning process, and can this concept of relationship generate essential and innovative impulses for pedagogic and didactic reflection on religion? On the basis of this analysis a theory of education is developed, with special attention to children and youths’ relations with God.

In the preface to the book the author formulates three premises: a sociological, a theological and a methodological premise. The sociological premise refers to the relation between sociology, theology and pedagogics of religion. According to the author a pedagogic premise of religion is to be found at the interface between theology and pedagogics, assigning each discipline equal value. The theological premise deals with the relationship between God and human beings. Human individuals are understood primarily in terms of their relations with each other against the background of their personal relationship with God. The nature of the relationship between God and human beings is based on the biblical doctrine of creation. The methodological premise refers to the way individuals are perceived as ‘subjects-in-relationship’, including their relationship with God.

The book is divided into three sections. In section 1 the author describes the sociological building blocks of his theory. These evolve from a paradigm shift in the social sciences, in which the ‘old’ developmental paradigm made way for a new, relational paradigm. According to the author relationship is fundamental to people’s social reality. Being involved in relationships means involvement in a dynamic, unpredictable process. This involvement can be on different levels. People may relate to themselves (intrapersonal level), to other people (interpersonal level) and to nature, society, history or God (suprapersonal level). Children and youths depend on their relations with others for their existence. Until the mid-20th century children had little say in their own upbringing. Education could be equated with reproduction of meaning, which was imposed upon pupils by the power of the educator. Nowadays the aim of the relation between children and educators is autonomy, yet within the boundaries of time and space. As a result of this interaction between autonomy and bondage, education cannot be seen as reproduction of meaning but depends on construction of meaning. This entails both appropriation and mediation of meaning. The process of appropriation refers to the way a subject relates to the world, whereas mediation refers to the way the world relates to the individual. In a relational educational setting the appropriation and mediation of meaning are accomplished dialogically by a “nurturing community” (Erziehungs Gemeinschaft). In this community adults lead the way as far as experience and knowledge is concerned, but they can learn just as much from children and youths as the latter can learn from them.

In section 2 the theological building blocks for a relational theory of religious education are described from the perspective of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. According to the author
the dialogical relation between appropriation and mediation is reinforced by the Bible. In both the Old and the New Testament the relationship between God and humankind is described in relational metaphors. These metaphors promote a socio-empirical notion of relationships by describing them as God-given. Receiving relationships as gifts from God does not make people puppets in God’s hands; in a biblical perspective humans are God’s interlocutors. Being interlocutors in a discourse in which God has a voice does not mean that they coincide with God. God will and always does remain the ultimate Other. The relation between God and humans is also dialogical, characterised by revelation on the one hand and mystery on the other. At the end of section 2 the dialogical nature of the relationship between God and humans is compared with the dialogical relationship between children and their educators.

In section 3 the building blocks from the two preceding sections are used to construct a ‘relational hermeneutics’ within pedagogics of religion. According to this hermeneutics religious education is defined as self-formation or self-education in relationship (“Selbstbildung in Beziehung”). This definition places the individual at the centre of a triadic relationship consisting of self, other and their interrelationship. This is the book’s cardinal innovative contribution to pedagogic and didactic reflection on religion. Whereas most theories of religious upbringing and education describe the interaction between children and their educators in terms of binary oppositions, this book stresses that relationships must be conceived of as asymmetric dualisms, involving associations of same and different simultaneously. In this triad relationship is more important than self and other, because neither of the two exists in itself. Being is always co-being.

With reference to Karl Rahner the author rejects the postmodern belief in the ‘feasibility’ of relations. Childhood has its own theological and anthropological value, which will be taken into account in God’s self-revelation in the way described by Dorothea Sattler. The dialogical relation between revelation and mystery, being the heart of a relational theology, can only be realised ‘by time and in the time’ (Emmanuel Levinas). Until that goal is achieved, we have to endure the heterogeneity and alterity of the dialogical process. In giving concrete form to this dialogical relation, a didactics of religion must sensitise children and youths to all dimensions of human relations: with themselves, with others, with the world and with God. Only thus can children and youths, also those who are not religiously socialised, authentically experience what religion means.

In this extensive study the author succeeds in laying a new foundation for pedagogics of religion. Making relationship the fundamental principle of a pedagogics of religion will have a major impact on the way religious education is organised. The theory outlined in this study accords with the guiding principles of current learning theory based on Lev Vygotsky’s theoretical framework. Remarkably, in spite of its importance to pedagogics of religion, the book makes no direct reference to this contemporary view of learning. To my mind the theory underlying this new foundation for pedagogics of religion would be strengthened if it were to incorporate more of the Anglo-American literature on the topic of relation.


Reviewed by K. Tirri, Helsinki

David Fontana is a psychologist with a positive view of religion. He believes that religion and spirituality have brought and continue to bring more advantages than disadvantages, both to individual believers and to society in general. He argues that the psychology of religion and spirituality has been neglected by mainstream psychology for several reasons. Fontana’s book challenges the narrow views of many psychologists by reviewing current
research into the effects of religious and spiritual belief on behaviour and on physical and psychological health. He focuses on six religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism), which he refers to as ‘the great traditions’. Among these he concentrates mainly on Christianity, Hinduism and Islam.

At the outset Fontana discusses definitions of key concepts such as religion, spirituality, God and belief. The book provides a good overview of the history of introspection in psychological research. The approaches to the psychology of religion and spirituality are explored by reviewing the impact of eminent scholars like Wundt, Watson, James, Freud and Jung. Fontana deals with religious beliefs and practices in the great traditions under the themes of reward and punishment, nature of the afterlife and near-death experiences. He traces similarities and differences in the religious behavioural codes of the six traditions. He builds on Hindu scholarship and identifies five paths of spiritual development. These paths are discussed under the following headings: Hatha Yoga, Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga and Raja Yoga. Fontana also reviews current research into spirituality and the brain. This topic is very relevant in the context of a possible new type of intelligence: spiritual intelligence. Religious and spiritual experiences are not always linked to a religious tradition.

