

Joel Mokhoathi

Dr. Joel Mokhoathi, Faculty
of Theology and Religion,
University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein.
E-mail: Mokhoathij@ufs.ac.za

Lodewyk Sutton

Prof. Lodewyk Sutton, Faculty
of Theology and Religion,
University of the Free State,
Bloemfontein.
E-mail: Suttonl@ufs.ac.za

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 marked the beginning of the 40th Celebration of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State. The theme for the celebrations is “Transforming Theology and Religion?”.

“Transforming Theology and Religion?” – The theme of the 40-year anniversary is ambiguous. With this theme, the Faculty is accentuating the fact that theology and religion are transforming. Also, in the Free State, theology and religion have in many ways contributed towards the transformation of the country and continent. It is, however, also acknowledged that theology and religion have not always actually practised this transforming potential. In fact, theology and religion have in some ways coalesced against transformation. The question mark in the theme is therefore very significant. Theology itself will have to be transformed, to form and transform. The theme of the 40-year anniversary therefore allows us to ask anew how theology and religion will have to be transformed so that we – in inter- and multi-disciplinary conversation as well as in light of the many ways in which we have not actualised this – will practise our transforming potential globally and locally in accordance with this significant milestone.

This publication is structured to focus on eight contributions to the theme related to religion and a further five contributions made from biblical studies (Old and New Testament), with a special addition at the end containing seven articles focusing on the theme from the Book of Psalms.¹

1 The overviews provided in this introduction are compiled from sections of the articles of the different authors and therefore credit must be given to each of them.

The first eight articles from the perspective of religion approached the theme in many instances from the point of religious transformation and society. This viewpoint is considered for one particular reason, that, as mentioned, the theme is ambiguous. On the one hand, theology and religion can serve as transformative catalysts in society, while on the other, theology and religions themselves transform over time due to socio-political, economic and cultural developments. In this regard, scholarly contributions looking at the role of religion in society were requested from various scholars, to be included in this *Supplimentum* to commemorate the 40 years of the Faculty. These contributions came from S. Astapov, E. Baron, J. Beyers, P. Dijkhuizen, W. Domeris, D. Ellington, Y. Gavrilova, and J. Mokhoathi.

What follows is an overview of each individual article that was submitted by the mentioned scholars focusing on Religious Studies. The contribution by Sergey Astapov starts the section under Religion Studies, by looking at methodologies of post-secular society theories for application in research on religion in his article, *Transforming the study of religious situation: the outlook of post-secular society theories*. He notes that the discourses that emerge from theories of the post-secular society, which recognises the transformation of the place of religion in the public sphere at the beginning of the 21st century, see the contradictory unity of religious and secular moments in any social phenomenon, thereby transforming the established scientific approach to the study of religion with concepts of post-secular society theories.

Eugene Baron's article on *The transformative role of the media in the formation of virtuous citizens: a contribution to reconciliation in a post-Apartheid South Africa* reflects on "State Theology", as propagated under the name of Christianity during the time of apartheid. Baron critically interrogates the role of newspapers in moral formation as a positive reinforcement for ethical behaviour and thereby enabling the process of reconciliation.

Jaco Beyers, extending this debate on the role of religion in society, notes in his article, *Religious transformation and society: The role of religion in society*, that the role that religion plays in society is ambiguous. As Baron noted that Christianity was used as an oppressive tool during the apartheid era, Beyers also contends that religion is a paradox. He argues that many wars have been fought with religion as both instigator and motivator. Again, religions have also been constantly used to root out violence and oppression, and to motivate the search for peace. He notes that there were religious leaders who famously fought against apartheid in South Africa, while there were also those religious leaders who expressed

support for and legitimated apartheid. This speaks to the paradoxical nature of religion – it is both an asset and a danger, depending on how it is used.

Petra Dijkhuizen, in *Conceptualising religion in the twenty-first century: examining the proposal of Mark C. Taylor in After God*, offers a critical review of Taylor's work and points out some inconsistencies in Taylor's application of religion as a complex adaptive system.

