

## SVENSK TEOLOGISK KVARTALSKRIFTS REDAKTIONSRÅD

MARTIN BERTSON  
Göteborgs universitet

ANNE KATRINE DE HEMMER GUDME  
Universitetet i Oslo

PATRIK HAGMAN  
Åbo Akademi

MICHAEL HJÄLM  
Enskilda Högskolan Stockholm,  
Sankt Ignatios Akademi

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# In memoriam påve Franciskus

*En mariologisk apokalyptiker*

(1936–2025)

MÅRTEN BJÖRK

Precis som budet ”Du skall inte dräpa” markerar en tydlig gräns för att skydda värdet av mänskligt liv, måste vi i dag också säga ”du skall inte” till en uteslutnings- och ojämlikhetsekonomi. En sådan ekonomi dödar. Hur kommer det sig att det inte är en dagsnyhet när en äldre hemlös dör utan kläder och värme men väl när aktiemarknaden tappar två punkter?

Orden från påve Franciskus apostoliska exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*Evangeliets glädje*) från november 2013, sju månader efter att hans pontifikat inletts, sammanfattar nog för många den argentinske jesuitprästens tänkande och gärning. När Franciskus avled den 21 april i år, åttioåtta år gammal, beskrevs hans ämbetsperiod av både motståndare och sympatisörer som ett politiskt pontifikat. Det är inte helt missvisande, men orsaken tycks inte bero på att Franciskus var en särskilt politisk påve, utan på att den katolska kyrkan verkar i en värld präglad av politiska och militära konflikter till den grad att även bönen, mystiken och kontemplerationen kan bli politiska. ”Allting börjar i mystiken, men slutar i politiken” skrev en gång den franske poeten och essäisten Charles Péguy – som Franciskus ofta återvände till i sina predikningar och skrifter – och denna lägesbeskrivning kan hjälpa oss förstå den romersk-katolska kyrkans förste sydamerikanske påve.

Franciskus var en mystiker, en apokalyptisk och mariologisk mystiker som blev påve och världsledare i en övergångstid som kanske kan spåras tillbaka till den globala finanskraschen 2008–2009. I en intervju från 2013, kort efter att hans pontifikat inletts, beskrev Franciskus Ignatius av Loyola,

grundaren av Jesu sällskap som Franciskus tillhörde, och dennes vän Pierre Favre som andliga lärare för en modern tid – en tid som var formad av reformationen och kolonialiseringen av Amerika. Gud finns inte bara i vildmarken utan ger sig till känna för den som vill möta honom mitt i storstadens larm: ”Ignatius var mystiker, inte asket. Jag blir mycket arg när jag hör att man säger att de andliga övningarna är ignatianska för att de äger rum i tystnad. I själva verket kan exercitierna (övningarna) vara fullkomligt ignatianska också mitt i livets brus och utan att man har tystnad runt omkring sig. Att betona askesen, tystnaden och botgöringen är en förvanskning, särskilt vanlig i spanska kretsar. Jag står nära den mystiska strömningen, av typen Louis Lallement och Jean-Joseph Surin. Och Favre var en mystiker.”

Pierre Favre, som levde mellan 1506 och 1546, var medgrundare av jesuitorden och helgonförklarades av Franciskus på sin födelsedag 2013. Påven beundrade honom djupt och kanske var det framför allt den franske jesuitens mytomspunna förmåga att knyta starka band med andra människor, och därmed älska den andre, som Franciskus beundrade. I en text om Favre skriver jesuitfilosofen Michel de Certeau att ”[f]ör varje person han mötte var han en räddare av något djupt inom dem som höll på att gå förlorat [...]. Och genom denna uppmärksamma underkastelse inför andra människors verklighet, förenad med en passion för deras återupprättelse, erhöll Favre nådegåvan att ge andlig vägledning – en nådegåva som gjorde det möjligt för honom att urskilja och blottlägga hos alla han mötte den punkt där frälsningen kom till dem från Gud.” Det var denna punkt Franciskus sökte och han gjorde det i en värld som på många sätt är lika orolig som Favres.

Ärkebiskopen i Buenos Aires, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, som blev påve Franciskus den 13 mars 2013, levde ett turbulent liv. Han erfor och tvingades navigera genom sex militärkupper i Argentina. Den första när han bara var ett barn 1943. Den andra 1955, två år efter att han känt sig kallad till ett liv som präst i samband med att han biktat sig som sjuttonåring. Den tredje 1962, fyra år efter att han trätt in i jesuitorden. Den fjärde kuppen kom 1966 när han undervisade i psykologi och litteratur – han älskade den tidigare nämnde Péguy, Dostojevskij, Manzoni och Borges – på en jesuitskola för pojkar i Buenos Aires. Den femte kuppen ägde rum 1973, samma år som han avlade sina sista löften som jesuit, och den sjätte 1981 efter att han blivit rektor för fakulteten för teologi och filosofi vid Jesuituniversitetet *San Miguel* i Buenos Aires. Där hade han själv studerat och framför allt formats av den franske jesuiten Gaston Fessards dialektiska tolkning av Ignatius av Loyolas andliga övningar och av sin lärare Miguel Ángel Fiorito. Två tänkare som också utvecklat den ignatianska traditionen i den mystiska riktning som Favre, exorcisten Surin – som i över tjugo år plågades av en demon som han drivit

ut – och Lallament representerade för Franciskus. Och demonologin var, för Franciskus, viktig. Kyrkan måste vara en kraft mot intets makter.

Fiorito beskrev i en essä som var avgörande för den blivande påven, ”*La opción personal de S. Ignacio: Cristo o Satanás*”, hur den ignatianska metoden uppdragar att vi är splittrade i ”två olika jag” – det jag som följer Kristus och det jag som följer Satan. Och det är denna slitning som den romersk-katolska kyrkan ska påminna världen om och som jesuiternas andliga övningar ställer oss inför. De gör det mitt i en värld där det kan tyckas omöjligt att handla rätt eftersom vi, som Franciskus ofta betonade, är formade av arvsynden och helt enkelt ofta saknar makten att på egen hand göra vad som är gott. Efter det så kallade smutsiga kriget mellan 1974 och 1983 i Argentina, då runt 30 000 personer dödades eller försvann, kritiserades också den blivande påven – som då var provinsial för den argentinska jesuitorden – för sin försiktiga hållning gentemot militärjuntan. Särskilt omdiskuterat är huruvida han hjälpte två slumpräster, Orlando Yorio och Franz Jalics, som kidnappades av militärer och hölls fängslade i ett hemligt fängelse. Men Franciskus ska ha försökt få dem frisläppta och enligt den italienske journalisten Nello Scavo kan han genom sin tysta diplomati ha räddat mer än tusen personer från tortyr, fängelse och ond bråd död. Det var kanske erfarenheten av en sådan brutal verklighet som fick honom att kort efter Putins fullskaliga invasion av Ukraina 2022 hävda att världen håller på att träda in i ett ”tredje världskrig som utkämpas bit för bit” – ett synsätt som hans efterträdare, Leo XIV, verkar dela då han använde exakt samma ord för att beskriva världsläget i sin första söndagspredikan i maj 2025. Vår värld är en värld som ännu inte är försonad och det är möjligt att det är enklare att se detta om man tillhör det Franciskus återkommande beskrev som de ”existentiella periferierna”. I sin älskade Favres anda hävdade han 2022: ”Endast en kyrka som är nedsänkt i verkligheten, vet på riktigt vad som finns i den samtida människans hjärta. Därför består varje sann kommunikation framför allt av konkret lyssnande, möten, ansikten och berättelser. Om vi inte vet hur man lever i verkligheten, begränsar vi oss till att endast ange riktningar från ovan som ingen lyssnar på.” Kristendomen, hävdade Franciskus, var mer än ett abstrakt trosprogram. Dess dogmatik pekade främst på vem Kristus var – och hur Gud lever – då denna religion är mer än en filosofi. Den är ett liv som erbjuder vänskap, och dess filosofiska och teologiska läror måste kunna visa att det första och det sista är en gudomlig och treenig person – en person som blivit född av en människa.

Om Franciskus pontifikat var politiskt, var det följaktligen för att världen tvingade honom att tolka tidens tecken och agera utifrån denna profetiska tydning. I en meditation 2015 i *Casa Santa Martas* kapell sade han att ”tider-

na förändras och vi kristna måste ständigt förändras”. Man behöver på intet sätt vara en intellektuell eller akademiker för att tolka tidens tecken: ”Se på bönderna, på de ödmjuka: i sin enkelhet förstår de att när regnet kommer växer gräset; de kan skilja vete från ogräs. Som ett resultat kommer enkelheten – om den åtföljs av tystnad, eftertanke och bön – att göra det möjligt för oss att förstå tidens tecken.” Franciskus menade följaktligen att om det skandalösa evangelium som säger att dödens makter börjat övervinnas genom Jesu död, uppståndelse och himmelfärd ska fortsätta vara levande i en alltmer sekulär värld måste kyrkans folk tolka historien och vara beredda att förändras med den. Men den måste tolka historien i relation till det som Franciskus menade var den eviga och oföränderliga kärnpunkten i kristendomen: Jesu bultande och eviga hjärta. Det hjärta som blivit mänskligt och som omsluter oss med både helvetisk vrede och himmelsk kärlek.

Franciskus sista encyklika *Dilexit Nos* (*Han har älskat oss*) från 2024 handlar om Jesu hjärta och belyser den argentinske påvens närhet till en lågkatolsk fromhetskultur där Maria är en central gestalt och hjärtat en viktig soteriologisk symbol. Men även i denna text blir Franciskus mystiska teologi tydligt politisk, då han i augustinsk anda beskriver kyrkan som ett sjukhus som kan hjälpa till att göra världen hel: ”Vi måste komma ihåg att i Romarriket mötte många av de fattiga, invandrarna och andra som levde i samhällets utkanter respekt, kärlek och omsorg från de kristna. Detta förklarar varför den avfällige kejsaren Julianus i ett av sina brev erkände att en av anledningarna till att de kristna respekterades och imiterades var den hjälp de gav de fattiga och främlingarna, som vanligtvis ignorerades och behandlades med förakt.” Franciskus teologiska kardiologi rör därmed inte bara det inre livet. Hjärtat är organet som avgör om vi lever eller ej, och än mer hur vi lever i en ofta hjärtlös värld. Hjärtats symbolik är därför relaterad både till evigheten och vardagen, Gud och världen – just den värld som för så många människor innebär ”en ekonomi som dödar”, som Franciskus alltså skrev i sin första apostoliska exhortation. Statistiken talar också sitt tydliga språk. Närmare sextio procent av världens arbetare, fler än två miljarder människor, är enligt *World Economic Forum* verksamma i den informella ekonomin. Den stora majoriteten av världens arbetare saknar således de sociala skyddsnät som många medborgare i världens rikaste länder i dag menar är hotade av migration och globalisering. Och en stor del av dessa fattiga arbetare, inte minst de som befinner sig på vandring i jakt på fred eller ett tryggare liv, är katoliker som lever utanför väst.

Franciskus pontifikat var ett försök att representera den väldiga massa av katoliker som kyrkan består av. Han var kritisk till pompa och ståt och avvisade de traditionella påvliga kläderna – stola, rochet och mozzetta – när

han valdes, och föredrog i stället en enklare vit kåpa och pellegrina. Det var en tydlig markering som provocerade många, särskilt i väst där den katolska kyrkan tappat medlemmar och inflytande. I USA lämnar omkring åttahundra personer kyrkan för varje hundratal som konverterar eller döps, ofta på grund av bristande tro, övergreppsskandaler, sekularisering och andra faktorer. Samtidigt växer kyrkan fortfarande i det som ofta kallas det globala syd. Om den nuvarande trenden fortsätter kommer tre fjärdedelar av alla katoliker att leva utanför väst år 2050, och Sydamerika har sedan länge varit kontinenten med flest katoliker.

Migrationsflödena har dessutom redan omformat den romersk-katolska kyrkan i USA och de flesta europeiska länderna till en mångkulturell gemenskap. Om Franciskus därför kort efter sin död kunde beskrivas i *The Washington Post* som ”en globalist i en tid av nationalisterna” är det inte för att påven själv var skeptisk till nationalism, utan för att hans ledarskap vittnade om att hans kyrka är en världskyrka och en migrantkyrka. Denna verklighet har, för alla påvar och kristna, en eskatologisk betydelse då de döpta blivit främlingar för den fallna värld som utan Guds kärlek vore fullständigt identisk med vår arts långa historia av handlingar och underlåtelser. Det är detta som den sydamerikanske och på många sätt djupt augustinske påven såg som ett arv av skuld, som skänks från generation till generation oavsett om vi vill det eller ej och som vi behöver hjälp från Gud själv för att kunna bli fria från. Våra handlingar och underlåtelser bestämmer trots allt vilka vi är i Jesu väldiga hjärta, som enligt Franciskus bultar hårdast för Lasarus och alla andra fattiga som i dag inte sällan är på flykt. För hjärtats princip, kan vi läsa i *Dilexit Nos*, innebära ”att individer är ännu mer ’värda’ vår respekt och kärlek när de är svaga, föraktade eller lider, till och med till den grad att de förlorar sin mänskliga ’gestalt’”. Dessa ord är inte bara ett uttryck för ett abstrakt medlidande eller en sentimental moralteologi, utan för en historisk realitet som Jesus uttryckte på ett kärnfullt sätt när han sa till sina lärjungar: ”De fattiga har ni alltid hos er, men mig har ni inte alltid.” Och fattiga tenderar att sträcka ut en hand, söka ett arbete, korsa en gräns, stjäla en vara, och på olika sätt överleva. De driver på och förändrar historien.

Bergoglio växte upp i en världsdal dit miljoner européer och andra flytt för att undvika fattigdom, förtryck eller helt enkelt söka ett nytt liv. Han var själv ett barn till flyktingar. Han föddes den 17 december 1936 i Buenos Aires som äldsta barnet av fem till Mario José Bergoglio, en revisor från Piemonte i Italien, och Regina María Sívori, hemmafru. Mario och Regina, bägge aktiva i *Azione Cattolica*, lämnade Italien 1929 för att undkomma Benito Mussolinis skräckvälde. Flyktingerfarenheten tycks vara relevant för att förstå den romersk-katolska kyrkans förste sydamerikanske påve.

Men även kopplingen till Argentina och Sydamerika är avgörande. I ett förord till en kommentar av Hegels *Andens fenomenologi* skriven av en av Bergoglios förebilder, den argentinska filosofen Amelia Lezcano Podetti (1928–1979), lyfter Bergoglio fram Podettis idé om *la irrupción de América en la historia* som en händelse som klyver historien itu. Det var enligt Podetti i och med ”upptäckten” av Amerika som världen på allvar trädde fram som större än Europa. Och som många utvecklingsprocesser i en fallen värld skedde detta genom våld och död. De europeiska kolonisatorerna förintade komplexa och blomstrande civilisationer. Det beräknas att runt 56 miljoner urfolk dog under loppet av ett sekel i Nord- och Sydamerika till följd av den europeiska expansionens jordbruk, slaveri, gruvnäring och kolonialism. Men det koloniala våldet blev enligt Franciskus inte bara en tragedi för Amerika, utan också ett sår som kom att slita sönder Europas kristna civilisation.

Bara tjugofem år efter att Christopher Columbus lade till i det han trodde var Indien spikade Martin Luther upp sina 95 teser. Det satte igång en process som enligt en annan av Franciskus stora förebilder, den uruguayanske katolske historikern och journalisten Alberto Methol Ferré, började få sitt avslut först i och med det Andra Vatikankonciliet: ”Med konciliet överskrider kyrkan både den protestantiska reformationen och den sekulära upplysningen. Den övervinner dem genom att ta till sig det bästa från båda. Vi kan också säga så här: den skapar en ny reformation och en ny upplysning.” Mötet i Rom mellan 1962 och 1965 signalerade enligt detta synsätt ett möjligt slut på det moderna projekt som kolonialiseringen av Amerika och religionskrigen kort efter reformationen i Europa hade utmynnat i. För även om reformationen vilade på en legitim kritik av ecklesial korruption – och på så sätt även möjliggjorde en inomkatolsk reform som inte minst jesuitorden representerade – medförde den en splittring av Europa och en politisering av kristenheten längs med nationella och statliga konfliktlinjer. Europa blev enligt både Methol Ferré och Franciskus en kontinent som på många sätt var mer nationalistisk än kristen. Reformationen och den katolska kontrareformationen ledde fram till det trettioåriga kriget och lade grunden för de sekulära nationalstater som så att säga blev upplysningsfilosofins politiska hemvist. Men upplysningen förhindrade inte att människor behandlades som slavar och varor. De europeiska, och alltmer sekulära, staterna var drivande i den så kallade triangelhandeln mellan Europa, Västafrika och Amerika/Karibien som varade fram till och 1800-talet, där europeiska varor byttes mot afrikanska slavar som sedan transporterades till Amerika för att arbeta på plantager. Den romersk-katolska kyrkans hierarki var alltför sen med att fördöma detta utbyte (en viktig bok om detta är je-

suitteologen Christopher J. Kellermans *All Oppression Shall Cease: A History of Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Catholic Church*) trots att Paulus III, som stadfäste Jesu sällskap 1540, redan 1537 underströk att det var kristen lag att ursprungsbefolkningarna inte fick förslavas och att de hade rätt till frihet och egendom även om de inte var döpta – och trots att katoliker bidrog till kampen för slavarnas befrielse. Ett exempel på det senare är den fromme och mytomspunne revolutionären François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture som ledde kampen mot slaveriet i Haiti 1791 och som hade uppfostrats av präster, inte minst jesuitmissionärer, som lärde honom att läsa och skriva.

Det var denna katolicism som Bergoglio och kretsen kring Methol Ferré såg som ett alternativ både till reformationen och upplysningen. Den möjliggjorde rentutav vad Methol Ferré beskrev som en ”ecklesial geopolitik” koncentrerad på det himmelska Jerusalem, där den enskilda personens oändliga värde snarare än statlig eller politisk suveränitet skulle stå i centrum för kyrkans politiska verksamhet. Det var på detta sätt det Andra Vatikanconciliet innebar en möjlighet för den alltmer globala romersk-katolska kyrkan att ta sig ur både reformationen och upplysningen, och möjliggöra en ny katolsk reformation och upplysning. Dialektiken mellan reformation och kontrareformation under 1500- och 1600-talen – och följaktligen nationaliseringen och politiseringen av kristendomen – var i slutänden inte bara parallell med kolonialiseringen av Amerika. Den drevs på av denna logik då olika tolkningar av det kristna budskapet kunde användas för att legitimera de europeiska kolonialmakternas kamp om alla de affärsmöjligheter som ”upptäckten” av Amerika innebar. Upplysningen som på många sätt kom som ett svar på de europeiska religionskrigen – och som inte på ett enkelt sätt kan ses som ett irreligiöst fenomen – saknade dock enligt Franciskus makten att försvaga de i slutänden demoniska krafter som möjliggjorde förintelsen av miljoner människor i det som blev känt som Amerika. Columbus styre var så brutalt att han till sist fängslades och skickades tillbaka till Spanien i bojor 1498, under sin tredje resa, efter att det lett till uppror bland bosättarna i Nya Världen.