Fontana reviews research and literature on both immanent and transcendent mystical experience. Mysticism is discussed broadly with reference to various features of mystical experience and their connection with psychosis, sport, drugs, religious conversion and dreams. One chapter is devoted to the concepts of self, soul and brain. The study of consciousness and the different models are introduced, together with some empirical findings on near-death experiences, effects of distant healing and evidence from parapsychological research. Both positive and negative effects of religion on physical and psychological health are discussed.

I look forward to seeing more empirical work (both case studies and wider surveys) on psychological aspects of spirituality. Fontana’s book is a great starting point for any empirical investigator. It is also useful for every scholar and student of psychology of religion. I can recommend it to those who want to study spirituality from a psychological and experimental point of view. The book provides both theoretical knowledge and empirical research findings on religious and spiritual development and behaviour. It can be used as a textbook for psychology, education and theology at both undergraduate and graduate levels. It is necessary reading for every researcher in the fields of psychology, religion or spirituality.

Reviewed by G. Sturms, Nijmegen

This book, which was originally accepted as a doctoral thesis by the Catholic theological faculty of the University of Vienna, attempts to create and test a methodological instrument for liturgical studies. Hausreither maintains that this discipline lacks a research methodology of its own and frequently borrows the methods of the social sciences. He expands the semantics of Greimas and its musical adaptation by Willem-Marie Speelman (*The generation of meaning in liturgical songs*, 1995). Hausreither’s method is applicable not only to literary liturgical objects (eucharistic prayers, hymn texts) but also to non-liturgical objects like liturgical space, vestments and gestures. The book is a case study of two German liturgical songs, including text and music: ‘Segne dieses Kind’ (Bless this child) and ‘Hände, die schenken’ (Hands that give).

The study is structured in four parts. The first deals with the meaning of music, different semantics and the specific choice of Greimas’s model, which it introduces to the reader.
The second part describes the research object and the author’s adaptation of the semiotic model. He makes an analytical distinction between liturgical scenario (hymnbook or prayer book) and liturgy in actu (as an event). The method is intended for liturgical actions in liturgical contexts; hence Hausreither analyses liturgical songs in actu. The research method requires fieldwork. After attending the liturgical action the recorded singing is transcribed in detail to produce a visual semiotics. This entails a study of both the literary semiotics (form and content of the hymn text) and the musical semiotics (form and content of the melody). The in actu analysis means that the research includes specific contextual musical parameters such as organ preludes or guitar accompaniment.

In the third and longest part of the book Hausreither tests his method on two songs. Having noted different types of liturgical music, he chooses to describe two songs from the genre of liturgy for children. The analysis comprises three parts. After describing the liturgical and cultural context (I), he presents the literary and musical analyses on the basis of the scenario (music score) and the liturgical action (performance of the score) (II), followed by a theological interpretation (III). This third section indicates the truly theological nature of the method.

In the fourth and final part of the book Hausreither describes the importance of his semiotic research. He makes it clear that his semiotic method can be used to reveal the different qualities of liturgical song, especially the meaning emerging from the song itself. Possibly this approach to liturgical music could lead to a new theological-liturgical aesthetics.

Hausreither has written a challenging book in the field of liturgical studies, one which is also challenging for non-semiotic experts. It includes a semiotic glossary for readers with little or no expertise in semiotics.

Hausreither’s attempt to offer an integral research method for the discipline in general, and for liturgical music in particular, is successful. The in actu semiotic approach is very refreshing in liturgical studies. It enables researchers to study liturgical acts closely, which can be difficult when using empirical methods. Further research to test the method on non-literary and non-musical liturgical objects would be interesting. Another interesting and difficult research topic would be the meaning liturgical participants assign to liturgical objects such as songs.


This book is a study of a measuring instrument developed by Stefan Huber (University of Mainz, Germany) to assess both various expressions of religiosity and their centrality to a person’s hierarchy of values. The instrument developed and discussed in the study is based on two theories. The first reflects Allport’s motivational distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, which discriminates between religious commitment for its internal significance on the one hand, and religious engagement for its external effects on the other. The second theory is that of Glock, whose so-called 5-D model distinguishes between various dimensions of religions, such as ideology, knowledge, worship, prayer and experience. Huber’s thesis is that the instrument not only integrates theoretical concerns of psychological and sociological approaches to religion, but also offers an economical means of empirically assessing various religious expressions with one effective instrument.

Huber adapts Glock’s distinctions in his own measuring instrument, but criticises Allport for his implicit value judgment in favour of intrinsic religion and for including theological...
assumptions in his scale construction. To substantiate this criticism, Huber introduces the
notion of centrality to determine the relative priority of religion in people’s value systems.
In search of a theoretically unbiased way of incorporating Allport’s approach, Huber
applies basic assumptions of Kelly’s construct psychology to religious commitment. This
result in basic postulates, in which religious behaviour is assumed to be a function of cen-
trality and substance (content) in religious construct systems. Glock’s dimensional model
provides the construct system in which theological concepts can be located. By way of
example Huber offers typologies from existing research such as orthodoxy, particularity
and ethicalism that may help to classify these theological concepts.