William Domeris, in his article *Dystopian reality? Reading the hunger games in an African Context*, continues to pay attention to the present situation by focusing on gender-based violence, where there is neglect of women and children, and the problem of male violence. He does this by looking at two quite different studies of shame and honour – by Ryan P Brown and Suzanne Collins, and linking these to the biblical narrative where Jesus challenged the system of shame and honour as glorified by Roman imperialism.

Responding to current times, Yulia Gavrilova looks at *COVID-19 pandemic as a socio-psychological influence and transformations in religion*. Through her sociological survey on 4700 residents of Moscow and the Moscow region, she observes how scholars, politicians, economists, religious figures, believers and ordinary people living without commitment to any ideas and principles experience panic attacks as well as inadequate emotional and sensory reactions to what is happening in the world due to COVID-19. As a result, she noticed that apocalyptic fears, eschatological expectations, and *thanatophobias* (fears of death) are on the rise. These led to major changes in how religion is being practised, as religious services and sermons were either cancelled or preached remotely by using broadcasting networks.

Dustin Ellington, in his article *The promise of attending to literary context for contextual biblical hermeneutics in Africa*, continues to highlight the significance of a contextual biblical hermeneutics in Africa. He argues that at the heart of biblical hermeneutics is the need for readers to find some form of dialogue between the text and context, and to ask questions that will help them use literary contexts to observe the main aims, themes, and lines of thought of passages of Scripture while also asking questions that foster a deep identification between biblical texts and the readers' context.

Joel Mokhoathi, in his article *Christianity in transformation: the rise of African Christianity among amaXhosa*, looks at how religion transforms over time by focusing on African Christianity among the *amaXhosa* of the Eastern Cape. His study focuses on the character of Ntsikana, who was both a Xhosa Christian prophet and an African traditional diviner.

The next section of the publication focuses on contributions from the field of Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament), with a special edition of papers at the end focusing specifically on the theme from the book of Psalms. The articles in this section used different hermeneutical approaches towards the theme and appropriated the theme in different ways. The first contribution on this section is structured according to themes, then Pentateuch, Historical Literature, Wisdom Literature and Prophets. These contributions come from C. Frevel, D.J. Human, J.S. van der Walt, S. Fischer, and M.D. Terblanche. The special edition of articles on the book of Psalms is structured according to themes and then follows the numbering of the Psalms. These contributions came from N.L. deClaisse-Walford, K. Jacobson, C. Brown Jones, L. Sutton, D. Davage, D.G. Firth and G.T.M. Prinsloo.

What follows is an overview of the individual articles that were submitted by the mentioned scholars focusing on Biblical Studies. Christian Frevel, in his article on *Tradition of Reform as Reform of Tradition* begins by questioning the commonly held assumption that tradition is fixed and does not change over time. For Frevel, tradition is a dynamic concept because traditions undergo constant revision and amendment. In his article, the relationship between reform and tradition is evaluated, whereafter the findings are demonstrated using three text examples in which the recourse to traditions in reforms turns out to be an innovation and an invention of tradition.

In his article, Dirk Human, explains that the re-interpretation of theological motifs or ideas leads to transforming theology and religion. For Human, this phenomenon takes place within the corpus and boundaries of the Old Testament. He explains this by looking at how “later texts” re-interpret “earlier” texts. He ends by demonstrating how the book of Ruth re-interpreted certain pentateuchal texts as an act of transforming theology.

Steve van der Walt uses the narrative in 1 Kings 17:1-16 that tells of a strange encounter between two people of different backgrounds, to illustrate how dialogue brings them closer to each other in a mysterious way, causing them to change roles. The dialogue brings the transformed realisation that the trust the two have for each other has an origin far deeper than they could imagine.

From a perspective of wisdom, Stefan Fischer approaches the theme of transformation in the Wisdom Books of the Hebrew Bible to appropriate his findings to the contexts of southern Africa. He explores the transformation of southern African theology and society through the books of Job and

Proverbs and how folk sayings can be relevant for the transformation of South African university education, and how biblical proverbs may transform folk proverbs. He therefore proposes that a secular society should be an enabler of different religious traditions.