Methol Ferré betonade på sjuttioalet att framväxten av gud-är-död teologi och annan form av radikal teologi är en typisk västerländsk produkt som inte klarat av att se hur kristendomen just genom det koloniala projektet blivit en mestiserad och global företeelse. Den romersk-katolska kyrkan är, som jag nämnde ovan, störst i Sydamerika och växer främst i Afrika och Asien. Afrika är idag kontinenten med flest kristna i världen. Franciskus pontifikat speglar detta och hans ledarskap kan göra det enklare för oss nordbor att komma ihåg att kristendomen, som ursprungligen växte fram i Mellanöstern och Nordafrika och därför var allt annat än västerländsk i mo-

dern mening, idag är en global företeelse. Men Franciskus var också ytterst medveten om att kristendomen börjar bli ett religiöst undantag i en sekulär värld. Hans vilja att lyssna på en värld som helt enkelt inte känner igen sig i den kristna religionens läror och moraluppfattningar var därför inte så mycket en eftergift som ett försök att följa den tradition av mystik som han ledde tillbaka till Pierre Favre – jesuiten och helgonet som menade att vänskap var nyckeln för all mission och omvändelse.

Riktlinjerna för en sådan katolicism institutionaliserades i det Andra Vatikanconciliet och legitimerades genom den vändning till patristiken som detta koncilium innebar. En ung Joseph Ratzinger hade redan på femtiotalet sagt att den konstantiska eran var slut, men med Franciskus kan man förstå att det inte nödvändigtvis innebär att kyrkan blir en katakombkyrka eller en frikyrklig sekt. I själva verket kan den nu framstå som en global världsmakt, en väldig civilisation, som är större än alla nationer. Under det andra vaticanconciliet möjliggjordes en färdplan för en sant universell kyrka i en värld som inte är dess slutgiltiga hem, då hela skapelsen ryckts bort från skaparen och präglats av dödens och syndens krafter. Det var dessa krafter som gjorde att den romersk-katolska kyrkans påvar länge menade att katolicismen måste vara en statsreligion. Det låg i varje människas eviga intresse att kyrkan var det politiska livets moraliska och religiösa garant. Men religionskrigen, kyrkans korruption och senare pedofilkrisen vittnar tydligt om att det bästa kan perverteras till det värsta. Och som flera av kyrkans viktigaste lärare betonat måste valet av Gud vara frivilligt för att verkligen skänka en väg till frälsningen. Kristendomen kan inte vara statens eller tvångets religion: Den måste vara den mänskliga personens religion, och därmed frihetens religion.

Franciskus var emellertid knappast en motståndare till att den katolska kyrkan skulle gripa in i politiken. Citatet som inleder denna text visar att han hoppades att kyrkan kunde forma både samhället och ekonomin. Vissa beskrev honom till och med som en ultramontan påve, då han kunde agera med järnnäven mot dem som inte ville följa hans väg. De så kallade ultramontanisterna – från latinets *ultra* (bortom) och *mons* (berg), alltså bortom bergen – betonade under 1800-talet den katolska kyrkans rätt att hävda sig som en makt gentemot nationalstaterna. De användes av nationalistiska krafter för att utmåla katoliker som ett slags landsförrädare. Och visst kan man identifiera vissa sådana ultramontana tendenser i den sydamerikanske påvens ledarstil. Ett bra exempel är när Franciskus i februari 2025 skrev till de amerikanska biskoparna, efter att USAs vicepresident J. D. Vance hade försökt legitimera Trumps immigrationspolitik med den katolska tanken om en kärlekens ordning. I sitt brev underströk Franciskus med kraft att ”den sanna *ordo amoris* som måste främjas är den som vi upptäcker

genom att ständigt meditera över liknelsen om den 'barmhärtige samariten' (jämför Lk 10:25-37), det vill säga genom att meditera över den kärlek som bygger broderskap som är öppet för alla, utan undantag". Det visar att kyrkans uppgift fortfarande är att undervisa världens politiska makter om vad kärlek och frälsning innebär – och därmed, varför kyrkans budskap kan hamna i öppen motsättning med den politiska makten.

Många var besvikna på Franciskus initiala ovillighet att använda järn-näven för att på allvar göra upp med övergreppen mot barn och vuxna. Under ett besök i Chile 2018 hävdade Franciskus att anklagelserna mot en biskop var "förtal utan bevis". Uttalandet väckte starka reaktioner i ett land som just börjat hantera sin kyrkas övergreppsskandaler. Påvens egna rådgivare kritiserade honom öppet, och han tvingades backa. I stället för att stå fast beställde Franciskus en utredning och insåg att han hade haft fel. Han bad offren om ursäkt – och fick hela Chiles biskopskår att erbjuda sina avskedsansökningar. Men utan kraften, för att inte säga vreden, underifrån hade Franciskus kanske inte heller orkat lyssna. Det verkar dock som att Franciskus menade allvar med sin ånger, och måhända berodde det på att kritiken av klerikalism var en avgörande aspekt av hans pontifikat. Han var en varm anhängare av synodalitet och villig att lyssna på kyrkans folk och den omgivande världen. Ett år efter skandalen i Chile kallade han biskopskonferensernas ledare till Vatikanen för att kräva hårdare åtgärder mot övergrepp. Han tog bort den så kallade "påvliga hemligheten" kring sådana fall och införde krav på att kyrkans personal måste rapportera misstänkta övergrepp internt. Dessutom införde han rutiner för att utreda biskopar som själva begått eller dolt övergrepp – ett steg mot att bryta kyrkans kultur av straffrihet. Han försökte också stärka lekmännens roll i kyrkan. Han ville ge dem inflytande i beslutsprocesser och omformade därför kyrkans ledarskap genom att låta lekmän – även kvinnor – leda viktiga ämbeten i Vatikanen. I sitt dokument *Praedicate Evangelium* ändrade han reglerna som sa att enbart präster kan leda kurian. Här kan man se hur en avgörande del av Franciskus teologi började institutionaliseras som lag. Han betonade trots allt att dopets värdighet gör varje kristen till konung, profet och präst. Den katolska kyrkans hierarki är helig och inte minst nödvändig för att kyrkan ska överleva som en världsomspännande och geopolitisk makt, men den ska vara ett medel för en tjänande och profetisk gemenskap med de "existensiella periferierna" och "de fattiga".

Det var därför det utifrån Franciskus perspektiv i slutänden var det Andra och inte Första Vatikanconciliet som möjliggjorde en uppfordrande katekes av världens makter: Han menade närmast att detta koncilium utgjorde grunden för en verklig postmodernitet – det vill säga, en ordning bortom

den nationalistiska dialektiken mellan reformation och motreformation som slitit sönder den medeltida kristna civilisationen och lagt grunden för upplysningen. Den romerska kyrkan är inte en statskyrka utan en universell gemenskap som lika lite kan acceptera den moderna nationalstatens gränser som slutpunkter för sin mission idag, som den accepterade äldre rikens gränsdragningar igår. Och detta inte bara för att den katolska kyrkan är en global kyrka, utan än mer för att den vidhåller att vi i slutänden blott är gäster i denna värld. Det är också denna apokalyptiska insikt som kan göra den kristna universalismen konkret enligt Franciskus. I förordet till Podettis kommentar av *Andens fenomenologi* skriver den blivande påven:

De stora mänskliga problemen är utan tvekan universella och på ett visst sätt tidlösa, men i filosofens medvetande riskerar de att försvinna i tomma, abstrakta formuleringar om de inte passerar genom sållet av den rena och hårda verkligheten. Och verkligheten är alltid förkroppsligad, särskild och konkret. Det kan inte finnas någon tillgång till universaliteten utan att man fullt ut och helt omfamnar inkarnationen [*la encarnación*].

I ljuset av inkarnationen, med andra ord Guds förköttsligande som människa, gränsar förvandlandet av kristendomen till ett totaliserande tankesystem enligt Franciskus mot heresi. Kristendomen är och borde vara inkarnationens religion. Och det var denna inkarnatoriska konkretion av evigheten i tiden och rummet, i köttet och blodet, som Franciskus erbjöd på ett sätt som provocerade lika många konservativa katoliker som han gjorde progressiva sådana besvikna. Kanske var han nöjd med detta, då hans teologi och ledarstil vilade på en idé om förening av motsatser som inte kulminerar i en syntes. Livet och tänkandet måste hållas öppet ändå tills den eskatologiska slutpunkt som de kristna kyrkorna hävdar redan har börjat uppenbara sig i Jesu liv, död och uppståndelse fullständigt omformat verkligheten. Men Jesus spottar enligt Uppenbarelseboken ut den som är ljum eller mjuk, och eftersom varje center är definierat av sina extremer är den aristoteliska mittpunkten inte sällan rörlig och föränderlig. Det är helt enkelt svårt att identifiera en mitt när kontexten är i rörelse.

Denna insikt om världens föränderlighet blir inte minst tydlig i vad som antagligen är en av Franciskus mest lästa skrifter: miljöencykliken *Lovad vare du* från 2018. Där betonar Franciskus, återigen i Favres anda, att relationer, vänskaper och kärlekar är vad som kan befria oss och leda oss mot det eviga livet: ”Människan utvecklas mer, mognar mer och helgas mer beroende på i vilken utsträckning hon går in i relationer och förmår lämna

sig själv för att leva i gemenskap med Gud, med andra och med alla varelser.” Skapelsen finns inte utan relationer, såsom relationen till skaparen och relationerna mellan allting skapat. Människans till synes ofta banala och konkreta livsvärld är avhängig det väldiga kosmos av galaxer – kanske till och med, det multiversa – som omger henne. Vi tillhör inte bara en region i världen utan skapelsen som sådan, och vi gör det eftersom vi är Guds barn och därmed har en skapare.

Det är denna kosmiska, med andra ord skapade, avhängighet som gör människan till en del av den ut- och inandning, *exitus* och *reditus*,  $\alpha$  och  $\omega$ , som Guds skapelse och omskapelse av världen innebär. Det är ingen slump att Bibeln börjar med en redogörelse för skapelsen av allt som är och avslutas med en berättelse om alla tings slut i en värld bortom solen. Men vår värld är inte bara en plats för livet, den är också plågad av döden: den död som enligt klassisk kristen teologi och metafysik kan sägas vara orsakad av änglarnas och människornas fall. Och det är denna kosmiska olycka som måste helas så att allt ska bli som det borde vara. *Lovad vare du* är därför i slutändan långt mer än en simpel appell om att vi människor borde ta hand om den värld där korallreven dör ut och vi trätt in i en sjätte artutrotning – de tidigare fem processer av artutrotning som omformat livet på vår planet orsakades inte av den mänskliga civilisationen. Kanske kan de därför, med hjälp av Franciskus encyklika, tematiseras dogmatiskt och mytologiskt som en konsekvens av änglarnas fall. Det har skett en kosmisk olycka som möjliggör att människan kan följa ormen och falla ned i den värld där livet blivit en kamp om överlevnad, bestämt av det närmast omöjliga valet mellan det goda och det onda. *Lovad vare du* är på så sätt en apokalyptisk mariologi som visar att mystiken inte bara är politik utan att politiken måste förvandlas till mystik om den ska kunna hjälpa oss. Vi behöver ett hopp som över-skrider människans horisont men som ändå bor i vårt hjärta: hoppet om övervinnandet av döden, ett hopp som för Franciskus innebar hoppet om alla varelsers förhärligande och, därför, rimligtvis, uppståndelse.

Till slut kommer vi att stå ansikte mot ansikte med Guds gränslösa skönhet (jfr 1 Kor 13:12) och med beundran och glädje kunna utläsa universums mysterium som, tillsammans med oss, kommer att ingå i fullkomligheten. Också nu är vi på resa mot evighetens sabbat, det nya Jerusalem, till vårt gemensamma hem i himlen. Jesus säger: ”Se, jag gör allting nytt” (Upp 21:5). Det eviga livet kommer att bli en gemensam erfarenhet av vördnad, i vilken alla varelser, ljuvligt förhärligade, kommer att inta sina avsedda platser och ha något att ge dessa fattiga män och kvinnor som då kommer att vara befriade för alltid.

På så sätt har vi befriats från vårt fallna ursprung. Med Kristus och Maria är vi mer än våra biologiska föräldrars barn. Vi har blivit adopterade av den nye Adam och den nya Eva och därmed börjat bli fria från arvsyndens och de fallna änglarnas makt. Vi har fått en apokalyptisk mor som vårdar sig med ”omsorg och smärta om vår sårade värld. Precis som hennes genom-borrade hjärta sörjde Jesu död, känner hon nu smärta inför lidandet hos de plågade fattiga och inför de varelser på jorden som går till spillo till följd av mänsklig makt”.

Det var denna apokalyptiska och mariologiska tanke om skapelsens delaktighet i det eviga som utmärkte Franciskus pontifikat. Han var tydligt konservativ i vissa frågor, markant progressiv i andra, och ofta verkade han tycka att det var bäst att suspendera sitt omdöme i närmast sokratisk anda och därför påminna oss om några av Jesus kanske mest radikala ord: ”Döm ej!” Det kanske mest kända exemplet på det senare är när han apropå en fråga om kyrkans syn på homosexualitet sade sina ofta citerade ord: ”Om en person är homosexuell och söker Gud och har god vilja, vem är jag att döma?” Det avgörande för någon som blivit döpt och därmed adopterad av Gud och hans moder kanske helt enkelt är insikten att det aldrig är människan som deklarerar den sista domen. Om detta kan tyckas stå i strid med den katolska kyrkans morallära, som påven knappast ville utmana – tvärtom manade han oss att leva för något större än pengar, sex och ära – så underströk flera av Franciskus försvarare, även konservativa sådana, att den katolska kyrkorättens sista kanon betonar att själens frälsning är den högsta lagen som står över allt annat, och att själen är kroppens livgivande princip. Den är formen som animerar materien och gör den levande: till skator och ugglor, till löss och loppor, till bläckfiskar och marulkar, till mossor och svamp, och därmed till hela den levande omgivning som möjliggjort och fortsätter möjliggöra människan. Nåden och insikten att man ibland inte kan döma eller bestraffa är därför inte bara en nödvändig del av all sund rätt – *summum ius, summa iniuria*, den högsta eller mest pedantiska rätten leder till den högsta orätten – den är grunden till den natur som alltid är större än kampen för överlevnad. Nåden är själva livsgåvan som ingen valt eller skapat på egen hand. Franciskus sökte i slutänden något som var större än lagen, politiken och rätten och därför också något som var större skapelsen och naturen. Han sökte Gud och han fann denna gudomliga skapare likt sina jesuitfäder i treenigheten, i relationen, i vänskapen och i kärleken. Och således i det allomfattande hjärta som innesluter, och som därmed är långt större än den nuvarande, förunderliga men i slutänden ändliga skapelsen som inte är den sista och som vi måste vårda just för att den precis som vi kommer att dö och gå under. ▲

# Editorial

## *Public Theology*

JAKOB WIRÉN

This special issue of *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift*, focuses on public theology and the role of religion in the public sphere. It draws on a conference in Lund which took place on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2024 and includes the inaugural lecture of Ulrich Schmiedel, professor of Global Christianities at the Centre for Theology and Religious Studies.

In the present issue, we will delve into the current landscape of public theology, reflecting on the role of religion in the public sphere. We will examine the tools and methods available to understand controversies that arise – or appear to arise – from religious diversity. Three brief examples:

Over the past years, the arguably secular Sweden has found itself engaged in theological discussions surrounding the Qur'an. Leading newspapers and television programs have explored its status as a holy text, while debates have emerged regarding the treatment of physical copies of the Qur'an. These discussions have also led to comparisons between Islamic theologies of the Qur'an and Christian theologies of the Bible. The backdrop to these conversations? Public burnings of the Qur'an, strong anti-Muslim sentiments, Sweden's attempts to become a member of NATO, and the ongoing tension between freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

Over the past two years, Sweden's interreligious infrastructure has experienced significant shifts. Long-standing partnerships between individuals of different faiths have been disrupted, and fundamental dialogue principles of representation and responsibility no longer seem to hold. The catalyst for these changes? The terror attack on Israel on October 7 and the subsequent war in Gaza. Experiences of grief and victimhood have profoundly impacted both public and private relationships, dramatically altering the dynamics of interreligious relations in Sweden.

Even more recently, around the time when this is written, Sweden's largest newspaper – historically known for its critical stance toward religion, particularly Christianity – made a striking proclamation: the return of Christian faith. Its front page featured a powerful image of three teenagers, dressed in white robes, being baptized in a lake. According to the newspaper, young people are increasingly turning to spirituality and faith as a means of coping with the violence and shootings that have become part of everyday life in Swedish society.

These examples, and many others, illustrate the deep entanglement of religion and politics, the interconnectedness of the local and the global, and the polycentric nature of religious traditions. Public theology's task is not merely to identify and describe these complexities but to engage with them theologically. It is the responsibility of public theology to explore how these global and local dynamics – conflict and coexistence, antisemitism and Islamophobia, secularization and the resurgence of religion – affect theological inquiry.

The authors of this special issue will explore these questions through the lenses of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thought and theology. Although all of them are based in Europe, they bring with them experience and expertise from both within and beyond the continent.

In “Un-Thinking the West? On African Christianities and the Future of Global Public Theology”, Dion A. Forster critically examines the dominance of Western paradigms in global public theology. Drawing on decolonial and African theological perspectives, Forster critiques the “theme park theology” phenomenon, where Western-centric approaches sanitize and commodify faith, sidelining non-Western voices and realities.

He highlights the resilience of religion in African and migrant contexts, challenging secularization theories and emphasizing the importance of a contextually nuanced Public Theology that considers socio-political and economic dimensions of faith. Forster also addresses concerns that Public Theology has sometimes been perceived as a supercessionist project, overshadowing liberation and contextual theologies such as Black, feminist, and queer theologies.

To move forward, Forster calls for a de-centering of Western hegemony in theological research, the creation of spaces for historically silenced perspectives, and a recognition of the growing global influence of non-Western religiosities. This approach, he argues, is essential for a truly inclusive and impactful Public Theology.

In her article, Annette Langner-Pitschmann explores the vital role of Global Public Theology in navigating the delicate balance between dogma-

tism – the rigid affirmation of one’s own perspective – and syncretism, the uncritical adoption of others’ viewpoints. Drawing on Ricœur’s philosophy, she argues that Global Public Theology must cultivate intellectual styles that sustain this tension, fostering thoughtful engagement without collapsing into extremes. Lagner-Pitschmann emphasizes the need for intellectual agility, underpinned by irony, as a means of creating spaces that honor difference, embrace the process of relativization, and resist what William Connolly terms “ontological narcissism”. By doing so, Global Public Theology can advocate for more inclusive and nuanced forms of public reasoning, enriching its engagement with diverse perspectives in an interconnected world.