Huber constructs a Religiosity Structure Test (RST) to demonstrate that this instrument
measures both the centrality and the form of religious commitment in Abrahamic religions.
In the empirical part he constructs a ten-item index from the measured intensity of the five
dimensions, which enables him to offer a research instrument that is dimension-specific,
theologically unbiased and economical. He demonstrates the validity and reliability of the
instrument by describing the operationalisation process, scale construction and statistical
analyses on the basis of a survey. This survey, conducted in 1999 among students (N = 871)
of the University of Freiburg (CH), validates the assumptions. Huber scrutinises his data
for validity and reliability, checks for bivariate and partial correlations and for internal prediction
of the validation criteria. He also puts his assumptions to the test in confirmatory factor
analyses and in an additional network study to check for independency of sampling. With
some minor weaknesses that Huber takes into account, the empirical analyses prove that
the distinction of dimensions holds water while a valid measure of centrality is offered. To
overcome some of the weaknesses Huber expanded his test to 15 items in subsequent research.

Huber’s Zentralität und Inhalt presents a solid empirical study of religiosity. The book
offers an accurate and scholarly understanding of religious commitment in terms of its basic
psychological theories. It sometimes engages in debates that exceed the limits of a schol-
arly research report, with the result that the volume is more of a handbook on various pos-
sibilities for religious commitment research. Huber successfully and innovatively integrates
theories that have hitherto addressed separate academic audiences. At the same time he
does not lose sight of his pragmatic aim to develop a ‘lean and mean’ empirical instrument
that satisfies the need to economically study respondents in an area that demands prudence
and scrutiny. Empirically, Huber adequately tests his findings and makes a plausible case
for a limited-item instrument’s capacity to both discriminate the dimensions of religious
commitment and offer insight into personal centrality as its core aspect.

As in any good study, some questions remain. These include Allport’s initial claim (to
what extent can centrality serve as a concept in motivational theory?), Kelly’s ambition
(can the idiographic character of constructs be applied generically?), and sampling (are stu-
dents from one university a representative sample to validate such an ambitious instrument?).
One obvious drawback of a study that avoids theological ‘contamination’ in conceptualis-
ing and operationalising a measure of religious commitment is that it may fail to address
theological critiques. Thus one can object to Huber’s blithe rejection of ethics and com-
munity as autonomous dimensions of religiosity (as proposed by Verbit), or his acceptance
of the rather arbitrary redefinition of the 5-D model (as proposed by Stark and Glock) with-
out taking into account a long-standing tradition of theological reflection on personal reli-
gion. This is even more questionable inasmuch as Huber explicitly presents his instrument
as applicable to Abrahamic religions without theoretically taking into account these reli-
gions’ own views of religious commitment, or empirically including samples of Islamic
and Jewish respondents. Huber’s attempts to avoid theological bias runs a risk of under-
standing historical religions merely as ‘chiffre’ and overlooking the ‘stubbornness’ of their
self-definitions that may or may not suit the selected dimensions. Within the parameters of
Huber’s innovative psychological aim, however, he has produced an extensive study and a
promising scale has been added to the academic toolbox of empirical research into religion.
Empirical methods are a recent innovation in practical theology and have had quite an impact on the development of the discipline. This development has been nourished by discussion on research methodology with other disciplines, such as the social sciences. The debate has now been joined by Stephanie Klein, whom we have come to know over the past few years as a committed and enthusiastic practical theologian. Her recent study, *Erkenntnis und Methode in der Praktischen Theologie*, is meant to contribute to the theory of science underlying practical-theological methodology. It seeks to meet the need for an explicit theoretical basis for the phenomenological principles and methods of practical theology. She acquits herself admirably of her task.

The study comprises seven chapters, starting with a meticulous description of the problem: how does one theorise scientifically – that is, intersubjectively and on a methodological basis – about people’s existential reality? (p.14) The reality that concerns practical theology is people’s religious praxis. As a result of social and ecclesiastic developments that reality has changed so much that old categories can no longer adequately describe it, let alone explain it. The new reality confronts practical theology as action science with new questions that have implications for its research methods, such as the question of how to describe religious practices outside the confines of a church. The challenge to devise new methods arises not only from the research object but also from its subject. Klein makes her point in the very first chapter, with reference to Habermas (Technik und Wissenschaft als ’Ideologie’, 1969). She maintains that practical-theological work relates closely to the researchers’ focal interests: the theologians’ religious beliefs and praxis, as well as the theological, scientific and ecclesiastic discourses in which they engage. Throughout her study this is a central theme: the argument that the researcher, the subject of the study, should occupy a reflective, constitutive position in research methodology.

Klein bases practical-theological research on the threefold principle of ‘observe-judge-act’ (Cardijn), then proceeds to construct her argument with reference to Husserl’s phenomenology (observation as the basis of theorising), Schütz’s social phenomenology (people should be observed in their subjectivity and their context), Devereux’s methodology (observation should be interactive and reciprocal), and finally the approach of Glaser en Strauss (grounded theory as a fundamental strategy of empirically based theorising). She deals with the various authors in detail, appraising their thinking in terms of its implications for practical-theological research. The chapters are carefully and clearly structured: the author takes the reader along on an absorbing exploration of her argument.

In this study Klein emerges as a researcher championing the cause of the lived reality of religious people. She frequently reiterates that her concern is for the lives and uniqueness of human beings (pp. 14, 25, 105, 239, 279, etc.). This reality, bound by the horizon of faith, is the crux of practical-theological research, which operates within the same horizon (‘im Horizont des Glaubens’). That horizon is manifestly the connecting link. Practical theologians will only be able to understand other people’s religious and subjective world once they have fathomed their own. They have empirical methods at their disposal to observe and explain that world.

By and large Klein’s study, originally accepted as a *Habilitationsschrift*, has grown into a solid theoretical work. She makes her point – that of restoring the researcher to her position as subject of the study – with great fervour. Yet I feel that her argument would have been far more forceful if she had based it on (personal) empirical research. Only once do we get a glimpse into Klein’s own method of operation. When she describes her experience of biographical interviews (p. 233) she gives us a peep into how the researcher’s subjectivity affects his work. Although her study is predominantly fundamental, her statement
would have been much stronger if she had cited actual research to show how practical-theological theory is co-determined by the person of the researcher. Put differently, it would have put solid flesh on the bones of her study.

