

Editorial

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This issue of *Exchange* offers a series of articles exploring the concepts of religion and religious diversity. The first four articles, based on papers presented at a conference in the Netherlands, explore the concept 'religion' from a variety of angles. Everyone whoever participated in an inter-religious dialogue must have discovered how crucial the concept of religion is that is used by the people attending these dialogues. It is fundamental for the understanding of one's own faith but also for perceiving the religious traditions of others. It was for this reason that I, in my previous capacity as the managing editor of *Exchange*, decided to devote an issue of this journal to the concept of religion in inter-religious contexts. The emphasis of the discussion in this issue is not on discussions of the concept of religion in the field of the philosophy of religion, but rather on how this conceptualization is employed in the interaction between adherents of various religious traditions and also in the interaction between religions and the state.

The first article, written by Paul Hedges, focuses on the deconstruction of the concept of religion. He starts with a discussion of those proposing a so-called hard deconstruction in which the concept of religion is replaced by other concepts; in this approach the idea that religion has something like a *proprium* of its own is dismissed completely. Subsequently he pleads for what he calls a soft-deconstruction, which asserts the social and religious realities of religion.

In the second article Marius van Hoogstraten continues the discussion about the deconstruction of the concept of religion. He points out that this concept has its roots in defining the differences between religions and religious communities. He indicates that these differences are often very blurry. He wonders whether a further analysis of the concept of religion is very helpful. Would it not be much more fruitful, he wonders, to scrutinise how the differences between religions are used? He advocates a more profound exploration of how certain collectivities and practices come to be defined as 'other religions'. Why are they 'other'?

Daan F. Oostveen, the author of the third article, starts his contribution with an investigation of the concept of religion in the context of multiple religious belonging. He distinguishes three hermeneutics on religion and religious diversity in theology and religious studies: a hermeneutics of multiple religions, a hermeneutics of hybrid religiosity and a hermeneutics of deconstruction. In the second half of his article he argues that religions or religious traditions are reified imaginative formations resulting in the so-called World Religions Paradigm. To what extent does multiple religious belonging affect the reality of this paradigm? Are people with multiple religious belonging really following hybrid forms of religion or is the idea of world religions, in fact, unreal?

The last article on this theme from Bram Colijn analyses how the concept of religion is employed in China. He does so on the basis of his fieldwork in this country. He observes that the concept is employed by many different authors, including the Chinese state and certain individuals. In the definition of the Chinese state religion first and foremost seems to mean that certain phenomena, which outside China are considered to be genuinely religious, such as magic and superstition, are excluded. In China he discovered that people of different religions but living in one household play with the various definitions of religion when they explain why they can either combine or not combine their differing affiliations. He also discovered that although the concept of religion has its roots in academia it is nowadays employed by many people outside this milieu. In other words, if it is abolished in academia it will still be in use outside this context.

In all these articles definitions of religion are used either to demarcate the differences between certain religions or to show that they, despite their mutual differences, belong to the same genus. In other words, defining religion always has a contextual component. When discussing this concept, it is important to be aware of this.

In the fifth article of this issue, Auli Vähäkangas and Annette Leis-Peters focus on young people's experiences of religious diversity in two Nordic localities in Finland and in Norway. With the help of Haugen's reformulation of the concept conviviality and his distinction between the layers of respect, relationality and reciprocity, Vähäkangas and Leis-Peters demonstrate that living in the same neighbourhood with youth from other religious traditions helps young people to face religious diversity and develop respectful attitudes towards the religious other. However, their fieldwork also shows that despite day-to-day experiences of religious diversity, young people rarely build social networks or long-term friendships across religious boundaries. Coexistence in itself, they conclude, is not sufficient to generate reciprocity.

The review section includes individual book reviews as well as a review article by Steve Bevens, in which he gives an appraisal of the 35 volume Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, published by the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

I hope that this first issue of 2018 will stimulate reflections about the notions of religious diversity and interreligious relations as well as on the concept(s) of religion that lie beneath these thoughts and discussions.

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Guest Editor