Fatima Tofghi argues that Theology and Religious Studies remain deeply entrenched in biases that marginalize certain perspectives, questions, and themes, often rendering the “religious other” unwelcome within the discipline. She calls for a process of provincializing theology and religious studies in Europe and North America, advocating for greater inclusivity and reflexivity in the field’s infrastructures and methodologies.

Reflecting on her work in Farsi, Tofghi underscores the ethical responsibility of Muslims – and followers of all religions – to engage with those of other faiths. She insists that a truly global and contextual theology cannot isolate itself but must remain accountable to diverse others, acknowledging their presence and perspectives.

Drawing attention to the aftermath of the events of October 7, 2023, Tofghi critiques the insufficiency of current analytic frameworks to address complex realities, including the role of guerrilla movements, the intersection of militant and civilian lives, and the nuanced role of religion – particularly Islam – in these contexts. Even liberation theologies, she notes, fall short, underscoring the urgent need for theological approaches that are more global, dynamic, and responsive to contemporary challenges.

In her compelling contribution, Alana Vincent challenges conventional responses to violence within public theology, arguing that the primary task is to reject appeals to divine agency as legitimate answers to the world’s violence. Such appeals, she suggests, risk deflecting attention from the deeper, systemic issues at play.

Vincent observes that the epistemic violence we critique from a safe distance is often the very foundation of the neutral frameworks we rely on to avoid confronting our complicity in that violence. Rather than retreating into the sacred as something removed or set apart, she calls for an embrace of the profound and unrelenting responsibility to stand accountable to one

another in the face of violence. Public theology, she argues, must prioritize this accountability as its central ethical imperative.

In his inaugural lecture, Ulrich Schmiedel advocates for a coalitional and comparative public theology as a fresh approach to understanding Global Christianity. In dialogue with his predecessors at the chair of *Missionsvetenskap med ekumenik* in Lund, Schmiedel integrates insights from sociology and anthropology to challenge traditional notions of religious identity and interaction.

Drawing on sociologist Lori Beaman's application of Anna Tsing's concept of "contaminated diversity", he highlights the historical and ongoing interplay between religions. In Tsing's work, contamination represents transformative interactions that reshape participants, a metaphor Schmiedel finds particularly relevant for understanding the interwoven histories of Christianity and other religions. Ultimately, there is no Christianity without other religions, nor other religions without Christianity; their histories are inextricably linked, shaped by "contamination" rather than separation. Instead of asking, "Why do people come together across differences?" – a question that assumes purity as the norm – he proposes asking, "Why do people not come together across differences?" This perspective rejects ideals of religious purity and instead embraces the dynamic, evolving nature of religious life, fostering a vision of conviviality rooted in shared transformation and mutual influence.

How do these global entanglements influence our work as scholars? How do local developments shape our research? And how do scholars of religion navigate the tension between neutrality and normativity, a tension that is intrinsic to their engagement in the public sphere? These are critical questions that public theology must confront – and these are questions that are confronted in this thematic issue on global public theology. ▲

# Un-Thinking the West?

## *On African Christianities and the Future of Global Public Theology*

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Dion A. Forster is Professor of Public Theology and Ethics, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and Stellenbosch University.

d.a.forster@vu.nl

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In his professorial inaugural lecture at Lund University, Prof Ulrich Schmiedel invited a some colleagues to reflect on the notion of a “global Public Theology”, without falling into the trap of what Marcella Althaus-Reid has called “theme park theology”.<sup>1</sup> Althaus-Reid suggests that some approaches to theology sanitize reality, commodifying and domesticating the radical elements of faith in relation to issues of public concern. By doing so, they opt for a form of escapism from difficult realities. This paper aims to address an important concern among some African Christian theologians – to decolonize and Africanize the (public) theological archive.

### **Critical Positionality: From Where Do You Speak?**

Prof Schmiedel and I have recently undergone changes in our professional lives. He moved to Lund – something that we celebrate today! I have moved to the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. In South Africa, however, my work centred on the intersections of faith and public life within the contested space of the ongoing traumas of colonialism and apartheid. There, I encountered critiques from colleagues who viewed Public Theology as a supercessionist project. By that I understand that some felt that Public Theo-

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<sup>1</sup> Marcella Maria Althaus-Ried, “Gustavo Gutiérrez Goes to Disneyland: Theme Park Theologies and the Diaspora of the Discourse of the Popular Theologian in Liberation Theology”, *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 42.

logical research aimed to replace, or at least displace, important approaches to theology, such as contextual theology, and liberation theologies (such as black theologies, feminist theologies, queer theologies etc.).<sup>2</sup> They argued that Public Theology was, both methodologically and in content, largely a Western enterprise that had become captured by Western (or West sympathetic) academic interests, aims, and questions. While I don't entirely agree with this critique, it is one that demands serious engagement.

I am an African migrant in Europe where Public Theology is widely embraced. Yet, I find that the definitions and frameworks employed are sometimes thin, and can perpetuate Western privileges and biases, tending to assume universal applicability and value. As a white, professor who can speak Dutch I function within the social, economic, religious, and political elite of Dutch society. I am a privileged insider. Yet, I remain an outsider on the inside. I occasionally encounter the prejudices that other African migrants experience – afro-pessimism, xenophobia, miss-recognition, paternalism, and being regarded as the exotic other.

These important realities, shape my reflections on what has become characterised as an African decolonial Public Theological perspective.<sup>3</sup> It invites a critical reflection upon the hegemony of Western epistemologies in theology and seeks to contribute to a more inclusive, critical, and glo-cally conscious theological discourse.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this discussion is to present four points. These are, that a “global” Public Theology could expand beyond Western models to include more diverse perspectives, recognize religion's persistence across the world, support decolonial discourses, and amplify African voices in shaping global theological conversations.

### **The Persistence and Relevance of Religion and Faith in Public Life**

Contrary to secularisation theories that predicted the decline of religion in public life, faith remains an enduring and even growing force in many parts of the world, especially in the Global South, but also in late secular and early post-secular Western Europe. Religion's relevance in the public sphere, particularly in Africa, has not diminished but transformed, shaping

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2 Tinyiko Maluleke, “Why I Am Not a Public Theologian”, *The Ecumenical Review* 73, no. 2 (April 2021), 297–315, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12602>.

3 Dion A. Forster, “African Public Theology? A Conceptual Engagement to Keep the Conversation Alive”, *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 56, no. 1 (July 22, 2022), 9, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v56i1.2849>.

4 For some discussion on the notion of a ‘glo-cal’ (global and local) Public Theology, please see: Dion A. Forster, “Democracy and Social Justice in Glocal Contexts”, *International Journal of Public Theology* 12, no. 1 (April 23, 2018), 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15697320-12341530>.

everything from politics to social movements.<sup>5</sup> The persistence of religion is not only an African phenomenon. Pippa Norris, Ronald Inglehart, and more recently by Hennie Kotze have demonstrated that while secularisation trends are evident in Western Europe, religiosity persists strongly, particularly where existential insecurity continues to drive the need for spiritual meaning and community.<sup>6</sup>

One of the major limitations of some scholarship on religion and secularisation is its overreliance on Western European trends, particularly the decline in church attendance among Protestants and Catholics.<sup>7</sup> However, this narrow focus fails to account for the reality that in many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, religiosity remains vibrant, and religious movements, such as Pentecostalism and African Independent Churches, are growing rapidly.<sup>8</sup> As noted, the religious vitality in these contexts is underpinned by socio-economic conditions, where existential insecurities remain.<sup>9</sup> These trends are also present among African migrants in Europe, who bring their religious practices and beliefs into the secular public spaces of countries like the Netherlands and Sweden.<sup>10</sup>

Peter Berger's revision of the secularisation thesis is particularly instructive here. In his later work, Berger argues that rather than fading away, religion has shifted in form, adapting to pluralistic and modern societies.<sup>11</sup> The rise of pluralism and globalisation has, in many ways, intensified religious expression, rather than diminishing it.

The comparison between South Africa and Sweden, as explored by Hennie Kotze (2019), provides a striking example of the diversity in global religiosity. In South Africa, 85% of the population identifies as Christian, with high levels of religious participation, while in Sweden, church attendance

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5 Dion A Forster, "Public Theology and Africa", *T&T Clark Handbook of Public Theology*, eds. Christoph Hübenthal & Christiane Alpers, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022, 475–80.

6 Pippa Norris & Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 7–9; Hennie Kotze, "Religiosity in South Africa and Sweden: A Comparison", *Freedom of Religion at Stake: Competing Claims among Faith Traditions, States and Persons*, ed. Dion A Forster, Elisabeth Gerle, & Göran Gunner, *Church of Sweden Research Series* 18, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019, 3.

7 Norris & Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular*, 3.

8 Kotze, "Religiosity in South Africa and Sweden: A Comparison", 11–13.

9 Dion A. Forster, "Theology in the Public Realm? David Tracy and Contemporary African Religiosity", *Beyond the Analogical Imagination: The Theological and Cultural Vision of David Tracy*, ed. Barnabas Palfrey & Andreas Telser, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 88–94.

10 Jürgen Habermas, *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023, 54–55.

11 Peter L. Berger, *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2014), 51, 68–78.

has plummeted, with only 6% of the population attending services regularly.<sup>12</sup> In Sweden, where existential security is relatively high, the secularisation thesis holds true – people feel less need for religion to provide existential answers. In contrast, South Africa’s high levels of inequality and economic insecurity create fertile ground for the flourishing of religious belief. Yet, even when persons migrate to contexts like Sweden, while they tend to be better off (economically and in terms of security, for example), they still remain at the margins of society – thus facing existential and social challenges of differing kinds. In both cases, as Kotze notes, the context in which religion operates is key to understanding its persistence or decline.<sup>13</sup>

Peter Berger and Wolfram Weisse (2016) offer additional insights into the dynamics of religious pluralism, noting that in pluralistic societies, religion does not disappear but rather adapts and takes on new forms, often becoming a tool for identity formation and social cohesion. This is particularly evident in contexts where religious communities play a central role in providing not only spiritual guidance but also identity retention, and basic social services, such as education, and political formation.<sup>14</sup>

Jurgen Habermas also argues that migration is reshaping the religious and political landscape in contemporary Western Europe. Migrant communities, particularly from Africa and the Middle East, are bringing new forms of religiosity into secular public spaces, challenging the assumption that modernity leads to the decline of religion. In countries like Sweden and the Netherlands, the influx of religious migrants is reintroducing faith into public life in ways that complicate the secularisation narrative. Habermas suggests that rather than religiosity diminishing, it is shifting, with migrants and other minority religious groups revitalising religious practices in Europe.<sup>15</sup>

In summary, the persistence of religion in public life cannot be understood through a single lens. Global religiosity is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including socio-economic conditions, cultural traditions, and migration patterns. While secularisation may be evident in some parts of the world it is far from a singular, or universal, phenomenon. So, the first point is that Public Theology must move beyond Western-centric models and engage with diverse, global perspectives, especially those from the Global South to understand the presence of religion in public life.

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12 Kotze, “Religiosity in South Africa and Sweden: A Comparison.,” 7.

13 Ibid., 10.

14 Peter Berger and Wolfram Weisse, “The Moral Limits of Religious Pluralism” (Unpublished project proposal, November 29, 2016), 5.

15 Habermas, *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*, 35, 54–55.

## Untangling the Complexities: Religion in the Public Sphere

Religion and public life interact in complex ways, with religious beliefs and practices both shaping and being shaped by societal structures and political contexts, influencing moral values and political alignments.<sup>16</sup> Public Theology should provide frameworks to engage with the complex intersections of religion and public life, moving beyond binaries like faith versus secularism to examine diverse cultural and socio-political contexts shaped by broader socio-economic factors. In South Africa, where inequality and economic insecurity remain high, religion plays a critical role in providing existential security, social cohesion, and even political mobilisation. This is evident in the rise of religious movements that engage directly with political issues, such as the prosperity gospel and religious nationalist movements, both of which have gained significant traction in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, in Sweden, high levels of existential security, combined with a welfare state that provides for many of the needs traditionally met by religious institutions, have contributed to the decline in formal religious participation. Yet, as noted earlier, the influx of highly religious migrants to Western Europe continues to complicate our understanding of religion in the public sphere.<sup>18</sup>

Such notions challenge simplistic secularisation narratives and highlight the importance of studying the specific contexts and the unique ways in which religion and public life intersect. The work of Schmiedel and Ralston (2021) on political theologies and populism offers further insights into the complexities of the relationship between religion and public life. In *The Spirit of Populism*, they examine how religious narratives are often co-opted by populist movements to create an “us versus them” dynamic, where religious identities are used to draw boundaries between the so-called true people and the perceived outsiders.<sup>19</sup> In reality, however, the public sphere should be an open space occupied by diverse sets of ideas and beliefs.

However, to avoid becoming a form of ‘theme park theology’, Public Theology should aim to offer more than just an analysis of various religious beliefs and practices; it must critically engage with the political, social, and economic structures that shape how religion is practiced and understood in public life.<sup>20</sup> This requires an interdisciplinary approach, one that draws on

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16 Forster, “Theology in the Public Realm? David Tracy and Contemporary African Religiosity”, 87.

17 Forster, “Public Theology and Africa”, 474–75.

18 Kotze, “Religiosity in South Africa and Sweden: A Comparison”, 10.

19 Ulrich Schmiedel & Joshua Ralston, *The Spirit of Populism: Political Theologies in Polarized Times*, Leiden: Brill, 2021, 3.

20 Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, *Liberation Theology for a Democratic Society: Essays in*

the social sciences, and even the natural sciences, and theology to untangle the complex relationships between faith, politics, and public life.

The complexities of religion in the public sphere cannot be reduced to simple binaries or universal models. Whether in South Africa, where religion plays a central role in public life, or in Sweden, where secularism dominates but religious migrants are reshaping the public sphere, the interplay between faith and public life is shaped by unique cultural, socio-political, and economic factors. Public Theologians must engage critically with these contexts, offering nuanced frameworks that can help us understand how religion continues to shape, and be shaped by, public life in an increasingly pluralistic world. So, the second point is that the persistence of religion in public life, particularly in Africa and among African migrants, calls for a more nuanced approach to Public Theology, one that accounts for socio-political and economic conditions that drive religious expression.

### **The African Public Theologian and the Decolonial Imperative**

As an African Public Theologian working in the diaspora, I am increasingly convinced of the need for a decolonial approach to theology – one that challenges the intellectual hegemony of Western scholarship and holds space for other perspectives. The insights of African theologians like Vuyani Vellem and Tinyiko Maluleke, are important. Both have been deeply critical of the project of Public Theology. Maluleke argues that it is precisely people like me (white, male, academics, supposedly in service of Western scholarship) who are responsible for turning Public Theology into a kind of ‘theme park’ theology.<sup>21</sup>

Vellem (2017) emphasizes the need to acknowledge that we are facing an “epistemic break” in contemporary theological reasoning.<sup>22</sup> As Ndlovu Gatsheni argues, “[w]hen important new evidence undermines old theories and predictions do not hold, we are pressed to rethink our premises”.<sup>23</sup> Western intellectual frameworks are proving to be incapable of dealing with issues of human and non-human flourishing and justice without remainder to other forms of wisdom and knowledge. Instead, as Vellem argues such frameworks contribute towards greed, polarizations of various forms, the miss-recognition of our shared human (and non-human) existence.<sup>24</sup>

*Public Theology*, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2018, 45–61.

21 Maluleke, “Why I Am Not a Public Theologian”, 303.

22 Vuyani S. Vellem, “Un-Thinking the West: The Spirit of Doing Black Theology of Liberation in Decolonial Times”, *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4737>.

23 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Empire, Global Coloniality and African Subjectivity*, New York, NY: Berghahn Books, 2013, 31.

24 Vellem, “Un-Thinking the West”, 8.

He advocates for a theological framework that he terms “un-thinking the west”.<sup>25</sup> He argues that his call is constructive, rooted in broader philosophical, ethical, and religious traditions that better address the socio-political realities of the majority world.

Maluleke (2021) adds another dimension to this discourse by critiquing the “supersessionist” tendencies in some approaches to Public Theology, which seem to want to universalize Western frameworks of religion and public life, imposing them on non-Western contexts. He writes, that, global Public Theology should at least become conscious of its imperial ambitions that set it not merely in competition but in opposition with local theologies. It should become conscious of its unspoken or even unconscious desire to efface and trivialize local agency and of its desire to become the one and only representative of all voices, in all places and all times.<sup>26</sup>

He argues that uncritical ‘global’ Public Theology risks becoming a tool of Western domination, erasing African theological contributions and responses to local challenges – a critique that resonates strongly with my work on decolonizing and Africanizing theology in both African and global contexts.<sup>27</sup>

Decolonizing theology requires confronting the historical and ongoing theft – of land, of culture, of intellectual agency, and of course of bodies – that has shaped African experience. This is not only a matter of reclaiming African religious traditions but also of developing new theological frameworks that speak to the realities of African societies in the 21st century. Africans who do Public Theology must be actively involved in addressing the socio-political struggles of African people, particularly in the face of global challenges such as globalisation, migration, environmental degradation, and political conflict.

Drawing on these insights, I argue that there are three key tasks that are essential for decolonizing and Africanising Public Theological reflection. First, we must *name and de-center the power of Western hegemony* on academic reasoning and theological research. Vellem has aptly described the way Western epistemologies have functioned as tools of domination, sys-

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25 Ibid.

26 Maluleke, “Why I Am Not a Public Theologian”, 303.

27 Forster, “African Public Theology?”; Dion A. Forster, “The ‘Stolen Bible’ and the ‘Stolen Land’? Some Tentative Reflections on the Decolonising of Biblical Studies”, *Facilitating God’s Preferred Future: Faith Formation, Missional Transformation and Theological Education*, eds. Marius J. Nel & Pieter van der Walt, Biblecor: Wellington, 2023, 241–62; Dion A. Forster, “African Realities and Resilient Religion? An Invitation to Africanize the Conversation”, *Resilient Religion, Resilience and Heartbreaking Adversity*, ed. C. A. M. Hermans & Kobus Schoeman, *International Practical Theology* 24, Münster: LIT Verlag, 2022, 83–100.

tematically marginalizing African knowledge systems and ways of being.<sup>28</sup> This “epistemicide,” has rendered African theological voices quite invisible in global theological discourses. Second, it is crucial to *create and hold space for inputs and perspectives that have been historically been silenced*. This involves not only amplifying African voices in theological conversations but also challenging the methodological blindness that continues to pervade some Western theological institutions. Public Theology should insist on the legitimacy of African religious experiences and theologies as sources of knowledge that can speak to global issues. As Maluleke (2021) argues, this requires a reimagining of the structures of theological education and research, where African scholars and practitioners have an equal footing and the necessary resources to develop their own frameworks. Third, Africans who do Public Theology must recognize that *African religiosity is having an increasing impact on global theology and public life*, a phenomenon that Catherine Keller refers to as “global entanglement.”<sup>29</sup> African Christianity is reshaping not only the continent’s theology but also global Christianity, as African migrants bring their traditions to the West. This global entanglement calls for rethinking boundaries between African and Western theologies. African theologians in the diaspora, including myself, have a responsibility to bridge these worlds, ensuring African theological contributions are recognized for their transformative potential rather than diluted by Western frameworks.