Finally, in my view a fundamentally oriented study has to deal with the issue of normativeness. Klein appears to be about to do so when she takes Cardijn’s threefold principle of ‘observing-judging-acting’ as the foundation for practical theology as action science, but she does not work it out systematically. Again: her argument for reinstating the subject of research to her rightful place would have been more cogent if she had dealt with normativeness explicitly and systematically. By now some practical-theological insight has been gained into the issue (J. Van der Ven & M. Scherer-Rath, Normativity and empirical research in theology, 2004). Yet these two criticisms do not detract from the importance of this study for practical theology and the (believing) researcher’s role in it.


Reviewed by W. Smeets, Nijmegen

Lachmann’s thesis deals with ethical aspects of nursing from a theological perspective. The author, a practical theologian and pastor, takes nurses’ self-description of their activities as her point of departure. In the first, theoretical section she clarifies the practical-theological premises. Nursing activities are regarded as diaconal praxis. Diaconal study, a branch of practical theology, is not confined to Christian activities and includes the activities of diverse professions in the field of diaconal work. Lachmann associates herself with the scholarly tradition that sees the subject as the focus of practical-theological study (cf. H. Luther) and considers practical theology to be an observational science (cf. Grözinger, Gräb). Hence the specific object of this study is observation of nurses’ lived ethos.

This is followed by a historical outline of the development of the nursing profession and the organisation of health care in Germany. From this it is evident that nursing is regarded as a predominantly ‘female’ profession, which has led to the emergence of a professionalisation movement.

Next the author introduces some basic ethical concepts. Ethics is seen as a science for praxis, praxis being expressive of people’s morality and ethos. The author opts for a descriptive hermeneutic ethics and a theological ethics on the lines of Buber’s anthropology. In concrete terms she confines herself to the ethics of nursing activities, concentrating on four aspects: relations with patients, professional practice, the profession as such and relations with colleagues.

Finally she describes the research method and design. She settles for qualitative socio-scientific research (more specifically the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss). The theoretical perspective is Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of knowledge and the hermeneutic interpretation of abduction (Peirce). The research object is nurses’ ethical orientations. The biographical interviews seek to determine their interpretation of their activities, following F. Schütze’s model (as worked out by Rosenthal). The interviewer proceeds non-directively.

Lachmann conducted twenty interviews with nurses. For her eventual thesis she selected three of these, whose contents cover the widest possible range of issues. The second, empirical section provides a detailed analysis of these three biographical interviews. They comprise, firstly, the nurse’s professional biography, and secondly, the interviewee’s responses to questions about specific elements of the work (significance of the Christian faith, departmental cooperation, and the themes of guilt, justice and humanity). The ethos of the first nurse, Hilde, is characterised by a focus on duty, an orientation to other people’s expectations, and fear of blame. The second nurse, Irina, has an ethos characterised by an interplay of
relational and performance orientations. In this regard her orientation to patients serves as the criterion of professionalism and her orientation to performance as a criterion of collegial relations. Nurse Christian’s ethos is characterised by a pragmatic attitude towards problems in his work with the emphasis on how things happen in practice.

The comparative analysis of the three interviews (using Schütze’s method of minimal and maximal comparison) is aimed at discovering a basic pattern. It emerges that nursing is a relationally oriented profession, marked by medical-ethical conflict situations in the context of health care in society; professional self-understanding has a functional-medical and a relational side.

The third section gives an interpretation of the empirical data. Lachmann tries to relate the basic ethical pattern in each of the three interviews to theories of nursing ethics. Hilde’s duty ethos relates to Kant’s ethic of duty: her actions are dictated by a moral code, moral autonomy and conscience as a major factor. Irina’s goal-oriented ethos relates to Aristotle’s teleological ethics, her conduct being determined by responsible relationships. Christian’s pragmatic ethos relates to the pragmatism of James and Peirce, his conduct being determined by a utilitarian outlook.

The next step entails drawing conclusions for ethical nursing practice. To this end the author proposes two basic ethical categories: an orientation to patients and an orientation to the relational network in which the patient is situated. In terms of professional self-understanding she links the duty ethos to a pre-professional conception, analogous to the task of a housewife; the pragmatic utilitarian ethos is linked to a professional conception centring on the doctor; and the reflective responsibility ethos is connected with a professional self-understanding that is not confined to technical medical competence but also entails personal responsibility in concrete situations.

The fourth and final section presents the author’s conclusions from her study for the nursing profession and some related professions. She believes that biographical reflection offers reliable access to personal ethics and professional self-understanding. It enables the person to clarify her position in situations of ethical conflict and to be tolerant of other positions. Hence the author considers the development of such biographical self-reflection an important component of nurses’ training; here the methodological concept of Clinical Pastoral Education is relevant. For the professional group of hospital chaplains she advocates a similar accent on promoting personal identity and healthy cooperation with nurses, especially at an ethical level. In the case of hospital management she advocates a person-oriented leadership style that encourages staff to take personal responsibility.

The book is well structured. The background to theoretical choices is described in detail. Thus it offers a useful synthesis for anyone wanting to conduct similar qualitative research. The author makes a convincing case for replacing the traditional ‘subservience ethos’ of nursing with a professional self-understanding, specifically in the perspective of Christian ethics. Lachmann clearly inclines strongly to a practical-theological approach that sees nursing as a diaconal activity. Occasionally the reader has to put up with repetitions of earlier conclusions. On the whole the style of writing could have been more concrete and concise. But for empirical theologians interested in the sphere of care-giving this thesis is a must.