Marius Terblanche focuses on the theme using Jeremiah 31:31-34 to indicate a prospect of true transformation. In his article he shows that the theme of transformation of reality is one of the unifying themes in Jeremiah 30-31 that indicates allusion, against the background of Deuteronomy. These allusions in Jeremiah 31:31-34 demonstrate that the new covenant passage attained a distinct identity by the promise of a radical transformation. In addition, he shows that the application of utopian literary theory suggests that Jeremiah's utopian vision enflamed possibility and awakened emotional yearning for a better world.

In the first of the articles in the special section focusing on the theme of the publication from the Book of Psalms, Nancy deClaisse-Walford surveys the imprecatory words in the book of Psalms and examines and questions their place in the faith life of the third decade of the 21st-century world, one that is fraught with the impact of a global pandemic, political uncertainties, and racial injustices.

In his article, Karl Jacobson looks at metaphorical expression that is profoundly transformative, both cognitively and theologically. This said, he indicates that not all metaphors are created equal, nor are they simplistically metaphorical in the strictest sense. Looking at the two distinctive semantic movements in metaphor, namely epiphor and diaphor, he explores the semantic depth of the two ways in which metaphor functions, by investigating several historical references in the psalms with a view to understanding when history is history, when history is plainly metaphorical, and when history is best understood diaphorically.

Christine Brown Jones focuses on two large sections in the Book of Psalms, namely books I and II. She approaches the theme in these two books by looking at transforming presence from the perspective of God's body. She indicates that the Book of Psalms contains a significant amount of language and imagery related to the physical and sensing body of God. Understanding the body and body language necessitates an understanding of the culture that produced the language. The references to God's head and hands in Psalms correspond to a broader ancient Israelite emphasis on God's communication and action.

Lodewyk Sutton also focuses on the body, but on a transforming body. He reads Psalms 50 and 51 from a post-exilic context in the light of social norms communicated through the Leviticus sacrificial system and body

imagery. Reading these Psalms in the light of social norms communicates the body's renewal process, applied to the community of Israel and to the individual who is praying these Psalms before God becomes apparent.

David Davage's article *Paratextual framings of Psalm 72 and the shaping of interpretive possibilities*, focuses on how paratextual reframings of Psalm 72 have transformed the royal ideology in the psalm. In his article, the paratexts are addressed one by one. He notes that the doxology in verses 18-19 is added as a theological correction, creating a tension between the psalm proper and the paratext; whereafter he argues that verses 1 and 20 cast the psalm as David's prayer for Solomon. The effect of these paratextual activities is then traced over time, first in the Hebrew Bible, in Second-Temple literature, in the New Testament, as well as in Christian and Jewish expositions. The article, therefore, indicates various ways in which the tensions are resolved and how these interactions, in turn, generate new paratexts.

Reading Psalm 100 from a perspective of war language within the context of Psalms 93-100, David Firth demonstrates in this psalm the transformation of war language to the language of worship. In his article, the background in warfare is explored through intertextual links within this collection and then against the background provided by the book of Joshua as a sample text. As the conclusion to this collection within the Psalter, Psalm 100 transforms this language so that YHWH's kingship over all the earth is expressed not in the violence of conquest but rather in the joyful submission of freely given worship.

Gert Prinsloo, with his article, *From desperation to adoration: Reading Psalm 107 as a transforming spatial journey*, concludes this publication by using critical spatiality to open avenues to investigate the transforming power of the authors/redactors of the Hebrew Bible's spatial imagination. He reads Psalm 107 as a spatial journey bridging the divide between the desperation of the exile and the longing of the Psalter's post-exilic authors/redactors for Israel's complete restoration and the universal adoration of YHWH. According to him, Psalm 107 hints at a continuous transforming spatial journey between present realities and the longed-for eschatological establishment of a universal, divine kingdom.

From us as guest editors of the publication of *Transforming Theology and Religion*, we would like to give special thanks to each contributor to the publication. Each of these contributions has enriched the publication and provided viewpoints on the theme that would otherwise not have been raised. We believe that these contributions will be valuable to the academic community and will contribute to the 40-year celebration of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State.