Ultimately, the task of the African who does Public Theology is to engage, and even challenge, the dominance of Western epistemologies and to build new theological frameworks that are rooted in African experiences and practices. So, the third point is that African Public Theology plays a critical role in decolonizing theological discourse by challenging the intellectual hegemony of some Western epistemologies.

### **The Task of the African Public Theologian in the Diaspora**

The task of the African Public Theologian in the diaspora is multifaceted and urgent. As mentioned at the start, we should aim to avoid the dangers of ‘theme park theology’ with its three-fold consequences: sanitizing complexity, commodifying faith, and furthering escapism from reality. For those of us Africans who work in European academic contexts, the task is not only to critically represent broader glo-cal theological perspectives but also to contribute towards the transformation the Western frameworks.

First, as I have argued throughout this presentation, the African Public

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28 Vellem, “Un-Thinking the West”, 5.

29 Catherine Keller & Mary-Jane Rubenstein, eds., *Entangled Worlds: Religion, Science, and New Materialisms*, 1st edition, New York: Fordham University Press, 2017, 3.

Theologian must work to decolonize the field of theology by naming and decentring the power of Western hegemony in academic reasoning and research. In the Netherlands (and possibly also in Sweden), where secularism dominates public discourse and religious participation is notably low, there is a particular need for majority world Public Theologians to push back against the narrative that religion is in retreat. As Habermas has observed, while secularism may characterize much of Europe's public life, migration has brought new forms of religious expression into the public sphere.<sup>30</sup> This shift calls for a deeper engagement with the lived experiences of religious migrants and a rethinking of how Public Theology is practiced in late- or post-secular contexts.

Second, African (and other majority world) Public Theologians in the diaspora must actively create and hold space for perspectives that have historically been silenced. This also involves advocating for non-traditional epistemologies as legitimate sources of knowledge. This task is not just about inclusion for its own sake but about the necessity of diversifying theological discourse in order to address the complex, global challenges we face today. Whether it is the challenges of religious populism, migration, or environmental degradation, African theological perspectives, particularly those that emphasize community, resilience, and justice, offer vital resources for responding to these issues in meaningful ways. African Public Theologians have an important role to play in this discourse, bringing a perspective that is rooted in the experiences of communities that have been historically marginalized and oppressed.

Finally, the task of the African Public Theologian in the diaspora is to recognize the increasing global influence of migrant religiosity. As Catherine Keller notes, we are living in an era of "global entanglement,"<sup>31</sup> where the boundaries between local and global religious practices are becoming increasingly porous. African (and other migrant) Christianities, in particular, are no longer confined to the continent; they are shaping theological discourses around the world, particularly in contexts where African migrants have established new religious communities. This is particularly true in countries like Sweden and the Netherlands, where African migrant communities are becoming African theological repositories with critical engagement in Western contexts.

In conclusion, the task of the African Public Theologian in the diaspora is not just to represent African perspectives in global theological discourse but to actively decolonize that discourse. Finally, this leads to my fourth point,

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<sup>30</sup> Habermas, *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*, 54.

<sup>31</sup> Keller & Rubenstein, *Entangled Worlds*, 3.

that African Public Theologians in the diaspora have the task of amplifying African theological contributions, translating the inputs of diverse voices to shape global theological discourses.

### **Conclusion**

This article argues that far from diminishing, religion is evolving and adapting in ways that call for greater scholarly attention and public engagement. We must push beyond Western-centric models that have dominated Public Theology and hold space for the rich, diverse, and globally impactful voices of African (and other majority world) Christianities. This is not only a matter of justice but of relevance, as majority world religious thought and practices are increasingly shaping theological discourse and public life worldwide.

The decolonial imperative at the heart of African public theology calls us to un-think the West and its dominance in both the academy and the public square. It challenges us to hold polycentric experiences and perspectives, not as peripheral or reactive to the West but as vital contributors to global conversations on faith, justice, and social change. In doing so, we begin to untangle the complexities of religion in the public sphere, offering a more inclusive, grounded, and transformative approach to public theology. ▲

## **SUMMARY**

This article critically examines the dominance of Western epistemologies in global Public Theology as it intersects with African Christianities and the perspectives of African theologians in the diaspora. Drawing on decolonial and African theological frameworks, we address the “theme park theology” trend, where some Western-centric approaches sanitize and commodify faith, often marginalizing non-Western voices and realities. The persistence of religion in African and migrant contexts, despite secularization theories, underscores the need for a nuanced, context-aware Public Theology that accounts for socio-political and economic influences on faith expressions. Through comparisons between religious trends in South Africa and Sweden, the author highlights how existential insecurities shape religious engagement differently across regions. Ultimately, the paper argues that a “global” Public Theology could expand beyond Western models to include more diverse perspectives, recognize religion’s persistence across the world, support decolonial discourses, and amplify African voices in shaping global theological conversations.

# Practising Critical Responsiveness

## *A Task for a Global Public Theology*

ANNETTE LANGNER-PITSCHMANN

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Annette Langner-Pitschmann is Professor of Theology in Times of Globalisation, Goethe University Frankfurt.  
langner-pitschmann@em.uni-frankfurt.de

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There are two obvious ways of describing the tasks of a global public theology. On the one hand, one can identify specific topics that arise for theology from the different globalised societies worldwide. From the diversity of these questions, a job profile for the global public theologian can then be derived that will include a wide range of qualifications and interests. On the other hand, one can focus on the question how globalisation shapes the cognitive attitudes of members of one's own local context. Starting from this, it will be possible to work out what it means to pursue the programme of a public theology under the auspices of globalisation.

For the following considerations, I have chosen the second alternative. The starting point is the concept of 'world civilisation'. This term condenses some of the implications of globalisation, so that it can provide information about the way in which globalisation shapes the judgement-forming processes of members of Western societies. Following Paul Ricoeur, I will consider which form of intersubjective communication is appropriate to the conditions of globalisation. With William E. Connolly, I will indicate what requirements result from this for the public discourse of democratic societies. On this basis, I will conclude by outlining a professional profile for a global public theologian. My thesis will be that theology has to offer the globalised public a space in which an ironic approach to one's own convictions can be practised in the best sense of the word.

### **Globalisation and world civilisation**

The term 'world civilisation' does not describe an existing reality, but an intellectual possibility. It refers to the possibility that the worldwide network-

ing of people, goods and ideas associated with globalisation will lead to a shared world of ideas. Embedded in this idea is the assumption that one day, as a result of this networking, all people will start from similar presuppositions in questions of science, technology, politics, economics and lifestyle.

Opinions differ as to whether the idea of 'world civilisation' is a *realistic* way of describing the vanishing point of globalisation. Samuel Huntington, for example, whose programme has been the subject of frequent criticism by Ulrich Schmiedel,<sup>1</sup> is famously pessimistic on this issue. "For the relevant future", he summarises his theory on the clash of civilizations, "there will be no universal civilization, but instead a world of different civilizations, each of which will have to learn to coexist with the others".<sup>2</sup> For him, this assumption is the inevitable conclusion of a twofold premise. First, the increase in global interaction between people leads to a "growth of civilisation-consciousness".<sup>3</sup> The more one's own existence is characterised by contact with other life contexts, the more intensely one's belonging to one's own context is perceived. In Huntington's view, this rise in "civilisation-consciousness" is, second, synonymous with the fact that people are increasingly likely to "see an 'us' versus 'them' relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion".<sup>4</sup> The stronger one's own affiliation to a civilisation context is perceived, the more pertinent the distinction is made between identity and alterity, between one's own and the foreign.

A counterpoint to Huntington is provided by Paul Ricœur's reflections, written as early as 1974 in his *Universal Civilization and National Cultures*. For him, it is self-evident that "mankind as a whole is on the brink of a single world civilisation".<sup>5</sup> His interest now centres on the question as to which obstacles make the path to such "worldwide awareness" a challenge.<sup>6</sup> In this context, he states:

When we discover that there are several cultures instead of just one and consequently at the time when we acknowledge the end of a sort of cultural monopoly, be it illusory or real, we are threatened with

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1 See Ulrich Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie. Der religionstheoretische Diskurs der 9/11-Dekade*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021, [https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-160795-0\\_102-123](https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-160795-0_102-123).

2 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993), 22–49, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621>.

3 Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", 26.

4 Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", 29.

5 Paul Ricœur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures", *History and Truth*, Evanston/Ill: Northwestern University Press, 2007, 271–284, here 271.

6 Ricœur, "Universal Civilization and National Cultures", 273.

destruction by our own discovery. Suddenly it becomes possible that there are just others, that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among others.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike Huntington, Ricœur is not primarily interested in the *external* threats lurking in the world of the future. Instead, he focuses on the question of which *internal* conflicts challenge us on the path to a universal civilisation and how we can respond to them appropriately. This means that he looks at the awakening of “civilisation-consciousness” from the perspective of the psychoanalyst behind the couch, so to speak. In this perspective, however, the characteristics of this development are quite different from those of Huntington.

Above all, it becomes apparent that the reflexive thematization of belonging to a certain civilisation (and thus at the same time not belonging to other civilisations) leads at best in a second step to the staging of a frontline position between one’s own and the other, between friend and enemy. Primarily, this thematization has a completely different effect: it is experienced as a narcissistic imposition. The realisation “that we ourselves are an ‘other’ among others” deprives every fantasy of uniqueness of its plausibility. In this sense, Ricœur makes it clear that the threat felt in the course of the awakening of a civilisation consciousness does not come from the Other or the stranger. Instead, it stems from “our own discovery” and from the disillusionment that accompanies it.

As a psychoanalyst, Ricœur of course knows that you *can* indeed react to a narcissistic insult by dividing the world into good and evil and turning your aggression outwards – but you do not *have to*. The regressive reaction is just one of many possible courses of action. Ricœur names three of the possible alternatives, i.e. three different ways of reacting to the insult associated with globalisation. First, as indicated, one could go into defence mode, making the differences between civilisations absolute and committing oneself to aggressive dogmatism. A second reaction pattern exists in the opposite extreme. It aims to deny any meaning to the differences between civilisations and to advocate a noncommittal syncretism. “All meaning and every goal having disappeared, it becomes possible to wander through civilisations as if through vestiges and ruins. The whole mankind becomes a kind of imaginary museum”.<sup>8</sup> However, Ricœur considers this form of reacting to the uncertainty associated with civilisation consciousness to be unsustainable. In his opinion it leads to a “scepticism on a world-wide scale”.<sup>9</sup>

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7 Ricœur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”, 278.

8 Ricœur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”, 278.

9 Ricœur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”, 278.

From these two one-sided and inadequate patterns of action, Ricœur now distinguishes a third option. It consists in recognising the offence one has experienced without absolutizing it. Ricœur argues that disillusionment over the contingency of one's own way of dealing with reality should be understood as a phase in a dialectical process. The somewhat humiliating realisation that – contrary to my intuition of being the centre of the world – after all I am simply “an ‘other’ among others” then becomes a temporary moment in the arduous but by no means hopeless process that Ricœur calls “communication”.<sup>10</sup>

For Ricœur, communication in this emphatic sense is anything but a mere factual exchange of messages. Rather, it is an existentially demanding process in which the affective bond to one's own culture is affirmed and at the same time exposed to the view from another culture. This “relation in which I affirm myself in my origins and give myself to another's imagination in accordance with his different civilisation” is “dramatic” in the sense that it creates an irreducible tension.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, there is the impulse to unconditionally identify with one's own normality; on the other hand, there is the experience that this normality is factually conditioned by the multitude of other normalities.

### **Civilisation Consciousness, Communication and Theology**

In the context of globalisation, democratic forms of coexistence rely on their citizens finding a mature way of dealing with social plurality. This ability in turn depends, at least as Ricœur suggests, on democratic citizens navigating the tension between commitment to one's own and relativity in the horizon of the other. In other words, they must be able to communicate in an emphatic sense.

Assuming that this view is correct, what does it mean for a global public theology? My proposal is that theology must create protected spaces within civil society in which people can practise communication as a “dramatic relation” in the dynamic between their own and others' dealings with reality. In other words, the programme of a Global Public Theology is to cultivate those habitual attitudes, argumentative patterns, and intellectual styles that keep open the gap between dogmatism and syncretism.

This proposal seems both abstract and vague. In order to put it a bit more precisely, it helps to juxtapose what has been said so far with some considerations by the political philosopher William E. Connolly. Connolly's work largely revolves around the question of how the democratic obligation to

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10 Ricœur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”, 282.

11 Ricœur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures”, 283.

recognise plurality can actually be put into practice. He starts from the critical awareness that both liberal and communitarian models of democracy, in their orientation towards the vanishing point of a social consensus, smooth out differences and divide ways of life into norm and deviation.<sup>12</sup> The tendency to ignore this paradox of democratic procedures and to “freez(e) moral standards of judgement condensed from past political struggles” only allows for a superficial “conventional pluralism”.<sup>13</sup>

Starting from this criticism, Connolly develops his programme of “deep pluralism”.<sup>14</sup> By this, he means a way of dealing with plurality and alterity that understands the boundary between the self and the other not as a natural given, but as the result of social settings. Difference, in Connolly’s credo, does not fall from the heavens, but is a paradoxical by-product of endeavours towards consensus and harmony: “[O]therness (dirt, things out of place, unreason, mystery, eccentricity, instability) is itself produced by the artifices through which we complete ourselves”.<sup>15</sup> For him, the crucial factor for the success of a “deep pluralism” is to realise that the normative settings are necessary for action but at the same time can be permanently contested. Conversely, this means that the boundaries that have been drawn can be made the subject of political negotiation again and again and thus utilised in a way that is productive for democracy. Democracy means constantly “to reconsider politically established orientations to these de-formations”,<sup>16</sup> i.e. to the mechanisms of demarcation and devaluation, which are caused as the flip side of collective decision-making.

In his reflections on pluralism, Connolly comes across the very question that I, following Ricœur, have identified as a key challenge of globalised (and therefore always necessarily plural) societies. How can the cognitive insight into the *optional* character of every identity be reconciled with the affective desire for a *non-arbitrary* identity? How can the awareness of the *contingency* of one’s own world view be brought into a balanced relationship with the intuition of its *necessary* validity?

Connolly summarises his answer to these questions in the concept of “deep contingency” and explains:

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<sup>12</sup> See William E. Connolly, “Democracy and Normalization”, *Politics and Ambiguity*, Madison/Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987, 3–16.

<sup>13</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, XIV.

<sup>14</sup> William E. Connolly, *Identity|Difference. Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*, Minneapolis 2008, XIV.

<sup>15</sup> Connolly, “Democracy and Normalization”, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Connolly, “Democracy and Normalization”, 11.

To speak of deep contingency is to play up the role of culture in the formation of identity while appreciating the weight of identity as it becomes entrenched in corporeal habits, feelings, and dispositions. It is also to set up the possibility that some of those entrenchments might be recomposed modestly through artfully devised tactics of the self and its collective sibling, micropolitics.<sup>17</sup>

Understanding one's own identity as a moment of deep contingency therefore means, on the one hand, consciously recognising its dependence on a particular cultural framework. At the same time, however, it also involves the unconditional acceptance of the fact that this framework – regardless of its optionality – inscribes itself into one's own habitus with the appearance of necessity. Connolly's concept of *deep contingency* is thus characterised by a dramatic quality similar to Ricœur's concept of *communication*: both involve the acceptance of the desire for a necessary identity while at the same time consenting to its permanent relativity. What is decisive for Connolly is that this double consent presupposes certain "tactics" in dealing with oneself and one's surroundings. More specifically, he calls for an "ethos of critical responsiveness"<sup>18</sup> which, in a nutshell, means a habitualised willingness to acknowledge the other regardless of existing "cultural markings" and irrespective of preconceptions about "what some 'we' already is".<sup>19</sup>

Connolly therefore understands critical responsiveness as a deeply political attitude. This attitude has nothing in common with a "therapeutic response, or paternalism, or pity, or certain types of Christian charity and secular community, where you respond humbly and warmly to the other to prepare it to convert to the universal identity you already represent".<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, unlike such harmony-oriented approaches, critical responsiveness aims to continually interrupt harmonisation processes. Critically responsive citizens of democracy are characterised by the way they constantly reflect on both the visible achievements of a successful community and the invisible processes of exclusion and marginalisation. In doing so, they represent a disruption of order insofar as they publicly visualise the necessary but always excluding (and that means: undemocratic) demarcations that are embedded in the democratic order.

### **Global Public Theology: Practising Critical Responsiveness**

As a preliminary conclusion, I noted above that the programme of a Global

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17 Connolly, *Identity|Difference*, XVI.

18 Cf. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, XIV–XXI, 180–188.

19 Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, XVII.

20 Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, XVII–XVIII.

Public Theology includes the task of cultivating such patterns of argumentation and styles of thought that, in Ricoeur's sense, maintain the distance between dogmatism and syncretism. With Connolly, I have summarised these mindsets in the attitude of critical responsiveness. My draft of a public theology in the context of globalised societies is therefore aimed at the level of democratic habitus. Theology can and should contribute to creatively dealing with the tension between the permanent necessity and the irreducible contestability of the norms and standardisations established in democratic coexistence. It can and should create intermediary spaces in which people learn to understand difference both as an aspect of living abundance and as a challenge to reflexive criticism.

It is quite obvious that the public character of such a theology does not consist in the visibility of substantive values. It is therefore by no means a matter of challenging democratically established standards with standards vouched for by theology. Instead, the model of public theology outlined here aims at the visibility of performative attitudes which allow the tension between definition and contestation to be permanently endured. Such a concept of public theology in the context of globalisation entails far-reaching preliminary decisions both regarding the concept of God and the theological epistemology. First, as far as the concept of God is concerned, the type of public theology proposed here assumes that divine reality is not limited to the production of cognitive clarity and moral manageability. Instead, it essentially reckons with a God who is the source of diversity and complexity, of abundance and excessive demands, of radical new creation and broken patterns of interpretation. Second, as far as the conditions of theological knowledge are concerned, it rests on a comprehensive doubt about the fundamental recognisability of all reality. At the centre is the paradoxical claim to hold together the existential interest in being able to say something about God with the reflexive insight of never being able to say anything about this God at all.