Reviewed by Pim Valkenberg, Nijmegen

The main thesis of this book, which is a revised version of Loop’s master’s dissertation, is that the history of scriptural exposition in Islam is not all that different from the history of

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Christian (or Judaic, for that matter) exegesis. Although it may be an overstatement to claim that Loop’s work lays the foundation for a comparison of hermeneutic processes in Islam and Christianity, it may contribute greatly to such an approach.

The introductory chapter relativises the general idea, formulated by Dilthey and Gadamer, that hermeneutics is typically a product of Western thinking. Loop shows that the history of textual interpretation is far more variegated than the average textbook leads us to believe. The second chapter, on method, begins with some fundamental ideas about human beings as ‘interpreting animals’. Loop focuses on the question of how human beings integrate new phenomena with existing frameworks of knowledge. He frequently uses the metaphor of knowledge as a supply of ready-made textual and interpretive categories that can be applied to new information, so that old texts and categories become canonised; but sometimes new information requires different categories and this is where interpretation becomes a way of solving new problems. Usually, though, historical processes lead to the canonisation not only of texts, but of hermeneutic traditions as well. Thus historical development may be discernible in a certain tension between texts and established interpretive processes.

In the third chapter, drawing on studies by John Wansbrough and Norman Calder, Loop sketches the history of Muslim exegesis of the Qur’an as one in which certain interpretive approaches gradually gained authority and became canonised. He shows how a gradual process of objectifying the meaning of the text took place in the 3rd and 4th centuries after the hijra. At the beginning of the classical phase of tafsir at-Tabari still preserved a plurality of exegetical processes, but such polyvalence gradually became suspect in the eyes of exegetes like Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir, who advocated an objective reconstruction of the meaning of the Qur’an. Loop concludes that there was an era of hermeneutic openness to possible meanings of the Qur’an, but these possibilities were subsequently narrowed down. By and large I agree with Loop’s interesting study, but sometimes he seems to have a normative hidden agenda in which ‘open’ and ‘liberal’ interpretations of Scripture rank higher than ‘closed’, ‘authoritative’ ones. In this respect Loop seems to be a product of modernity. Sometimes, however, he comes to conclusions that do not fit into this general framework, for instance when he observes a remarkable similarity between Ibn Hanbal’s argument that Scripture should explain itself and the basic stance of the Protestant Reformation.

The fourth chapter deals with material with which most readers will be familiar: the development of Christian concepts of hermeneutics in the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern era. Loop subscribes to the tendency to contrast the ‘spiritual’ exegesis of the Middle Ages with the more literal and objective exegesis of later times. Again, I consider his analysis to be rather one-sided on this point. For instance, when he compares the ‘dogmatic’ approach of Matthias Flacius (who has his equivalents in Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir) with the more ‘open’ and ‘objective’ approach of La Peyrère, Spinoza and especially Richard Simon, he is justifiably critical, but his praise of the open-minded approaches fits in a bit too snugly with the usual preconceptions of modernity. This tends to make his concluding observations on Richard Simon somewhat less interesting, although Loop rightly remarks that Simon was able to combine critical consciousness and Christian faith in a manner that would be almost impossible today. Judging by Loop’s statement that ‘objective’ interpretations are less prejudiced than ‘dogmatic’ interpretations, he seems to be aware that even ‘objective’ interpretations contain some presuppositions that may be criticised. Still, I would have wished him to be less ‘dogmatic’ on this point, so that he could leave room for a real plurality of interpretations in which dogmatic interpretations may have a function in exegetical history alongside more scientific ones. He is right in refuting the conventional idea that Islam did not have (and cannot have) a history of hermeneutics, but he is less right in moulding this interpretive history on a preconceived normative idea, namely that ‘objective’ modernity determined the history of Christian hermeneutics.
This book can be seen as the magnum opus of the Dutch liturgical scholar Lukken. Who is Lukken? He has followed the development of Dutch liturgy and ritual for decades and is well known for numerous publications, and not only in the Netherlands. Furthermore, Lukken is one of the leading proponents of what can be called the anthropological approach to liturgical studies. He has drawn on semiotics, but has also adopted various research approaches in ritual studies in his own research and reflection. Thirdly, Lukken has always been an important hermeneutic thinker in the Christian tradition. Anthropological investigation is followed by theological reflection, and this, according to Lukken, can benefit both the Christian tradition and the ritual needs of contemporary human beings.

Having noted these three characteristics of the author, three analogous hallmarks and qualities of this book can be pointed out: (1) it makes an interesting case for ritual in modern society, based on the Dutch situation; (2) it gives a good orientation to the meaning of ritual in a theoretical sense; (3) it offers guidelines for discovering and developing a structure for Christian ritual in modern culture.

(1) Regarding the first quality, Lukken points out that the Netherlands is an interesting case. In the 1960s ritual entered a deep crisis. On the one hand there was ritual creativity in, for example, the Roman Catholic church; on the other hand ritual disappeared from the public agenda. In the 1990s there was a revival of ritual in society, and this led to the situation described in the title of the book: rituals in abundance. But when dealing with a crisis it is important to distinguish authentic and inauthentic modes of rituality.

(2) This is the second quality of the book: Lukken reviews a huge amount of relevant literature from ritual studies and offers a coherent model for orientation, analysis and reflection concerning ritual. Still, one needs to take a certain position, a ritual tradition, and Lukken does this when focussing on the position and the character of Christian ritual in modern society.

(3) That is what his book aims at, and there the third quality can be found: a solid hermeneutic contribution to the revitalisation of Christian liturgical tradition. Lukken’s point of view is optimistic: he believes it is possible to construct new forms of Christian ritual that will keep the liturgical tradition alive. In this respect he represents the optimistic stream in liturgical studies without being naive.

