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Men, Masculinities, and Religion

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The journal *Religion and Gender* is having its 10-year anniversary, and this is well worth celebrating. Over the past ten years, it has successfully managed to bring together scholars from different disciplines to ‘explore the relation, confrontation, and intersection of gender and religion, taking into account the multiple and changing manifestations of religion in diverse social and cultural contexts’, as the editors formulated the journal’s scope in 2019. This has resulted in a rich collection of articles on a wide variety of topics, varying from Catholic views on assisted reproductive techniques to Muslim women’s self-representations in the arts, and from transwomen’s religious leadership in the Netherlands to the changing sartorial practices of Sikh women in the diaspora. Additionally, the journal has an excellent book review section, informing readers about the latest scholarly works in this field. As such, *Religion and Gender* has established itself as the leading journal for the study of gender and religion.

It is striking, however, that most contributions focus on women and on queer identities. Considerably less attention has been paid to cisgender, heterosexual men. This is not very strange, considering the history of gender studies. Rooted in the conviction that women and queer perspectives are all too often being made invisible, critical scholars tend to grant a hermeneutical privilege to people who are marginalized on the basis of gender. It was only during the twenty-first century that the study of masculinities really began to flourish. Scholars paid more and more attention to the lived experiences of men as gendered beings—also in relation to religion. At the same time, a growing number of scholars began to ask how ‘hegemonic’ and ‘subordinate’ masculinities are constructed in relation to each other. ‘Hegemonic masculinity’ has proven to be a useful conceptual tool to analyze normative ideas about masculinity that never fully correspond to the lives of actual men, but that produce widespread ideals, fantasies and desires towards an ultimately unachievable ideal. The concept is also increasingly used in combination with intersectional theory to analyze gendered power inequalities among men arising from race, class, age, sexual-

ity, ability, nationality, religion, and so on (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hibbins and Pease 2009).

In the journal *Religion and Gender*, these developments have led to a number of excellent contributions, with topics varying from Pentecostal Christian discourses about ‘male headship’ in Zambia (van Klinken 2011) to Hindu men participating in the Ayyappan pilgrimage festival in South India (Wilson 2016), and from the propagation of hetero-machismo by the Danish leader of a Tibetan Buddhist movement (Scherer 2011) to Evangelical Christian masculinity as expressed through an American cooking show (Cooper 2013). Three thematic issues are worth mentioning here. The first one is a thematic issue on ‘Religion and masculinities—continuities and change’ from 2012, guest edited by Björn Krondorfer and Stephen Hunt. It includes articles on male spirituality in the contemporary Pagan movement in the UK and the US, Muslim men in the *Tablighi Jama’at* movement in Kenya, and many more topics. The second one is a thematic issue on gender in shari’a-based family law legislation from 2017, guest edited by Betty de Hart, Nadia Sonneveld, and Iris Sportel. Whereas most research on Islamic family law focuses on the position of women, this thematic issue also takes into account the effects of legal reforms on men. The third one is a thematic issue on gendered representations of Jesus from 2020, guest edited by Jamie Pitts and Peter-Ben Smit. All three thematic issues take the critical study of men and masculinity heads on.

Nevertheless, men and masculinities seem to remain somewhat understudied in this journal and in the broader field of gender studies. This observation is not new. In the aforementioned thematic issue from 2012, Krondorfer and Hunt write in their editorial that ‘despite its present vibrancy, men’s studies still remains an under-researched field, and this is notably so in precincts clearly related to aspects of religiosity’ (197). Their call to shed more light on men in religion is still relevant today. And while there is still a great deal of research to be done on sociocultural representations of masculinity, this is even more true for the lived experiences of men as gendered beings. In the latest volumes of *Religion and Gender*, the latter topic has received almost no attention.

This way, men—and especially cisgender, heterosexual men—seem to remain in the proverbial ‘eye of the hurricane’. While the entire hurricane rotates around the eye, the eye itself is the calmest part of the hurricane. Similarly, while the experiences of cisgender, heterosexual men are the unmarked norm from which the experiences of women and queer people supposedly deviate (and often are measured against), these men’s experiences are seldom explicitly analyzed from a gender perspective, and they are seldom invited to reflect on their experiences *as men* either.

There is much to be gained from studying men and masculinities in relation to religion. Firstly, analyzing men's gendered religious experiences is vital for our understanding of religion as a social phenomenon. Secondly, religion is in itself a useful entry point to open up conversations about masculinity, as exemplified in a recent article by the sociologist Line Nyhagen (2020) in *The Journal of Men's Studies*. Nyhagen examines how a group of white, heterosexual, middle-class, lay Anglican men in the UK construct masculinities via discourses on church-going, worship styles, and submission to God. Her research results challenge fixed notions of 'hegemonic masculinity', and lay bare tensions between competing masculinity norms. During the last ten years, the journal *Religion and Gender* has built an excellent reputation, and everything indicates that it will remain the leading journal in its field for the next ten years to come. Let's hope that there are many more interesting contributions on men and masculinities to come!

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