Once again, Connolly comes into play as inspiration for such a global public theology, whereby I would like to emphasise two aspects of his reflections in particular. First, Connolly remarkably begins his *Reflection on the Politics of Morality*<sup>21</sup> with an analysis of passages from the Book of Job, namely the Lord's speeches from the storm. "Where were you when I planned the earth? Tell me, if you are so wise..." (Job 38:4): For Connolly, the series of "ironic questions" represents a final reckoning with the grandiose notion of an ultimately intelligible reality.<sup>22</sup> It proves that God cannot

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<sup>21</sup> William E. Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative. A Reflection on the Politics of Morality*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, 8.

be “the designer of a cosmic womb” who “envelops the little circle of human categories, wishes, fears, and hopes in its care”. Rather, from these lines speaks “the instigator of a strange, vast world of internal energies and external forces” that “clash”, “collide”, and “converge”.<sup>23</sup> The devastating questions of this God, according to Connolly, aim to “crush the self-serving, anthropomorphic demand for an intrinsic moral order”.<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the concept of a divinely created fullness of reality has the effect of deconstructing the “ontological narcissism” by which people refuse to recognise that reality far exceeds the scope of human categorisation and that their own reality is only one marginal option among many.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, when it comes to dealing with this deconstruction or disillusionment, Connolly brings into play the notion of irony. By mentioning an ironic perspective, however, he is not referring to the consistent denial of the legitimacy of our categories as such. Rather, he is concerned with a playful curiosity that allows us to track down moments of contingency in the seemingly unconditional; in which we “detect arbitrary elements within necessary limits” and in this way take account of the ambiguity inherent in all standards of thought.<sup>26</sup> For him, irony is the lens that allows us to recognise the ambiguity of the limitations by means of which we make reality manageable for ourselves. Making use of this perspective requires not only serious reflexivity, but also humour:

One may live one’s own identity in a more ironic, humorous way, laughing occasionally [...] at the predisposition to universalize an impulse simply because it is one’s own. Laughing because one senses that the drive to moralize difference is invested with the wish to reassure oneself that one is what any normal being should be. [...] Such laughter pays homage to fugitive elements in life that exceed the organization of identity, otherness, rationality, and autonomy.<sup>27</sup>

Irony essentially means – as Connolly’s remarks suggest – a distancing from reality, but at the same time and above all a distancing from our way of understanding reality. Irony involves the relativisation of our categories and the interruption of our recurring impulse to take our own identity far more seriously than it is as seen from the outside. Connolly’s affinity for irony

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23 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, 10.

24 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, 8.

25 Connolly, *The Augustinian Imperative*, 8.

26 William E. Connolly, “Discipline, Politics, Ambiguity”, *Politics and Ambiguity*, 99–115, 110.

27 Connolly, *Identity|Difference*, 180.

understood in this way recalls a comment by Søren Kierkegaard in his book *The Concept of Irony*. In this work, Kierkegaard describes the gesture of irony as, among other things, a sovereign distance from the conditions that surround us. “In irony, the subject is continually retreating, talking every phenomenon out of its reality in order to save itself—that is, in order to preserve itself in negative independence of everything.”<sup>28</sup> Irony in this sense is never a permanent state, but a temporary change of perspective that leaves permanent traces in our view of reality. One of these traces, I would assume, is the exit from the narcissistic confusion of contingency and necessity, of unpredictable abundance with infinite plasticity.

## Outlook

What is the task of a global public theology? I have suggested with Ricoeur that universal civilisation is a realistic possibility of globalisation – and that authentic, dialectical communication is a necessary precondition for the realisation of this possibility. Together with Connolly, I have considered that such communication depends essentially on the reflective use of our capacity for irony. In doing so, we have realised that irony as a tactic of deep contingency and as a guarantor of distance from dogmatism and syncretism is not a static attitude. It is the pivotal point in the constant oscillation between being and appearance, between ‘that’ and ‘as if’, between the indicative and the subjunctive. This oscillation requires a little intellectual dexterity, it needs to be practised.

As is known, theology has a range of methods and figures of thought at its disposal to practise the agility demanded by irony. Hermeneutics and negative theology, analogy and apophatic theology, the incidence of opposites and eschatological reservation: in all these approaches, the attitude of critical responsiveness can be tested performatively. The diversity of these methods allows us to practise the skills we need on the path to a universal civilisation – namely dealing with difference and otherness, with the inscrutability of the other and the contingency of our own standards, both honestly and playfully, seriously and non-ideologically.

Kierkegaard described irony in the following image:

Anyone who does not understand irony at all, who has no ear for its whispering, [...] does not know the refreshment and strengthening that come with undressing when the air gets too hot and heavy and

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<sup>28</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400846924-002>, 257.

diving into the sea of irony, not in order to stay there, of course, but in order to come out healthy, happy, and buoyant and to dress again.<sup>29</sup>

To draw a bath from which people emerge more communicative than when they went in: perhaps that is the task of a Global Public Theology. ▲

#### SUMMARY

This paper discusses how globalisation shapes the cognitive attitudes of democratic citizens and elaborates against this backdrop what it means to pursue the programme of a public theology in the context of a globalised world. It starts from the idea of a world civilization – a concept suggesting that global interconnectedness might, after all, foster shared values. In accordance with Paul Ricœur, it envisions the awareness of plural cultures as an introspective process, urging us to enter into the dramatic relation of communication, in which the affective bond to one’s own culture is affirmed and at the same time exposed to the view from another culture. The task of Global Public Theology, the paper argues accordingly, is to cultivate those intellectual styles that keep open the gap between dogmatism (as the unconditional affirmation of one’s own perspective) and syncretism (as the unconditional exposition to the perspectives of others). In terms of political philosopher William E. Connolly, this means that public theology has to provide a social space where the attitude of “critical responsiveness” may be learned. The paper explores the ways in which these key concept thematizes the tension between the desire for a necessary identity and the recognition of its permanent relativity. In doing so, it specifies the task of a Global Public Theology to the effect that it has to advocate for intellectual agility through irony, creating spaces for recognizing difference, enduring relativization and resisting what Connolly calls “ontological narcissism”.

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29 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, 326–327.

# The Island of Theology and Religious Studies in the Global Age

## *Remarks on the Discipline and Its Prejudices*

FATIMA TOFIGHI

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Fatima Tofighi is Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at University of Religions and Denominations (Qom, Iran), and University of Bonn.

tofighi@uni-bonn.de

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When I was packing in 2011 to travel from Iran to Glasgow to start my PhD, I insisted on putting my heavy Hebrew Bible, Greek New Testament, and Vulgate in the suitcase. I had got these Bibles by spending much of my savings, and asking American friends who travelled to my hometown, Qom, to kindly bring them. With all its difficulty, buying the Bibles and dictionaries was easier than finding self-study facilities. A couple of good university libraries were helpful, but I mostly relied on hacked books. (Perhaps that is one of the most legitimate things that hacking has ever been used for.) I had done literary studies, and then went back to where I thought should be my home: religious studies. I decided to study at the University of Glasgow, because it offered PhDs in literature and Theology. I thought I needed to study the Bible in a Christian setting. I had got a positive response from advisers, who were based in poststructuralist approaches to the Bible. A romanticized image of freedom of thought had overwhelmed my imagination and motivations. My dream was to pursue religious studies, *religionswissenschaft*, disinterested study of religion. I imagined I could study what I liked, I could do historical or literary studies as the authors of the books that I read had done. I only needed to try.

But upon embarking on my journey in Biblical studies, in what I thought would become a rhetorical analysis of Luke-Acts, I was soon startled by the underlying presumptions of the literature I was studying. The soil was fertile

for me to gradually move to the nascent field of reception studies, where I found myself at home for quite a few years even after my PhD. In my literary studies before the PhD, I had learnt postcolonial theory, and yes, even though I would not succumb to the temptation, I could not help but write in my book, *Paul's Letters and the Construction of the European Self* (Bloomsbury, 2017), that I was looking at Paul 'from Arabia', as it were. I was trying to demonstrate that European scholars had missed Paul because they were trying to construct their favorite hero. Historical critical scholarship had got it wrong, it was anything but unbiased. When the book came to a close, I returned the bulky Bibles without having used them. What is traditionally called philological study of the Bible required them; and that is not what I had done. By that time, I had learnt that biblical scholarship was a thoroughly Christian discipline, that a Muslim woman is not assumed to be interested in the Bible for reasons other than comparison, dialogue, or post-colonial approaches. (Well, by then I was myself proof thereof.) With this personal story about my own academic journey, I come to some remarks on the discipline of Theology and Religious Studies.

(1) There are those who do 'rigorous' studies of the Bible, and there are those others who do other things, with a little help from Derrida (as in the title of Yvonne Sherwood's edited volume, *Derrida's Bible*, 2004).<sup>1</sup> A myth of 'freedom of thought' or 'freedom of knowledge' or 'disinterestedness of religious studies' had driven me along to first imagine myself in the former approach. That a scripture could be studied philologically by anybody with scholarly interest regardless of their backgrounds had traditional precedents in the discipline of Oriental studies, including Qur'anic and Islamic Studies. And that is what I also had in mind when trying to write my dissertation on a philological study of the Bible. Soon, I learnt that it was not a two-way street. It is true that no one had in any way stopped me, but just as no one really stops a wheelchair in the entrance of a building with stairs and no ramps. Here also the infrastructure was not – as it were – either theoretically and practically suitable for the kind of questions I had in my mind. I felt that the literature upon which the research was to be built was itself questionable; so my job was to correct them in the first place. Besides, the ice-breakers in the conference coffee breaks could not but revolve on my 'anomalous' presence in biblical studies.

(2) The University has opened itself to the subaltern. But the subaltern goes in the Department of Subaltern Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Women's Studies. Instead of patronizing the subaltern, we ask them to

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<sup>1</sup> Yvonne Sherwood (ed.), *Derrida's Bible: Reading a Page of Scripture with a Little Help from Derrida*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

speak on their own behalf. The subaltern academic becomes the voice of the voiceless, the voice of the brown woman, who was rescued from brown men by white men, the brown woman, who cannot otherwise speak. The subaltern is also happy doing this. They can play the role of revolutionaries, fight prejudices, they can create a more ethical world, they are good at it (they have the ‘standpoint’ of the native), and they can build bridges with their native home.

(3) The Orientalists of Edward Said’s book do not do Oriental Studies. Where are they now? In Theology and Religious Studies. There are the white disciplines of historical critical scholarship of the Bible, Systematic and Fundamental Theologies. When the white goes out to the other, it is through other white disciplines of theology of religions, comparative theology, and intercultural studies, the disciplines of the nice, friendly person, who is remorseful of the past and is not negligent of the other. Yet the discipline is hardly aware of the power dynamics of its own approach. The Western Christian cannot just go to the Hindu, the Jewish, or the Muslim and say: “Oh, I am sorry for our animosity towards you. Now I have come to learn from you and enrich my own faith.” This gesture of genuine humility and vulnerability in learning cannot be detached from the long history of Christian missionary-colonial encounters. When the Western Christian is reading a theme in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism or Islam as relating to another theme in Christianity, they run the risk of becoming like their older missionary brother who taught the native that they had been unwittingly worshipping Christ all along. Here the force of Ulrich Schmiedel’s suggestion that we need *political comparative theology* becomes clearer.<sup>2</sup> Even in their attempts at self-reflection and self-critique, intercultural theologies have failed in understanding the others in their own terms. Then, there are these other disciplines of postcolonial studies, global Christianities, which are reminding the earlier disciplines of their biases, but could not overcome the myth of unbiased theology, and have only remained a “theme park theology”, nice exotic things that are not meant to hurt anyone’s biases/prejudices.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, more than two decades after its publication, Marcella María Althaus Reid’s critique speaks to the current situation of Theology and Religious Studies, which has not been critical enough, which has retained the image of the savior, without problematizing theology in critical terms.

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<sup>2</sup> Ulrich Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie: der religionstheoretische Diskurs der 9/11 Dekade*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, “Gustavo Gutierrez Goes to Disneyland: Theme Park Theologies and the Diaspora of the Discourse of the Popular Theologian in Liberation Theology”, *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. F. F. Segovia, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 36–58.

(4) Theology and Religious Studies, as an academic discipline, has two targets – the politician and the parishioner. It has done the two groups favors. The politician should not make policies that undermine the integrity and right of belief and expression. The parishioner needs to be educated against populism and fundamentalism. Indeed, Theology and Religious Studies protects the politician and the parishioner from each other. To the politician, religion becomes liberal; to the parishioner, religion is protected against being liberal. But in this dual attempt, Theology and Religious Studies risks its own integrity. And it still ignores the other who is outside the politician-parishioner game. Political theology should be targeted to and integrated with the understanding of the other. That is what Schmiedel has argued for both in *Terror und Theologie* and his co-authored work with Hannah Strømmen, *The Claim to Christianity*.<sup>4</sup>

(5) Within this kind of structuring of the disciplines, Islamic studies/theology belongs elsewhere. At points Islam is religion par excellence, even replacing the nineteenth-century tropes of Judaism. And at other points, Islam is the other of theology. ‘Theology’ is Christian theology, with clear-cut borders.

(6) Theology and Religious Studies has failed to open itself up to the ‘religious other’. In as much as taxonomies are challenging, they cannot be dismissed. Still, this does not mean that we allow ourselves to be ethically irresponsible toward the ‘religious’ other. In my book, *Paul and the Construction of the European Self*;<sup>5</sup> I tried to show how modern biblical interpretation needed to be ethically responsible to the Jews and Muslims. In my later work in Farsi, I reminded Muslims that they have an ethical responsibility to followers of other religions. In order to be global and contextual, theology of any religion cannot stay on a safe island. It has to acknowledge its accountability to the others.

(7) It is true that the vocabulary of liberation, postcolonial, diaspora, and other subaltern theologies looms large in different disciplines, not the least theology and religious studies, but we have run the risk of creating different ‘bubbles’ for particular disciplines and approaches. It may be time to make the followers of different approaches, disciplines, and religions confront each other. Nowadays we seem to have plenty of tools and devices to critically construct theology and religious theology. It is true, after all, that the criticism of religion is the beginning of all criticism. Decades after the emergence of liberation, postcolonial, diaspora, and other subaltern theol-

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<sup>4</sup> Hannah Strømmen & Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right*, London: SCM Press, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Fatima Tofiqhi, *Paul and the Construction of the European Self*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

ogies, and in a time that we avoid attributing wars and bloodshed to scriptures and their right and wrong interpretations, we should take the audacious step of making people confront each other. To be global, Theology and Religious Studies must not stop rethinking its own categories with the help of humanities.

### **Conclusion**

I started with my personal story to highlight the boundaries within the discipline of theology and religious studies. In what seems like an audacious orchestration of clichés, I tried to uncover the biases of the discipline, precisely in the moment that it was exposed to critical theory. Indeed, theology and religious studies has yet to be ‘provincialized’. It has yet to engage with the other, perhaps through co-contamination with the ‘religious’ other, as Ulrich Schmiedel in this collection also emphasizes. ▲

### **SUMMARY**

Theology and Religious Studies is still fraught with biases that in different ways underline the (religious) other. I try to uncover some of these biases, by calling attention to the infrastructures that do not allow certain people, questions, or themes to feel at home in the discipline. This is a call to provincialize theology and religious studies in Europe and North America.

# Public Theology, Violence, and Responsibility

ALANA M. VINCENT

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Alana M. Vincent is Associate Professor in History of Religion, Umeå University.

alana.vincent@umu.se

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Friends, we need to talk about violence.

I know, you're probably thinking, we talk about violence all the time. We deplore the violence visited upon other people's bodies,<sup>1</sup> the rhetorical violence which justifies it,<sup>2</sup> the epistemic violence with which its victims are prevented from claiming knowledge or the privilege of interpretation over their own experiences.<sup>3</sup> Less frequently, though slightly more than never,

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the essays collected in Andrew R. Murphy (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, Malden: John Wiley and Sons Ltd, 2011; Michael Jerryson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; and especially Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 77: "It is not easy for humans to kill others. To participate in mass killing in war is destructive of individual psyches and of the larger community's mental health".

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Kelly Denton-Borhaug "The Language of 'Sacrifice' in the Buildup to War: A Feminist Rhetorical and Theological Analysis", *Journal of Religion & Popular Culture* 15 (2007), 2, <https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.15.1.002>; Vincent Lloyd, "The Rhetoric of Political Theology", *Political Theology* 13 (2012), 741–750, <https://doi.org/10.1558/poth.v13i6.741>; Yvonne Friedman, "Christian Hatred of the Other: Theological Rhetoric vs. Political Reality", Cordelia Heß & Jonathan Adams (eds.), *Fear and Loathing in the North: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Scandinavia and the Baltic Region*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2015, 187–201, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110346473-014>.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Courtney T. Goto, "Experiencing Oppression: Ventriloquism and Epistemic Violence in Practical Theology", *International Journal of Practical Theology* 21 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt-2015-0051>; Ian James Kidd, "Epistemic Injustice and Religion", *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, eds. Ian James Kidd, José Medina & Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017, 386–396, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315212043>; Jo Henderson-Merrygold "Queer(y)ing the Epistemic Violence

some of us might even talk about the spiritual violence of forced forgiveness.<sup>4</sup>

But, friends, nearly all this talk about violence is about the violence committed by and enacted against other people – even if those people are our ancestors, fellow citizens, or coreligionists. We deplore it from a safe distance; we are able to deplore it precisely because of the safety that distance grants us. This is academic neutrality:<sup>5</sup> the safety distance grants us is not merely safety from violence itself, but safety from being implicated in violence, as either victims or perpetrators.

Except, of course, it isn't. The epistemic violence we deplore from a safe distance is the foundation on which the walls of neutrality we rely upon to shield us from being implicated in that violence are built. It is our very sense of academic responsibility: to objectivity, empiricism, the view-from-nowhere;<sup>6</sup> to the idea of the academy as a meritocracy, our own highly privileged positions as somehow earned; to the maintenance of the institution of the academy as such and the moulding of the generations that come after us

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of Christian Gender Discourses”, *Rape Culture, Gender Violence, and Religion*, eds. Caroline Byth, Emily Colgan & Katie B. Edwards, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018, 97–117, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72685-4\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72685-4_6); Sarojini Nadar & Tinyiko Maluleke, “Of Theological Burglaries and Epistemic Violence: Black Theology, Decoloniality, and Higher Education”, *The Ecumenical Review* 74 (2022), 541–560, <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12730>.

4 See, e.g., Rebecca Ann Parker & Rita Nakishema Brock, *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2002; Hellena Moon, *Liberalism and Colonial Violence: Charting a New Genealogy of Spiritual Care*, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2023.

5 The uses and misuses of “academic neutrality” are widely chronicled, including an extensive treatment in Stephen H. Aby & James Kuhn, *Academic Freedom: A Guide to the Literature*, London: Greenwood, 2000; see also Avner De-Shalit, “Teaching Political Philosophy and Academic Neutrality”, *Theory and Research in Education* 3, no. 1 (2005), 97–120, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878505049837>. For the role of academic neutrality in obscuring academic complicity in conflict situations, see e.g. Nathan Katz, “Academic Neutrality’ and Contemporary Tibetan Studies”, *The Tibet Journal* 8 (1983), 6–9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43300104>; Joan Wallach Scott, et al., “On Academic Boycotts”, *Academe* 92 (2006), 39–43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40253493>; Anne de Jong, “The Gaza Freedom Flotilla: Human Rights, Activism and Academic Neutrality”, *Research Ethics and Social Movements*, eds. Kevin Gillan & Jenny Pickerill, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315742403>; Hilary Aked, “Whose University? Academic freedom, neoliberalism, and the rise of ‘Israel Studies’”, *Enforcing Silence: Academic Freedom, Palestine and the Criticism of Israel*, eds. David Landy, Ronit Lentin & Conor McCarthy, London: Bloomsbury, 2020, 39–66; Arsène Saparov, “Normalizing conflict – concealing genocide? Expert neutrality in the Armenian Azerbaijani conflict”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* (2024), 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2024.2384138>. Concerns about neutrality also appear across a number of the chapters in Rian Venter & Francois Tolmie (eds.), *Transforming Theological Knowledge: Essays on Theology and the University After Apartheid*, Bloemfontein: UJ Press, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781920382261>.