The book is structured as follows. In the first part Lukken explores what ritual is. Knowing that it is extremely difficult to formulate one coherent definition, the author proposes concepts which progressively narrow down his conception of ritual. First he describes basic elements of ritual, the most important being communication and symbolisation. Then he distinguishes characteristics of ritual, such as formalisation and condensation, as well as its ethical dimension. Next he describes the contribution of semiotics, a field in which he has worked extensively in the past. This description forms the core of the first part of the book.

In the second part Lukken explains his view that ritual is always inculturated. He discusses several topics relating to the question of ritual and culture. The first concerns the cultural determination of ritual and the close relation between ritual and culture. As a liturgist, Lukken also analyses the theological problem of inculturation. This description clarifies his standpoint: he favours a liberal approach to ritual, one which is inductive and based on the cultural context in which participants live. Here he outlines the theoretical premises of this supposition.
In the third part of his study, Lukken elaborates on this supposition and presents his view of a possible position for Christian ritual in our culture. First he analyses modern culture, in the process explaining what he sees as a transition from ritual crisis to rituals in abundance. Christian ritual no longer has a monopoly in the ritual market, and many people have distanced themselves from it. To Lukken this implies that inductive liturgy is the appropriate form of Christian ritual today. He then offers relevant information on new transitional rituals and other ritual repertoires. This third part is the culmination of Lukken’s study and is relevant not only to liturgists. Other scholars of ritual can learn a great deal from it about the relation of ritual to modern culture, a relationship that is frequently overlooked in cultural anthropological reflection in ritual studies. Of course, Lukken still speaks as a liturgist. His standpoint is also the starting point of the analysis: an optimistic view of the future of ritual and Christian liturgy. In this regard this third part is particularly informative and representative of Lukken’s work.

All three parts of the book make a relevant contribution to present-day ritual and liturgical studies. The mass of material and Lukken’s profound knowledge of the literature in this field make the book a true magnum opus. It is comparable to major international studies in the field of ritual and liturgy, and from an anthropological perspective there is a dearth of such studies. Thus it is a useful and mandatory work for the Dutch context, other modernised contexts and especially the field of ritual and liturgical studies.


Reviewed by Leo van der Tuin, Tilburg

The book reports on an empirical study of the initial situation, worldview-related backgrounds and ‘subjective educational theories’ of teachers and students in Belgian secondary schools (more specifically in Flanders and Brussels). It was prompted by the introduction of compulsory new curricula for Roman Catholic religious education in 2000. The research was conducted in 2002.

The authors see the book as a manual of sources and information for further study, interpretation, discussion and policy making. Hence it comprises only an introduction on the research hypotheses and questions, followed by the empirical results of a survey conducted among 98 teachers and 1416 students. The questionnaires were completed by students during religious education lessons, while teachers completed theirs in their own time.

The study deals with two domains. The first is the family, traditionally regarded as the basis of religious education, although this can no longer be taken for granted. Various aspects of this education, both general and more specifically religious, are explored. The authors’ concern is with the relation between family characteristics and religious identity, both among students and among their teachers. Interestingly, Muslim students responded to the same items as Christian students; unfortunately they constitute a mere 1.5 percent of the sample.

The second domain is religious education at school. The first set of questions deals with the concept of religious education underlying the new RC curriculum, namely the hermeneutic communicative concept. To what extent do students and teachers meet the conditions for such an approach? Here the focus is on narrativity, identity, communication and a search for meaning. The second set of questions deals with three dimensions of interreligious learning: mono-religious (learning in), multi-religious (learning about) and interreligious learning (learning from). What conditions do students and teachers meet in regard to the plausibility of these models?
The description of the theoretical premises and methodology of the study is followed by un-interpreted data analyses. A series of tables are presented without any comments. If these data are to be at all meaningful, they require detailed reflection in other publications.

In some instances the results of scale analyses are provided, such as the attitude towards religion scale, which has the following dimensions: second naivety, relativism, external criticism and orthodoxy. Other scales include those for educational style, conception of religious education and notions about interreligious learning. The analyses of the data on both teachers and students conclude with a typology of models. These are all composed of different scales, hence it is not easy to integrate them. At best they can be described as typologies of ways of dealing with fundamental outlooks on life. Among teachers the models are the following: the engaged Christian teacher with a conscious Christian identity, the tolerant teacher with an open-minded attitude towards other religions, the discontinuous teacher who questions tradition, and the collaborative teacher who puts the accent on dialogue with students.

The data on students culminate in a typology of five models: a pluralistic model, in which religious education is seen as an open dialogue; a closed Christian model, displaying marked exclusivist features; a supportive family relations model that does not altogether fit the data, since it pertains mainly to the family; a collaborative model that largely concurs with the communicative hermeneutic concept of religious education; and a discontinuity model, which in fact rejects religion. Some of the models in the teacher and student typologies are parallel: the open pluralistic and tolerant models, and the two Christian models.

Finally the authors draw a provisional, hence highly generalised conclusion from their study. They realise that teachers face the extremely difficult task of engaging the Christian tradition in dialogue with modern fundamental outlooks on life. Among teachers the models are the following: the engaged Christian teacher with a conscious Christian identity, the tolerant teacher with an open-minded attitude towards other religions, the discontinuous teacher who questions tradition, and the collaborative teacher who puts the accent on dialogue with students.

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The European study by Ziebertz et al. (Youth in Europe. An international empirical study about life perspectives, 2005) contains most comparable elements.
The volume presents a wide variety of cases and perspectives on these. In the first chapter the concepts and perspectives are defined. It includes definitions of the key concepts of disaster and ritual, as well as the qualities of ritual, its function and the perspectives of ritual and liturgical inculturation. The main point of the choice of definitions is to show the dynamic and emerging character of ritual, which is contextually bound yet always has some sort of source or origin. It needs to be inculturated again and again in constantly changing contexts.

The second, third and fourth chapters present concrete material on disaster ritual. The second chapter starts with an overview of disaster ritual in the Netherlands from 1990 until 2001. The cases presented indicate a surprisingly coherent ritual repertoire. The different forms of ritual action are characterised and contexts are compared. Some international cases are also reported, for instance ritual performances after the 9/11 disaster. The authors’ exploratory conclusions include the role of being part of a huge group, which offers anonymity while at the same time providing an opportunity to find gestures to express one’s feelings for a moment, something that cannot happen outside a ritual setting.

The third chapter elaborates on the cases reported in the second chapter, such as the Bijlmer disaster and the Hercules disaster. Here the authors use qualitative research methods, more specifically observation and description as found in ethnography and other disciplines. At the same time the description entails analysis and reflection drawing on relevant literature from the social and cultural sciences, religious studies and theology. Concrete cases and categories of ritual action, such as the silent march, are presented. Comparisons are made with other ritual activities such as memorial rituals or funerals, and phenomena like monuments. The fourth chapter contains comparable material on non-Dutch cases: the Estonia disaster in Sweden and 9/11 in the USA.

In the fifth chapter the concept of ritual dynamics is discussed. Here the authors look for perspectives in a recent debate in ritual studies: what is the dynamics of ritual today? Do we live in a time of crisis or abundance? The authors adopt a balanced view, highlighting the weaknesses and strengths of contemporary ritual repertoires. This view is developed further in the sixth chapter, which opens up perspectives on, for instance, the identification of disaster rituals as an interesting study object.

The book provides an interesting and rich collection of material, theoretical discussions and methodological approaches. As such it certainly offers new angles for ritual studies and for liturgical studies, which deals more specifically with traditional religious ritual repertoires. Empirically it represents a good start and invites further research.

One could ask whether the ideas and concepts that the authors derive from the wealth of material actually correspond with the feelings of participants in these rituals. That would require the use of more methods than just the ethnographic method employed here. This is where the book invites further interdisciplinary research, and one can but hope that it is a starting point for such research in this very interesting and relevant field. In this sense the book is a good example of how ritual studies should function: as a platform on which different perspectives complement each other in order to obtain a complete picture.


Reviewed by Paul Ballard, Cardiff

This contribution to the series of ‘Empirical Studies in Theology’ addresses an important issue in ministry facing the Catholic Church in the Netherlands today. As a Protestant British citizen, the reviewer certainly recognises it, even with the odd usage of ‘religion’ instead of ‘ministry’ in the title, as one that faces all ‘main stream’ Christian traditions in the United Kingdom, and presumably elsewhere in the Western world. The question is how the autho-
rised pastoral ministry of the churches understands itself in a secular environment both in terms of its own self-legitimation and in relation to the wider community.

Schilderman explores this on the basis of an extensive questionnaire. 481 pastors, priests, deacons and pastoral workers, responded. The distribution across these categories is inevitably somewhat uneven, though without undermining the results. The shift to professionalism, it is asserted, is to be seen in contemporary pastoral practice and this represents a move away from the traditional founding of ministry on tradition and ecclesial authority.

‘The research problem is: what legitimation does [a] theology of ministry offer pastors for the professionalisation of pastoral work?’ (p.52) The extent of incipient professionalised attitudes are measured through responses to such marks of professionalism as specialised skills, responding to clients need, group identity and mutual support. The values placed on these are then measured against a complex and interlinked range of variables. So, for example, variations are noted between those who exercise a generalist parochial ministry and those with specialised tasks; between those whose orientation to their ministry is ‘orthodox’ (or traditional), ‘communitarian’ (or congregational), ‘traditional’ (or interpersonal) or ‘religious’ (concerned with spiritual development); between those who would look for institutional legitimation to the Church, the university or a professional association, such as a Pastoral Workers Association.

The process and rationale are carefully set out in five substantial chapters and a plethora of tables, somewhat awkwardly placed as an appendix. Each stage of the argument is embedded in a relevant hinterland of learning, from theology and ethics to sociology. It is, however, not an easy read. The translation is, on the whole highly competent, with few solecisms, but it could not overcome the density of style nor the accumulation of technical terms.

The findings, however, are of considerable interest; too many to be summarised here. Cumulatively they underline what one would expect from personal experience and anecdotal evidence. The rub, it would seem, is that there is a growing gap between the official, normative, theological language and practical assumptions of the Church administration and the practice of more and more of those in pastoral practice. On almost all counts there is a sharp difference between those who operate in the ‘orthodox’ traditional mould and the rest. This reflects the attempts of pastors, including priests, to find new ways of understanding their ministry that will allow them to connect both with their fellow Christians and the wider community for whom the former authoritative pastoral structures are increasingly obsolete and who are used to a more professional model.

This raises the question, however, whether the one has to be completely discarded for the other. In a somewhat surprising finale Schilderman argues for a compatibility, especially with a communitarian model, between them, drawing on the concept of subsidiarity. But that may leave the question of the danger of professional exclusivism unanswered. Is professional legitimate in a context which is meant to be prophetic as well as pastoral and priestly?

Schilderman has touched on a vital issue even if much is still open for debate. His considerable contribution is to provide some solid evidence of what is actually happening on the ground. This is important in an area where decisions are so often taken on idealistic doctrinal grounds. He also refers to the World Council of Churches study ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’. This suggests that there is room for further study at an ecumenical level. Certainly it would be very useful to have something of the findings in a much more accessible form in order to inform ecclesiastical policy making and in the many other places where these questions are of real practical import.

Reviewed by Don Browning, Chicago

*Is there a God of Human Rights* is the most ambitious and successful study to date from the new genre of practical theology called empirical theology. It is the product of a long and fruitful collaborative study of the 1996 transition in South Africa from a government ruled by parliamentary sovereignty to a parliament constrained by a democratic constitution and bill of rights. In the mid-1990s, Johannes van der Ven of the University of Nijmegen joined forces with Jaco Dreyer and Hendrik Pierterse of the University of South Africa to study certain aspects of this process. Specifically, they wanted to study the relation of actual religious attitudes to the human rights emphasis of the new South African constitution.