6 See the classic critique in Donna Haraway, “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual & Political Controversies*, ed. Sandra Harding, 2004, 81–101.

to the service of that institution; to our work as vocation,<sup>7</sup> rather than merely labour – it is this sense of responsibility which entangles us, unavoidably, in the violence which we constantly deplore, and which turns our deploring from the ethical stance we wish it to be into a denial of reality which betrays every single value we think we stand for. And worse than betraying our values, through this denial we betray one another. Constantly. Inescapably. Irrevocably.

How dare we?

I have been thinking about these things – the relentless violence of the world,<sup>8</sup> our unavoidable implication in it, and the very specific ways that our sense of academic responsibility makes us not merely implicated bystanders<sup>9</sup> but direct agents of violence – a great deal over the past year, from the 7th of October when the violence of the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank that most of us have learned to treat as background noise, a constant low frequency hum that serves as the backdrop to the sharper, more arresting screams from other, more novel sites of violence that we haven't spent our lifetimes learning to unhear, from when that low hum found harmonic resonance with the screams of 797 murdered Israeli civilians and 251 hostages. I've been thinking about it in the face of constant, relentless demand from both colleagues and institutions that we should only listen to one note in that chord of terror, and I hear it in the demand I make of my own students that they understand the context. There are few things that soothe the academic soul more effectively than understanding context – and there is so very much context for us to understand. Context, I think, is the wax we stuff in our ears to drown out the sounds of screaming so we can better tend to our vocation. It is the rose-coloured glasses that we wear to help us unsee the blood on our own hands.

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7 The distinction between labour and vocation, as well as its role in the precarisation of academic jobs, has been the subject of extensive commentary, such that once again I can only gesture at a few examples: George Morgan & Julian Wood, "The 'academic career' in the era of flexploitation" in Emiliana Armano, Arianna Bove & Annalisa Murgia (eds.) *Mapping Precariousness, Labour Insecurity and Uncertain Livelihoods: Subjectivities and Resistance*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315593838>; Ruth Barcan, "Paying Dearly for Privilege: Conceptions, Experiences and Temporalities of Vocation in Academic Life", *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 26 (2017), 105–121, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2017.1358207>; Fabian Cannizzo, "You've Got to Love What You Do": Academic Labour in a Culture of Authenticity", *The Sociological Review* 66 (2018), 91–106, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026116681439>.

8 Again, this is a widely discussed concept but see especially Thomas Lynch, *Apocalyptic Political Theology: Hegel, Taubes and Malabou*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.

9 See Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998, 76.

It is also the only thing we have to hang on to. What distinguishes theology from other disciplines, is, after all, our context: the consciousness we carry of speaking from and into a specific tradition.<sup>10</sup> What distinguishes good theology from bad theology is the way we put that consciousness to use: do we draw on our tradition as a resource that helps us to meet together and work together in the world as it is – the world which Hannah Arendt reminds us is preconditioned on the basic fact of human plurality?<sup>11</sup> Or do we use it to fence ourselves in, as an excuse to avoid honest conversation and collaboration with people who do not share our same starting points? Where do we draw the line between speaking from a tradition and epistemologically privileging arguments that favour the tradition from which we speak? When we insist on the importance of understanding context, are we really willing to enter into the context of others? Or are we just eager to make our context understood by everyone else?

In Pirke Avot, Akiva ben Mahalalel says:

Mark well three things to save yourself from error: know from where you come, and where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give an account and reckoning. From where do you come? From a putrid drop. Where are you going? To a place of dust, of worm and of maggot. Before whom you are destined to give an account and reckoning? Before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.<sup>12</sup>

I was told to be bold, here (an instruction which I suspect Ulrich might be regretting by this point), so let's go for it: I think that it is very dangerous for theologians to take ben Mahalalel at his word. Specifically, I worry about the way that we use the idea of God, and particularly the idea of God as the final judge. I think we use the idea of eschatological judgement to get us off the hook – to defer to the next world, if it exists, accountability for the violence that we do in this one.<sup>13</sup> We do this especially when we talk

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<sup>10</sup> See Alana Vincent, "The Necessity of a Jewish Systematic Theology", *STK* 92 (2016), 159–170.

<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, New York: Doubleday, 1958, 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Avot* 3:1.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Melissa Raphael, "'Cover not our Blood with thy Silence': Sadism, Eschatological Justice and Female Images of the Divine", *Feminist Theology* 3 (1995), 85–105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350950000808>; Hans Boersma, "Eschatological Justice and the Cross: Violence and Penal Substitution", *Theology Today* 60 (2003), 186–199, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004057360306000204>; Alan Revere, "Eschatology in the Political Theory of Michael Walzer", *Journal of Religious Ethics* 33 (2005), 91–116, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0384-9694.2005.00184.x>; Roko Kerovec, "The Embrace Of Justice And Peace: Concerning The Tension Between Retributive And Eschatological Justice", *Kairos: Evangelical Journal*

about violence as sacred, or religious; we invoke the idea of God as a way of cloaking this violence with the air of inevitability, rather than confronting violence as a choice.

A human choice.

Our own choice.

The day before the event for which this talk was prepared, I was at Umeå, teaching our Grundkurs moment Judendom och Islam, reading together with my students accounts of the Akedah. And we read Bereshit Rabbah, where after the angel intervenes to save Isaac's life, God tells Abraham "when I said to you: "Take you your son", I did not say: "Slaughter him", but rather, "take him up". I said this to you in affection. You have taken him up and fulfilled My words, now take him down".<sup>14</sup> In this telling, the violence in the story is presented clearly as belonging to Abraham – not an expression of his piety or obedience, not an intrinsic part of his human nature, not inevitable, not unavoidable; what this telling makes clear is how many opportunities Abraham had to do something different, to ask more questions, to register a protest, and how many ways he chose not to.

How do we do theology in times like these? The same way, it turns out, as we have always done: with blood on our hands and the sound of screaming in our ears. Some of the blood is our own – but not all; not even most of it. Some of the screams are ours, too. Where do we come from? Blood and screaming. To where do we go? That depends on the choices we make in this moment. To whom are we accountable? Every single person who came before us and will come after us. Our task is precisely not to fiddle about with the sacred, the raised above or set-apart,<sup>15</sup> but rather to meet that awful, fearsome, and endless responsibility: to stand accountable before one another. ▲

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*of Theology* 3 (2009), 9–22, <https://hrcak.srce.hr/215453>; Il-sup Ahn, "Deconstructing Eschatological Violence Against Ecology: Planting Images of Ecological Justice", *CrossCurrents* 67 (2017), 458–475, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26605817>; Lisa Marie Bowens, "God and Time: Exploring Black Notions of Prophetic and Apocalyptic Eschatology", *T&T Clark Handbook of African American Theology*, Antonia Michelle Daymond, Frederick L. Ware & Eric Lewis Williams (eds.), London: T&T Clark, 2019, 213–224; Michael P. Jaycox, "Nussbaum, Anger, and Racial Justice: On the Epistemological and Eschatological Limitations of White Liberalism", *Political Theology* 21 (2020), 415–433, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462317X.2020.1747810>.

<sup>14</sup> *Bereshit Rabbah* 56:8.

<sup>15</sup> E.g. senses 2 and 3 as identified in Matthew T. Evans, "The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts", *Review of Religious Research* 45 (2003), 32–47, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3512498>.

**SUMMARY**

This article argues that the main task of public theology in the contemporary context is to reject appeals to divine agency as legitimate responses to the violence of the world.

# Public Theology for the Postmigrant Society

*“Det började röra sig!”*

ULRICH SCHMIEDEL

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Ulrich Schmiedel is Professor of Global Christianities at Lund University.

ulrich.schmiedel@ctr.lu.se

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I have been thinking a lot about my retirement lately.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is neither the most common nor the most commendable way to kick off a lecture supposed to signal that I am starting to work at Lund University, but I have been thinking about my retirement for a reason. The reason is Malmö – in the future.

Malmö can be seen as a test-case for changes that are about to take place in many cities across Europe. By 2050, the population will have reached 500,000. It is likely that this population will be confronted with increasing inequality as the city shifts from “diversity” (where a distinction between majority and minorities can be drawn) to “superdiversity” (where a distinction between majority and minorities cannot be drawn).<sup>2</sup> Statistics show that today about 50 percent of Malmö’s population do not have a migration background and about 50 percent of Malmö’s population do have a migration background.<sup>3</sup> Yet among the under-15-year-olds, the ratio is 65 percent

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a shortened version of my inaugural lecture “‘Det började röra sig!’ Public Theology for the Postmigrant Society”, delivered at Lund University, 12 September 2024. Throughout, all translations from German, Norwegian, and Swedish are my own, unless noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of superdiversity was coined by Steven Vertovec, “Super-Diversity and Its Implications”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30, no. 6 (2007), 1024–1054. In the conversation about the concept, Maurice Crul has made the case for superdiversity as the characterization of a situation beyond the minority/majority distinction. See Maurice Crul, Jens Schneider, & Frans Lelie, *Super-Diversity: A New Perspective on Integration*, Amsterdam: VU University Press 2013.

<sup>3</sup> See the summary of Malmö in the research on “Becoming a Minority” led by Crul:

to 35 percent. When they will have grown up – I leave it to you to wonder whether I am following a realistic retirement plan – the distinction between the majority who did not migrate to Sweden and the minority who did migrate to Sweden will stop making sense. Malmö as a whole will have a migration background.

Maurice Crul, a sociologist who has been studying the shift from diversity to superdiversity across Europe, has taken Malmö as one of his cases.<sup>4</sup> Crul suggests that this shift has consequences for the concept of integration. The assumption today is that integration is the process through which a minority integrates into a majority. But as the statistics show, there will be no such process in Malmö because the city will have no majority. Integration will be a task for people with and for people without a migration background. Both will have to integrate into a society that will look radically different and radically diverse: superdiverse.<sup>5</sup>

Crul's argument connects to scholarship on the postmigrant society.<sup>6</sup> Scholars such as Naika Foroutan have theorized "postmigration" for the study of society. Foroutan points to "the postmigrant society" as a "promise of plural democracy".<sup>7</sup> She stresses that if migration is the new normal, then the binary between people with and people without a migration background becomes blurred. Normatively, Foroutan suggests that the postmigrant society is about the "negotiation and renegotiation of equality as a central promise of modern democracies, which refer to plurality and parity as principles".<sup>8</sup> It "poses the fundamental question of how we can get beyond the social dividing line of migration, if we want to live together in societies that are becoming more and more plural".<sup>9</sup>

Whatever else one can say about the shift from diversity to superdiversity that Malmö signals, one statement makes immediate sense: "Det började röra sig!" I have borrowed it (including the exclamation mark) from the

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<https://bamproject.eu/>, accessed 12 October 2024. A person with a "migration background" was born outside Sweden or has a parent who was born outside Sweden.

4 See Maurice Crul & Frans Lelie, *The New Minority: People Without a Migration Background in the Superdiverse City*, Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2023.

5 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 16–18.

6 Central to this scholarship is Regina Römhild's critique of "migrantology", scholarship on migration that misses the construction of migrantness by concentrating on migrants only. See Römhild, "Beyond the Bounds of the Ethnic: For Postmigrant Cultural and Social Research", *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 9, no. 2 (2017), 69–75. For a succinct summary of the debate, see Anne Ring Petersen, *Postmigration, Transculturality and the Transversal Politics of Art*, London: Routledge, 2024, 31–62.

7 Naika Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft: Ein Versprechen der pluralen Demokratie*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2019.

8 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 13–14.

9 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 18–19.

scholar who introduced the study of Global Christianity at Lund. The statement is tricky to translate. “Att röra sig” is about something that is stirring something up. What is striking about the stirring is that it is its own subject: the stirring makes the stirring. As a translation, I would suggest: “Things were starting to move.”

I have been thinking about my retirement because I am wondering what students at Lund need to know to navigate postmigrant public squares such as Malmö where things are starting to move. What could they have learnt about religion? What should they have learnt about religion? And how might I have helped in their learning before I retire? In this lecture, I aim to answer these questions by arguing for a coalitional and comparative public theology that allows the study of Global Christianity to analyze and assess the practices of living together in superdiverse societies. I move from Malmö in the past to Malmö in the present, before I go back to the future to point to the potential that theology holds for the postmigrant public square.

### “Things Were Starting to Move”: The Past

Gustaf Lindeberg (1887–1961) introduced the study of Global Christianity at Lund. In *A Century in the Service of Mission: The Lund Mission Society 1845–1945*, Lindeberg offers a historical account of the Lund Mission Society that sheds light on the origins and the organization of the field.<sup>10</sup> The Society was founded to fund a new institute at which missiology would be taught to missionaries. Lindeberg was a surprising choice for a teacher. He had not been a missionary himself, neither inside nor outside Sweden.<sup>11</sup>

Detailing the history of the Lund Mission Society, Lindeberg describes missiology in Europe during its heyday. You have to read a little bit between the lines to notice how he reflects on the connections between what is going on inside and outside Europe. “Det började röra sig!” captures how different national and international currents came together in a constellation that enabled the creation of the Lund Mission Society.<sup>12</sup> You can feel Lindeberg’s excitement.

Lindeberg’s Malmö clarifies what the constellation looked like. During Lindeberg’s life, the Kockums shipyard in Malmö developed into one of the largest shipyards in the world. Malmö was booming.<sup>13</sup> It was a city on a map of the world which revolved around a Christian center. Malmö was in

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<sup>10</sup> Gustaf Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst: Lunds Missionssällskap 1845–1945*, Lund: Gleerup, 1945.

<sup>11</sup> See Magnus Lundberg, “Gustaf Lindeberg och missionsstudiet vid Lunds Universitet”, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 86, no. 3 (1998), 357–368.

<sup>12</sup> Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> See Tessa Anderson, “Malmö: A City in Transition”, *Cities* 39 (2014), 10–20, 11.

the center. Accordingly, Lindeberg assumes that mission is the movement of Christianity from the middle to the margins: inside Sweden, missionizing Indigenous populations locally, and outside Sweden, missionizing Indigenous populations globally.<sup>14</sup> Lindeberg's account of the Lund Mission Society presents mission as the movement of Christianity from the middle to the margins.

Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing coined the concept of "friction" to capture how globalization plays out in concrete contexts. "Cultures", she argues, "are continually co-produced in the interactions I call 'friction'".<sup>15</sup> Countering abstract accounts of globalization that assume that the processes connecting more and more people in more and more places are smooth – frictionless movement of capital, frictionless movement of commodities, and frictionless movement of currencies – the concept of friction allows for ethnographic explorations that examine "the engagement and encounter through which global trajectories take shape" in the first place.<sup>16</sup> Friction is what happens when the global and the local connect. Lindeberg has no concept of friction, but his account of the Lund Mission Society shows a friction.

Lindeberg's story is not a success story.<sup>17</sup> The new institute that the Lund Mission Society was meant to fund had not formed by the time he retired. Lindeberg was never appointed professor. After his retirement, the worst that a theologian from Lund could imagine happened: theologians from Uppsala came to teach Global Christianity here!<sup>18</sup>

Eventually, however, the Lund Mission Society endowed a professorship. In the 1990s, Aasulv Lande (1937–2019) was appointed as the first professor of "Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik" at Lund. He cites from the minutes of a meeting of the Faculty of Theology on 11 May 1995 that laid out the role and responsibilities of the chair.<sup>19</sup> The professor ought to conduct "research on mission past and present [...] also in view of the interpretations of Christianity that are actualized in the encounter between Christianity and

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14 Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst*, 25–38. For comments on what he calls "lappmissionen", see Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst*, 7.

15 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005, 4.

16 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, "Frictions", *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Globalization*, vol. 2, ed. George Ritzer, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 707–709, 707.

17 Lindeberg, *Ett sekel i missionens tjänst*, 50–67, 87–100.

18 See Aasulv Lande & Magnus Lundberg, "Missionsvetenskap med ekumenik", *Theologicum i Lund: undervisning och forskning i tusen år*, eds. Birger Olsson, Göran Bexell, & Göran Gustafsson, Lund: Arcus, 2001, 150–155.

19 Aasulv Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 71, no. 1 (1995), 1–11, 1.

other religions”. Research about “the forms of expression of the ecumenical movement” is added a sentence after. Accordingly, the professorship is named “Missiology with Ecumenical Studies”.

The professorship would have suited Lindeberg. Yet Lande points out that the study of Global Christianity cannot be the same after the turn from the colonial to the postcolonial approach to missiology. Lande introduces a “two-dimensional concept of mission” to capture how this turn changes the field. One dimension of the study of Global Christianity is descriptive. Here, mission is studied historically. The other dimension of the study of Global Christianity is prescriptive. Here, mission is studied systematically. According to Lande, the normativity that is ingrained in systematic theology is necessary for the study of mission to critique colonialism. Without a normative anchor, the scholar of Global Christianity can characterize but cannot criticize colonialism in the name of God. Since Lindeberg had no normative anchor, Lande stresses, his missiology functioned as a defense of mission with “colonialism” and “cultural imperialism”.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, Lande conceptualizes mission as *missio Dei*: God is the subject rather than the object of mission, so that mission can take place with or without churches.<sup>21</sup> Lande pioneers the extension of ecumenism from intra- to inter-religious dialogue that has gained traction across the study of Global Christianity ever since.<sup>22</sup> Drawing on theologies of liberation, he declares: “In my normative starting point, the Trinitarian God is the radical innovator... I want to emphasize God who creatively renews in a historical process”.<sup>23</sup> “Renewal” emerges as a core category for Lande. It enables him to identify the agency of both the missionaries and the missionized in the process of mission.<sup>24</sup>

Lande’s concentration on renewal corresponds to the friction between the local and the global during the 1990s. Lande’s Malmö was going through a tough time, coping with the loss of employment across the city that came with the closure of the shipyard.<sup>25</sup> Whereas income inequality had been very low in Sweden, it was starting to rise towards the end of the 1990s. The

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20 Lande, “Det doble misjonsbegrep”, 2, with reference to Edward Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

21 Lande, “Det doble misjonsbegrep”, 5.

22 See David Kerr, “Mission and Ecumenical Studies at Lund University”, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 94, no. 4 (2006), 493–501, 494.

23 Lande, “Det doble misjonsbegrep”, 7.

24 See Magnus Lundberg, “Aasulv Lande and Missiology”, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 92, no. 3 (2004), 313–318.

25 See Malmö stadsbyggnadskontor, *Översiktsplan för Malmö 1990*, Malmö 1990.

employment gap between people with and people without migration background that characterizes the country today opened in the 1990s.<sup>26</sup>

Sweden's response to these changes fits the social, cultural, and political trends that are captured with the concept of "neoliberalism".<sup>27</sup> "Renewal" is in the air across the globe, materialized in the building of the Öresund bridge.<sup>28</sup> Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" takes the collapse of the Soviet Union as evidence for a renewal of the world through neoliberal capitalism where "all societies [...] end their ideological pretensions of representing [...] higher forms of human society" than the United States.<sup>29</sup> Instead of the "First World" in the West, the "Second World" in the East, and the "Third World" forgotten somewhere in-between, the world is assumed to become *one*. However, when Lande argues that "it is important to uncover the relationship of mission to colonialist patterns in the Third World", he appears to be cautioning that the end of history might not be as equalizing as it is assumed to be.<sup>30</sup> The study of Global Christianity is critical of one-world ideas and ideologies.

After Lande, David Kerr (1945–2008) takes up the professorship. With a specialization in Islam, he shapes a "comparative missiology" which sees Islam through the eyes of Christianity and Christianity through the eyes of Islam.<sup>31</sup> Kerr shows how Christians missionized Muslims and how Muslims missionized Christians.<sup>32</sup> After 9/11, the map of the world changes again. A new division is drawn between "the West" and "the Rest".<sup>33</sup> The very idea of a comparative missiology counters this division. Kerr established collaborations with Muslim faith-based organizations in Malmö, challenging how the division plays out in the concrete context of the city.<sup>34</sup>

In a lecture delivered soon after his arrival at Lund, Kerr makes the case that "Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik" could be translated to "World

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26 See Lena Schröder, "From Problematic Objects to Resourceful Subjects: An Overview of Immigrant-Native Labour Market Gaps from a Policy Perspective", *Swedish Economic Policy Review* 14 (2007), 7–31.

27 See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017; *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.

28 Anderson, "Malmö: A City in Transition", 17–18.

29 Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?", *The National Interest* 16 (1989), 1–18, 13.

30 Lande, "Det doble misjonsbegrep", 5.

31 Kerr, "Mission and Ecumenical Studies", 499.

32 See David Kerr, "Islamic Da 'wa and Christian Mission: Towards a Comparative Analysis", *International Review of Mission* 89, no. 353 (2000), 147–267.

33 See Ulrich Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie: Der religionstheoretische Diskurs der 9/11-Dekade*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021, 85–130.

34 Kerr, "Mission and Ecumenical Studies", 497–498.

Christianity and Interreligious Relations”.<sup>35</sup> Through this creative translation, Kerr connects Lund to changes in the field. Across countries and continents, “missiology” is being re-labelled in a way that points to the global character of Christianity as a “polycentric” religion that cannot be captured by the dynamics between Christian middle and non-Christian margins that comes with the concept of mission.<sup>36</sup> The new label unlocks the discipline. Kerr sees a dialectic at work here: the understanding of mission has changed the character of Global Christianity in the past and the character of Global Christianity has changed the understanding of mission in the present. This dialectic materializes on his office door where one could read “World Christianity and Interreligious Relations” and “Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik”. Kerr had not asked for the double designation, but when he discovered it on his door, he declared: “I was puzzled and pleased.”<sup>37</sup>

I am not sure what the sign on Mika Vähäkangas’ door said. Vähäkangas took the professorship after Kerr. His work escapes the “West” versus “Rest” paradigm by complicating both sides: “the West” and “the Rest” are not as univocal as assumed.<sup>38</sup> Vähäkangas shifts from the singular Christianity to the plural Christianities. His contextual<sup>39</sup> theology clarifies a core characteristic that has run through Global Christianity at Lund at least since Lande: Global Christianity is a way of doing systematic theology that weaves together descriptive and prescriptive perspectives. This clarification allows Vähäkangas to take the friction between the local and the global seriously. Christianities across the globe influence each other. Systematic theologians, then, need to come out of their Eurocentric echo chamber. Vähäkangas puts it perhaps more pithily: the study of Global Christianity bursts “the theologian’s reality bubble”.<sup>40</sup>

The approaches to the study of Global Christianity that are outlined after Lande take place in a friction between the local and the global that charac-

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35 See David Kerr, “World Christianity and Inter-Religious Relations: Missionsvetenskap med Ekumenik”, *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 82, no. 2 (2006), 74–85.

36 Klaus Koschorke has pointed to the polycentricity of Global Christianity. See the introduction to the special issue on Koschorke’s “Munich School of World Christianity” by David D. Daniels, “A Note on the ‘Munich School of World Christianity’”, *Journal of World Christianity* 6, no. 1 (2016), 1–3.

37 Kerr, “World Christianity”, 74.

38 See Mika Vähäkangas, *Context, Plurality, and Truth: Theology in World Christianities*, Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2020.

39 See Mika Vähäkangas, “Modelling Contextualization in Theology”, *Swedish Missiological Themes* 98, no. 3 (2010), 279–306.

40 Mika Vähäkangas, “World Christianity as Post-Colonialising of Theology”, *Contextual Theology*, eds. Sigurd Bergmann & Mika Vähäkangas, London: Routledge, 2021, 221–237, 224.

terizes the Malmö most of you know.<sup>41</sup> Across Sweden, income inequality has been increasing.<sup>42</sup> Sweden abolished taxes, such as the wealth tax, in the 2000s. There is evidence that these cuts intensify the increasing inequality.<sup>43</sup> In Malmö, inequality is very visible.<sup>44</sup> It is one of the most segregated cities in the country where ethnic, economic, and educational segregations overlap.<sup>45</sup>

Altogether, then, the study of Global Christianity at Lund has been shaped by frictions between the local and the global. Globalization emerges through frictions. The study of Global Christianity at Lund could be summed up as a critique of what Marcella Althaus Reid has called “theme park theologies”.<sup>46</sup> Scholars of Global Christianity run the risk of presenting how Christianity works in this or that context without allowing these presentations to have any impact on themselves. Such a way of studying Global Christianity is interesting but inconsequential – like a visit to a theme park. At Lund, however, the study of global Christianity has been concerned with the consequences that frictions between the global and the local have for the way scholars analyze, assess, and act in the public square. In the postmigrant public square, these consequences are perhaps more important and more intense than ever.

### “Things Were Starting to Move”: The Present

Today, Malmö is shaped by a new friction between the local and the global – the superdiverse postmigrant society. Seen as a case for controversies stirred up by (super)diversity, the city makes headlines. In the 2000s, Malmö featured in a U.S. Fox News’ series on “Eurabia”. The city was explored as an example of the conspiracy that “Islamization” is taking place in Europe, aided and abetted by European elites.<sup>47</sup> The rise in crime that has

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41 See Malmö stadsbyggnadskontor, *Översiktsplan för Malmö 2000*, Malmö 2000.

42 See Finanspolitiska rådet, *Economic Inequality in Sweden: An Overview of Facts and Future Challenges*, Stockholm 2024.

43 See Daneil Waldenström, “Inheritance and Wealth Taxation in Sweden”, *ifo DICE Report* 16, no. 2 (2018), 8–12.

44 See Roger Andersson & Lina Heldman, “Economic Decline and Residential Segregation: A Swedish Study with Focus on Malmö”, *Urban Geography* 37, no. 5 (2016), 748–768.

45 See Tapio Salonen, Martin Grander, & Markus Rasmusson, *Segregation och segmentering i Malmö*, Malmö 2019.

46 Marcella María Althaus-Reid, “Gustavo Gutiérrez Goes to Disneyland: Theme Park Theologies and the Diaspora of the Discourse of the Popular Theologian in Liberation Theology”, *Interpreting Beyond Borders*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 36–58.

47 See Anderson, “Malmö: A City in Transition”, 12. For the centrality of the Eurabia conspiracy to the far right, see Hannah Strømmen, *The Bibles of the Far Right*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2024.

brought Malmö into national and international news is also attributed to Muslims and migrants, displaying how the “securitization of Islam” and the “securitization of immigration” go hand in hand.<sup>48</sup>

Crul suggests that cities such as Malmö are in “a crucial transition phase during which tensions in society may increase”.<sup>49</sup> Descriptively, Malmö marks the “tipping point” that comes with the shift from diversity to superdiversity.<sup>50</sup> Prescriptively, Malmö marks the “trigger point” that comes with the shift from diversity to superdiversity.<sup>51</sup> Coupled with the necessity to adapt to anthropogenic climate change,<sup>52</sup> the shift sparks debates. For example, it took Swedish politicians less than ten years to go from being proud of not closing Sweden’s borders to being proud of closing Sweden’s borders – so much so that, apparently, Sweden has net zero immigration this year.<sup>53</sup>

Crul argues that during the time of transition, it “is not enough for people to just leave each other in peace to live and let live”.<sup>54</sup> The “practice of living together” is at stake.<sup>55</sup> Crul’s team has collected lots of these practices. Here is one case from Malmö:

This happened a while ago, when I had just moved in here. I was pushing my son in his buggy; he was very young. We walked past the square. [...] [T]here were some youngsters playing with fireworks. So I said something like: “Hey, can you please not do that because of my little son?” And maybe two or three days later, I bumped into them again.<sup>56</sup>

Crul tells us very little about this case. It took place in a neighborhood of Malmö that is superdiverse, so perhaps Rosengård. The man who tells the scene represents what Crul calls “the new minority”. Crul offers no information about religion, but statistically it is likely that the scene features an encounter that transcends either religious/non-religious boundaries (a

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48 See Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

49 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 15.

50 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 15.

51 Steffen Mau, Thomas Lux, & Linus Westheuser, *Triggerpunkte: Konsens und Konflikt in der Gegenwartsgesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2023.

52 See Malmö stadsbyggnadskontor, *Översiktsplan för Malmö 2023*, Malmö 2023.

53 See Miranda Byrant, “From ‘open hearts’ to closed borders: behind Sweden’s negative net immigration figures”, *The Guardian*, 19 August 2024.

54 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 17.

55 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 17.

56 Crul & Lelie, *The New Minority*, 119.

post-Christian man encountering Muslim youth) or religious boundaries (a Christian man encountering Muslim youth). When they meet again:

[O]ne of the boys said something like: “Oh, that’s him, the one who talked to us yesterday.” And that really got me thinking. Because it was not: “He shouted at us” or “He is an annoying old man”, but “He talked to us”. [...] They were more struck by the fact that I had spoken to them than that I had told them to stop what they were doing. And yes, I think that a lot of people say nothing, and then they go home and get a stomach ulcer because they are so full of fear... And they are angry instead of just having a conversation.

This case clarifies that practices of living together in the postmigrant society are mundane rather than miraculous. They take work, but it is “micro-labor” rather than “macro-labor”.<sup>57</sup> In a way, the mundanity of these practices is the point. The study of Global Christianity has always been interested in encounters between people from different backgrounds. However, after the shift from diversity to superdiversity, the competences that are required to navigate these encounters turn from a specialist skill (in the Malmö of the past, a competence only for students of Global Christianity) to a survival skill (in the Malmö of the potential future, a competence not only for students of Global Christianity).<sup>58</sup> Malmö today is at the turning point.

The study of Global Christianity, then, needs to be configured in a way that allows scholars to analyze practices of living together critically and to assess practices of living together constructively in order to enable creative action in the superdiverse postmigrant public square. The task is not as simple as it sounds. The practices of living together defy the habits that have shaped scholarship on religion for a long time, not only at Lund.

First, the habit of *denominational defense* needs to be countered. Theologians are particularly prone to denominational defense. Regardless of whether scholarship on religion is organized confessionally or non-confessionally as in Sweden, a student of theology learns first and foremost about their own religion. Christian theology is Christian theology because it is done by Christians. Of course, there is awareness of the plurality of religions

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<sup>57</sup> See Josje Schut & Ismintha Waldring, “Micro Labour, Ambivalence and Discomfort: How People Without a Migration Background Strategically Engage with Difference in a Majority-Minority Neighbourhood”, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 8 (2023), 2034–2051.

<sup>58</sup> Accordingly, the “global” in the study of Global Christianity points more to methodology than geography. See Martha Frederiks & Dorottya Nagy (eds.), *World Christianity: Methodological Considerations*, Leiden: Brill, 2020.

also among Christian theologians who have channeled it into the theology of religions. However, both the classical and the comparative approach to the theology of religions often operate with a clean and clear-cut concept of religion where what is Christian cannot be non-Christian and what is non-Christian cannot be Christian.<sup>59</sup> This concept has come under a lot of pressure, historically and hermeneutically.

Sociologist Lori Beaman has taken up Tsing's concept of "contaminated diversity" to call for a reconceptualization of religion.<sup>60</sup> Tsing's *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* is a fascinating ethnography of the global economy of matsutake mushrooms.<sup>61</sup> To Tsing, contamination is a metaphor for interactions that change the actors. Moving the metaphor into scholarship on religion, Beaman emphasizes that religions have interacted throughout history. They have been contaminated by each other. There can be neither "Christianity" without "other religions" nor "other religions" without "Christianity".<sup>62</sup> There is no conviviality without contamination.

Returning to the scene in Rosengård, it would be reasonable to claim that the man's secularity has been shaped by encounters like the one with the Muslim boys as much as the Muslim boys' Islam has been shaped by the encounters like the one with the secular man.<sup>63</sup> The point of my critique of the habit of denominational defense is not that scholars of religion should become experts of "religion in general".<sup>64</sup> Rather, my point is that scholars cannot continue to conceptualize "religion" and "non-religion" as clean and closed communitarian circuits that may or may not clash with each other. The encounters are crucial.<sup>65</sup>

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59 See Marianne Moyaert, *Christian Imaginations of the Religious Other: A History of Religionization*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2024, 4.

60 Lori G. Beaman, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 12–13, 58–59, 84–85, 194–198.

61 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.

62 As Werner G. Jeanrond, "Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love", *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, eds. Catherine Cornille & Christopher Conway, Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010, 44–60, 58, already argued: "a hermeneutics of religion committed solely to the [...] development of one particular tradition will not be equipped to uncover the actual handling of others and otherness in its own process of identity construction".

63 For the debate about diversity and definitions of Islam in Islamic Studies, see Oliver Scharbrodt, "'Neither of the East nor of the West': Crossing and Dwelling in Islamic Studies", *Svensk Teologisk Kvartalskrift* 100, no. 3 (2024), 271–287.

64 Atalia Omer, *Decolonizing Religion and Peacebuilding*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2023, 5, 156, 263.

65 See again Jeanrond, "Toward an Interreligious Hermeneutics of Love", 51–52: a "hermeneutics of love is not interested in either a universalist hermeneutical approach or a relativist hermeneutical approach to human communication... Rather a hermeneutics of love

Furthermore, the habit of *disciplinary defense* needs to be countered. The disciplinary differentiation that takes theology (in contrast to religious studies) to approach religion from the insiders' perspective and religious studies (in contrast to theology) to approach religion from the outsiders' perspective makes little sense when exploring practices of living together. Given that the scholars' lives take place amidst the turn from diversity to superdiversity, they are likely to be insiders and outsiders to these practices at the same time.

Imagine the exchange in Rosengård had taken a turn towards religion. The boys could have insisted that the fireworks they were playing with feature in an Islamic feast. They might not have gotten very far, but their insistence would have turned the fireworks from a non-religious into a religious object. Then the man could have countered that the fireworks impede the secularity of the public square. I admit that my speculations are a bit far-fetched, but they show that the definition and delineation of what counts as "religious" and what counts as "non-religious" is itself socially, culturally, and politically constructed.<sup>66</sup> The very category of religion is made and unmade in practices of living together. Studying these practices in a way that assumes that insiders' perspectives and outsiders' perspectives are incommensurable means that scholars are guaranteed to miss what is going on.

If scholars accept that insiders' and outsiders' approaches can come together, but then delineate the disciplines by arguing that theological research approaches religion only prescriptively, while non-theological research approaches religion only descriptively, scholarship is back in disciplinary defense.<sup>67</sup> Countering this habit, Lande's argument that the normativity inherent in systematic theology is crucial to missiology applies. Religious studies without theology can characterize practices of living together but without criticizing them (Lande's descriptive missiology). Theology without religious studies can criticize practices of living together but without characterizing them (Lande's prescriptive missiology). What is needed, then, is description and prescription at the same time.

Atalia Omer's critique of what she calls "harmony business" makes this case.<sup>68</sup> Omer studied how religion features in peacebuilding practices across the globe. She shows that there is no shortage of peacebuilders that pres-

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is interested in the dynamics of encounter".

66 See Jayne Svenungsson, "The Return of Religion or the End of Religion? On the Need to Rethink Religion as a Category of Social and Political Life", *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 46, no. 7 (2020), 785–809.

67 See Thomas A. Lewis, "On the Role of Normativity in Religious Studies", *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 168–185.

68 Omer, *Decolonizing Religion and Peacebuilding*, 1–2.

ent religion as the cause of conflict. When this presentation of religion is presumed, diversity between religions is seen as the problem and dialogue between religions is seen as the solution to the problem. Omer's critique is that the harmony business that creates and cashes in on this presumption ignores all the causes for conflict that might have nothing to do with religion, such as inequalities that follow from colonialist patterns of trade and thought across the globe. In the harmony business, dialogue is pacifying rather than provoking people to tackle the conflicts that are caused by such inequalities.<sup>69</sup>

Turning to Malmö, Omer's critique allows scholars to criticize initiatives that insist on inter-religious diversity as the problem and inter-religious dialogue as the solution to the problem without accounting for the increasing inequalities that result in the overlapping segregations in terms of ethnicity, economics, and education across the city. My point is not that religion cannot cause conflicts. My point is that initiatives that isolate religion as a cause for conflict run the risk of camouflaging what is going on. Normativity, then, is necessary to interpret the practices of living together that run through such initiatives. As a scholar of religion, Omer showcases how the definition of normativity as the dividing line between disciplines is neither essential nor expedient.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, the habit of *assuming that religion is private rather than public* needs to be countered. Swedes often self-describe as secular. But sociologists have analyzed the role of religion in Scandinavia as "complex": secularization and de-secularization occur simultaneously.<sup>71</sup> In fact, secularity is a category that is shaped in this simultaneity. Political theorist Anders Berg-Sørensen labels the Lutheran legacies in Scandinavian politics "Lutheran secularism".<sup>72</sup> The label highlights that secularism is not neutral.<sup>73</sup>

Lutheran secularism produces what the European Islamophobia Report problematizes as the "shrinking public space for Muslim civil society

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69 Omer, *Decolonizing Religion and Peacebuilding*, 245–281.

70 Atalia Omer, "Can a Critic be a Caretaker too? Religion, Conflict, and Conflict Transformation", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (2011), 459–496.

71 See Inger Furseth (ed.), *Religious Complexity in the Public Square: Comparing Nordic Countries*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

72 Anders Berg-Sørensen, "The Politics of Lutheran Secularism: Reiterating Secularism in the Wake of the Cartoon Crisis", *Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, eds. Lisbet Christoffersen et al., Aldershot: Routledge, 2010, 207–214. For a theological twist on the conversation about secularity in Scandinavia, see Bengt Kristensson Uggla, *Katedralens hemlighet: sekularisering och religiös övertygelse*, Göteborg: Bokförlaget Korpen, 2024.