The study that resulted is simultaneously empirical, historical, and theological. These are types of inquiry generally kept apart in the contemporary academy. In this book, they are artfully and profoundly brought together with the utmost rigor. The empirical study centers around a survey of the relation of religious attitudes to attitudes about human rights in three large populations of eleventh grade students in the Johannesburg-Pretoria area of South Africa. The students came from Anglican private schools, Catholic private schools, and Afrikaans medium public schools. The Anglican and Catholic schools were multicultural, and the Afrikaans school was monocultural. Questionnaires were administered on six religious themes – God, evil, the imitation of Jesus, salvation, the nature of religious communities, and interreligious interaction. Student attitudes toward these themes were compared to their attitudes toward human rights. Population measures pertaining to age, gender, home language, political attitudes, and cultural attitudes were also measured for their effects on human rights attitudes. Student attitudes were measured toward the three generations of human rights – civil and political, socio-economic, and collective.

Differences between these three groups of students who will constitute the future citizens of South Africa were small but revealing. In short, religious attitudes had an ambiguous influence on human rights attitudes – sometimes negative yet sometimes positive. For example, students from monocultural white Afrikaan schools were less positive about civil and political rights than students from multicultural schools, suggesting that in contrast to what is often charged, human rights is not just a “white issue.” On socio-political and environmental issues (what governments owe their citizens in terms of jobs, housing, security, and protection of the environment), students from all three types of school were in general more positive. Here are some other differences. Men were more positive about civil and political rights, and women more supportive of socio-economic rights. Students from all of these schools were negative about religious rights. But these are just a few examples of a rich array of findings, all pointing to the complex relation between religious attitudes and attitudes about human rights.

The bulk of the book consists of an amazingly wide ranging historical and critical discussion of the relation through the centuries of religion to human rights in societies that have informed Western democracy. These sections are largely written by van der Ven and display his typical care and encyclopedic knowledge. Principally using the thought of Hegel on mutual recognition, he denies the charge that the idea of human rights is necessarily individualistic. He reviews the history of Jewish and Christian thought on the polarities of individualism versus collectivism and universality versus particularity. He acknowledges that Christian theology has, at times, been hegemonic in its universalistic claims. However, in the teachings of Jesus, he finds a kind of “dialogic universalism” that can provide a positive framework for religious attitudes toward human rights. In short, whether or not there is a God of human rights depends on the way Christian ideas about God function in particular
contexts and social conditions. When does religion seem to have a positive effect on human rights? It is when religion is part of a multigenerational deliberative quest in contrast to a fixed sets of dogmas and rules.

This is an extremely important book that warrants serious study and discussion by scholars in law, political science, and international relations as well as various theological specialties. My reading, however, did leave me with a short wish list. I wish the students had been interviewed and that the flavor of their thinking had been woven into the fabric of the book. I wish that the broad issues of universalism versus particularism and individualism versus collectivism had arisen from the language of the students rather than from elite scholarly discourse. Finally, I would have liked to learn how this fine team of scholars might actually have engaged these students in sharing, and perhaps promoting, the team’s ideas about the relation of Christian beliefs to a culture of human rights. In other words, it would have been instructive to see how the full practical hermeneutical circle might have culminated in a dialogue with the students.


Reviewed by R. Robinson, Nijmegen

As the title indicates, the main subject of the book is covenant marriage. The term originates from a development in the civil law of three American states: Louisiana, Arizona and Arkansas. In these states couples can choose between a ‘normal’ contractual marriage with minimal formalities and attendant rights to no-fault divorce, or a covenant marriage with more stringent rules for formation and dissolution. In various articles Jewish, Christian and Islamic scholars reflect on the concept of covenant marriage in their religious traditions. The purpose of the collection is to stimulate religious traditions to think more seriously about restoring and reforming their own religious law on marriage, divorce and sexuality instead of simply acquiescing in state laws and culture.

The area covered combines historical research and exegesis of scriptural texts and the major law codes in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions. No empirical research was used. Since the aim is to compare studies of the various religious traditions, the book as a whole can be seen as a comparative study. From the comparison it is clear that the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions have a different understanding of marriage from secular society. In the Christian tradition the idea of a covenant marriage stems from John Calvin’s thinking. The Catholic Church introduced the term at the Second Vatican Council. The Jewish and Islamic scholars make it clear that in their traditions the term ‘covenant marriage’ is new, but elements of this interpretation of marriage can be discerned.

The publication forms part of the series ‘Religion, marriage and family’, edited by Don S. Browning and John Witte Jr. The general aim of the series is to understand, renew and redefine current views of marriage, family and children, probing the resources of the Christian, Jewish and Islamic traditions. This volume contains no reference to other publications either within or outside the series. It contributes to the debate on marriage and sexuality in modern society, but its academic relevance is questionable. The aim is to stimulate religious institutions to rethink their views on marriage and sexuality in a highly permissive society. This may be important in a political debate, but a scholarly debate could perhaps benefit more from a hermeneutic perspective, in which the tensions and commonalities between religious and secular views of marriage can be explored. It may also be a bit forced to look for a Calvinistic approach to marriage in the different religious traditions. In the introduction Witte already points out that in the Jewish and Islamic traditions the
covenantal idea of marriage only developed very recently. In the Roman Catholic tradition the idea of marriage as a covenant was only introduced in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. Does the volume in fact compare the perspectives of the three Abrahamic traditions or does it interpret them in a Calvinistic framework? In other words, do the authors really adopt a comparative approach to marriage?