73 See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003; Marian Burchardt, Monika Wohlrab-Sahr, & Matthias Middell (eds.), *Multiple Secularities Beyond the West*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.

organizations” in Sweden.<sup>74</sup> Emin Poljarević, Anna Ardin, and Mattias Irving explain how attacks against Muslims cause self-censorship, how self-censorship curtails Muslims’ ability to act in the public square, and how the curtailment of Muslims’ ability to act in the public square in turn causes more attacks against Muslims. The example of “the Christian Democratic Party leader” who “called for police to shoot more ‘Islamists’” following rallies and riots against a series of Qur’an burnings is a case in point.<sup>75</sup>

Historically, the Church of Sweden has shaped the public square with its differential distribution of privilege and power. Today, this differential distribution is a challenge to the Church. *A Single Bread – A Single Humanity: Joint Parish Instructions 2021–2025* of the Church of Sweden in Malmö exemplify how the Church grapples with shifting from a majority to a minority position. These subtle but significant *Instructions* suggest that “constant collaboration between different stakeholders is the key”.<sup>76</sup> But collaboration is tricky: on the one hand, the Church is a provider of the public spaces in which people from different backgrounds meet; on the other hand, the Church is a player in the public spaces in which people from different backgrounds meet. This is a tightrope indeed.

Returning to Rosengård once more, imagine what would happen if the scene in Malmö had included the man harassing the boys because of their Muslimness or their perceived Muslimness.<sup>77</sup> Could they have found a spokesperson in the Church? Or – if the roles were reversed – could and should the Church of Sweden speak out against crimes committed by Muslim youth, knowing that it cements the differential distribution of power and privilege in the public square? These questions clarify that any theology that is interested in the practices of living together is *public* theology. The scenarios I have played through suggest that the task for public theology today is not so much to inject, but to interpret theologies in the public square.<sup>78</sup> Theologies are there. The task is to analyze them critically and assess them constructively in view of creative action.

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74 Emin Poljarević, Anna Ardin, & Mattias Irving, “Islamophobia in Sweden: National Report 2021”, *European Islamophobia Report 2021*, eds. Enes Bayrakli & Farid Hafez, Istanbul 2022, 573–598.

75 Poljarević, Ardin, & Irving, “Islamophobia in Sweden: National Report 2021”, 585.

76 Church of Sweden, *A Single Bread – A Single Humanity: Joint Parish Instructions 2021–2025*, Malmö 2021, 4.

77 For a discussion of Islamophobia as a racism that targets Muslimness or perceived Muslimness, see Hannah Strømmen & Ulrich Schmiedel, *The Claim to Christianity: Responding to the Far Right*, London: SCM Press, 2020, 15–37. See also Farid Hafez, “Schools of Thought in Islamophobia Studies”, *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 4, no. 2 (2018), 210–225.

78 See Ulrich Schmiedel, “‘Take Up Your Cross’: Public Theology between Populism and Pluralism in the Postmigrant Context”, *International Journal of Public Theology* 13, no. 2 (2019), 140–162.

Altogether, then, continuing the study of Global Christianity at Lund today means coming to terms with the friction between the local and the global signaled by cities such as Malmö. Acknowledging that religious and non-religious ways of life have contaminated each other throughout history, the analytic approach shifts.<sup>79</sup> The question is not: “Why do people come together across differences?” This question presumes purity as the norm and plurality as the deviation from the norm, a deviation that then needs to be explained. Instead, the question is: “Why do people *not* come together across differences?” In order to ask and answer this question, the study of Global Christianity has to go beyond purity – contaminated rather than clean, allowing for things that are starting to move.

### “Things Were Starting to Move”: The Potential of Theology

To summarize, I have presented the study of Global Christianity as a field that revolves around frictions between the local and the global. You might have gained the impression that all crucial contributions to the field have come from Lund. I am not the one to correct this impression! Instead, I would like to propose that approaching the study of Global Christianity through what I call coalitional and comparative public theology is a way of continuing what has been going on at Lund for the new friction of the post-migrant society.<sup>80</sup> By “coalitional”, I mean practices that blur the boundaries between religions, and between religion and non-religion. Coalitional theology is lived theology in the streets. By “comparative”, I mean reflection on the practices that blur the boundaries between religions, and between religion and non-religion. Comparative theology is learnt theology in the seminar rooms. If the study of Global Christianity is a public theology that works coalitionally and comparatively – as I have argued throughout this lecture – it brings together what happens in the streets and what happens in the seminar rooms in a hermeneutical spiral. In this spiral, the critical analysis and the constructive assessment of practices of living together can come together to enable creative action in the superdiverse postmigrant public square.

Although I have made my case now, I would like to return to one concept that I have taken for granted throughout before I close: theology. If theology comes up at all in the scholarship on superdiversity, it comes up as a problem rather than a solution to a problem. But I would like to reflect on theology in the sense of thinking and talking about God as crucial to the epistemological and ethical challenges that characterize postmigrant

79 Beaman, *Deep Equality in an Era of Religious Diversity*, 180–202.

80 For the combination of coalitional and comparative theology in the public square, see Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie*, 365–398.

public squares. To return to Foroutan, the postmigrant society “poses the fundamental question of how we can get beyond the social dividing line of migration, if we want to live together in societies that are becoming more and more plural”.<sup>81</sup> Theology can help to ask and to answer this question.

Dorothee Sölle has inspired the coalitional and comparative theology that I have introduced to you.<sup>82</sup> She conceptualizes theology as a hermeneutics of experiences of transcendence. This hermeneutics interprets the public square as the space where truth is meant to come true.<sup>83</sup> She calls on Karl Marx’ critique of religion to capture the experiences she has in mind: “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature. The heart of a heartless world, the soul of soulless conditions, it is the opium of the people.”<sup>84</sup> Sölle suggests that the sigh of the oppressed creature is not a plea for immanence but a plea for transcendence. The sigh transcends what is towards what is not. Sölle calls theologians to reflect on the sigh but cautions that it is a tricky calling.<sup>85</sup> Theologians need to reflect on the sigh in a way that un-closes rather than closes the situation. The key to the tricky calling of theology is that the transcendence that is experienced and expressed in the sigh is not a propositional but a performative category. The sigh is not describing something but doing something.<sup>86</sup> According to Sölle, the sigh suggests that the world is more than it is. The sigh opens up the imagination to worlds that could be or should be.<sup>87</sup> Theology is imaginative in as much as it is not about what is but about what is not.

Sölle’s hermeneutics of sighs is not as strange as it seems. She gets the sigh from Marx. Arguably, Marx gets it from Paul, the Apostle. In Paul’s Letter to the Romans (8:18–26), the sigh comes up in a way that – at least in Martin Luther’s translation – connects to almost all the terms that Marx cites. Paul presents creation and creatures as suffering. Because creation as a

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81 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 18–19.

82 For my take on Sölle, see Schmiedel, *Terror und Theologie*, 305–364.

83 Sölle, *Politische Theologie: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Rudolf Bultmann*, Berlin: Kreuz Verlag, 1971, 73.

84 Sölle, “Der Wunsch ganz zu sein: Gedanken zur neuen Religiosität”, *Religionsgespräche: Zur gesellschaftlichen Rolle der Religion*, ed. Hans Eickehard Bahr, Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1975, 146–161, 147, with reference to Karl Marx, “Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie”, *Werke*, vol. 1, Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels, Berlin: Dietz, 1983, 379–391, 378.

85 For a systematic account of theology as a hermeneutics of experiences of transcendence, see Jörg Lauster, *Religion als Lebensdeutung: Theologische Hermeneutik heute*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2005.

86 See Matthias Petzoldt, “Wahrheit als Begegnung”, *Christsein angefragt: Fundamentaltheologische Beiträge*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1998, 25–40.

87 Dorothee Sölle, *Phantasie und Gehorsam: Überlegungen zu einer künftigen christlichen Ethik*, Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1968.

whole is characterized by suffering, the creatures are incapable of imagining a creation without suffering. All there is, is sighing at the mismatch between what is and what is not. There is the sighing (συστενάζει) of creation (8:22). There is the sighing (στενάζομεν) of the creatures (8:23) who are children of God. And then there is the sighing of God's spirit which takes up these sighs in what Luther translates as "unaussprechliches Seufzen" (στεναγμοῖς ἀλαλήτοις), a sighing that cannot be put into words (8:26). Paul, then, makes a case for negative rather than positive theology.<sup>88</sup>

In his "Lecture about the Letter to the Romans", Luther pushes Paul's conclusions. If the "Word of God" – Luther's favorite formula – is not describing something but doing something, then theology must be careful not to capture what the word does. The outcome is paradoxical: a theology that captures God's word with words cannot communicate it, while a theology that communicates God's word cannot capture it with words.<sup>89</sup>

This paradox is at the core of Sölle's hermeneutics of sighs. Crucially, she suggests that the sigh – a figure for the apophatic, that what cannot be said rather than that what can be said – cuts across religions.<sup>90</sup> Her suggestion has been confirmed by scholars of Islam who have studied apophaticism during the Middle Ages. According to Aydogan Kars, there were "trans-religious networks" that learnt how to un-say rather than say God from each other.<sup>91</sup> Apophaticism, then, exemplifies the co-contamination in the history of religion that I analyzed above. In a way, apophaticism makes the case for Beaman's "contaminated diversity" that shifts the analytic approach from asking "Why do people come together across difference?" to asking "Why do people *not* come together across difference?" Looking at the history of apophaticism through this lens, purity rather than plurality is what needs to be explained.

A footnote (which is itself a reference to a footnote) in Kars' analysis can help with the explanation.<sup>92</sup> The footnote suggests that the heyday of Abrahamic apophaticism ended in 1492, at least symbolically. For the study of

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88 For Paul's mysticism, see – still – Albert Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1930. I prefer the term apophaticism because mysticism is often associated with hierarchy. Bernhard McGinn, "Mysticism and the Reformation: A Brief Survey", *Acta Theologica* 35, no. 2 (2015), 50–65, 2, refers to "new mysticism" to stress that the mysticism that reformers like Luther drew on was "democratic in the sense that its authors addressed all believers".

89 Martin Luther, "Römerbriefvorlesung", *WA* 56. For Luther's mysticism, see Volker Leppin, *Die fremde Reformation: Luthers mystische Wurzeln*, München: C.H.Beck, 2016.

90 Dorothee Sölle, *Mystik und Widerstand: Du "stilles Geschrei"*, Piper Verlag, 1999.

91 Aydogan Kars, *Unsayng God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, 7.

92 Kars, *Unsayng God*, 6, n.6, points to Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayng*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 221, n.15.

Global Christianity, 1492 is a suggestive date. Inside Europe, it marks the fight against Christianity's Islamic enemies. Outside Europe, it marks the fight against Christianity's Indigenous enemies. 1492 is the moment Europe becomes Christian and the moment Europe becomes colonial through its "discovery" of the "new world". It is in the friction between the local and the global around 1492 that the categories of race and religion as they are known today are beginning to emerge.<sup>93</sup>

As a consequence, Sylvia Wynter, one of the key figures of Black studies, has suggested that the world as we know it starts in 1492.<sup>94</sup> The idea that this world needs to end is common in Black studies and in Black street movements, such as Black Lives Matter, as Thomas Lynch and Vincent Lloyd point out.<sup>95</sup> Saskia Sassen's account of the world as shaped by economic and ecological logics of expulsion confirms the call for the end of this world.<sup>96</sup> Sassen points to a "massive loss of habitat" around the world that forces people to flee their homes, resulting in unprecedented numbers of survival migrants.<sup>97</sup> "Expulsion", she proposes, "is even more brutal than targeting: these men and women and children do not count at all, they are not in the picture."<sup>98</sup>

Can a return to the apophatic help in imagining the end of the world as we know it and in imagining what could come after the end of the world as we know it? Sölle seems to suggest something like that in her hermeneutics of the sigh.

All the tentative attempts to rearticulate "religion" today remain unintelligible without the central concept of experience. Perhaps it would be better to speak of experience as a conceptual symbol because these attempts lack a precise psychological or sociopsychological definition which would allow for an operationalization of the concept. This lack

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93 See Anya Topolski, "The Race-Religion Constellation: A European Contribution to the Critical Philosophy of Race", *Critical Philosophy of Race* 6, no. 1 (2018), 58–81.

94 See the classic Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View", *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View*, eds. Vera Lawrence Hyatt & Rex Nettleford, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995, 5–57. See also Thomas Lynch, "A Political Theology for the World That Ends", *Worlds Ending: Ending Worlds*, eds. Jenny Stümer & Michael Dunn, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024, 21–36.

95 See Vincent Lloyd, *Black Dignity: The Struggle against Domination*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022. Behind this notion of the end of the world is Frank B. Wilderson III's account of afropessimism. See Wilderson, *Afropessimism*, New York: Liveright, 2020.

96 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsion: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014.

97 Saskia Sassen, "A Massive Loss of Habitat: New Drivers for Migration", *Sociology of Development* 2, no. 2 (2016), 204–233.

98 Saskia Sassen, "At the systemic edge", *Cultural Dynamics* 27, no. 1 (2015), 173–181, 178.

is necessary because a definition would contradict what is said, sensed or searched here. Experience constitutes itself against the empiricism of normality.<sup>99</sup>

A sigh remains a sigh. Because the lack that is experienced and expressed in the sigh of the oppressed creature cannot be filled without missing what it is about, Sölle locates her theology after “the death of God”.<sup>100</sup> If apophaticism is taken seriously, the difference between theism and atheism loses its significance. As Lynch argues: “theism and atheism are boring answers to bad questions”.<sup>101</sup> For Sölle, neither theism nor atheism are conditions for the sigh of the oppressed creature. Theists can sigh at the state of the world. Atheists can sigh at the state of the world. And both theistic and atheistic sighs transcend what is, without being able to say what is not or not yet. Accordingly, Sölle points out that the condition for working towards a better world is the sigh. The sigh has a force that cannot be captured in categories and concepts so that it keeps the configuration of the world open.<sup>102</sup>

Drawing on Sölle, it makes sense to insist that apophaticism – a theology that un-says rather than says God – is crucial to superdiverse societies. Foroutan has proposed that the postmigrant public square “poses the fundamental question of how we can get beyond the social dividing line of migration, if we want to live together in societies that are becoming more and more plural”.<sup>103</sup> In the apophatic imagination, dividing lines cannot be drawn with reference to God. On the contrary, the transcendence in the sigh of the oppressed creature crosses these lines epistemologically and ethically. And it does so because it entails a thinking and talking about God that refuses to be content with the world as it is.

Sölle is perhaps a bit naïve when she suggests that theology – thinking and talking about the transcendence of the sigh – is what brings people together. Her suggestion comes close to the title of a book by Islamic scholar Navid Kermani in which he explains religion to his child: *Everybody, from wherever they are, may come one step closer*.<sup>104</sup>

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99 Sölle, “Der Wunsch ganz zu sein”, 153.

100 Dorothee Sölle, *Stellvertretung: Ein Kapitel Theologie nach dem “Tode Gottes”*, Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1982.

101 Thomas Lynch, “Transcendental Materialism as a Theoretical Orientation in the Study of Religion”, *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 29, vol. 2 (2017), 133–154, 135.

102 See also Carlota McAllister & Valentina Napolitano, “Political Theology/Theopolitics: The Thresholds and Vulnerabilities of Sovereignty”, *Annual Review of Anthropology* 50 (2021), 109–124.

103 Foroutan, *Die postmigrantische Gesellschaft*, 18–19.

104 Navid Kermani, *Jeder soll von da, wo er ist, einen Schritt näher kommen: Fragen nach Gott*, München 2022.

Perhaps the lecture that I am about to finish has also been a bit naïve. But looking at Malmö at the time of my retirement, I wonder whether a theology for cynics would be even more naïve than the coalitional and comparative public theology I have advocated for. The postmigrant public square needs people who address increasing inequalities because they dare to dream that the world could be a better place. If I found out at the time of my retirement that some of the students I taught were among these people, I would be very grateful.

#### **SUMMARY**

This article argues for a coalitional and comparative public theology as a new approach to the study of Global Christianity. This theology analyzes and assesses practices of living together in postmigrant societies. The article takes the shift from diverse migrant societies to superdiverse postmigrant societies that shapes many cities across Europe as a point of departure to scrutinize the role of religion in superdiverse practices of living together. Surveying the history of the study of Global Christianity at Lund, the article probes the potential that apophaticism holds for the epistemological and ethical challenges that confront postmigrant public squares. What is at stake in these public squares is how society can get beyond the social dividing line of migration. Through a coalitional and comparative public theology, the study of Global Christianity can make significant contributions to precisely this social, cultural, and political transformation.

**Esra Özyürek. *Subcontractors of Guilt. Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. 249 s.**

Teaching classes on racism and xenophobia some twenty-five years ago, I used to present German memory politics as a particularly courageous case of confronting a traumatic past. Not only did it seem to depart from the rising tide of European ethnonationalist assimilationism. I considered it a healthy counterpoint to the oftentimes smug idealisation of secular multiculturalism in Britain, the Netherlands, and Sweden, blind to (or disinterested in?) the racism simmering beneath the surface of official discourse. In light of today's curtailment of debate in Germany on Israel, Holocaust memory, genocidal violence in Gaza, and pro-Palestinian activism, I had evidently missed something important.

Reading Esra Özyürek's *Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory & Muslim Belonging in Postwar Germany* has sharpened my sense of what I had overlooked. In a sense, the book was published just in time, a mere six months before 7 October 2023. It provides both an eerie premonition of the breakdown of debate that has ensued and a guide to understanding the drivers and trajectories defining current memory orders and their implications for public debate.

The book presents a unique take on Holocaust memory by regarding it from the perspective of young Germans with a 'Muslim-migrant background'. Grounded in ethnography, it follows young male high-school students and adult educators of Turkish or Arabic descent involved in educational programmes devoted to fostering democratic attitudes and counteracting antisemitism.

After an ambitious introduction, the book consists of five fairly independent chapters and a short conclusion. In the introduction, the author elucidates the background of German post-war memory politics and its roots in American foreign policy and pedagogic-psychological theory: a formerly authoritar-

ian and genocidal state or people can only develop "democratic values" if it accepts and atones for its collective guilt as perpetrators. This also provides the foundation for the economic metaphors guiding Özyürek's analysis of German antisemitism prevention as being based on social-contract and exchange theory.

In the introduction, Özyürek develops the central idea of the book: German postwar nationhood is predicated on the notion that (white) Germans have fully accepted, internalized, and atoned for the guilt of the Holocaust through education and public culture. They have thereby overcome antisemitism. Muslim migrants, however, remain outside this learning curve, according to an antisemitism discourse that settled in response to formative and cataclysmic events such as German unification, 9/11, and the Second Intifada, reaching its apex during the 2015 "refugee crisis". Contrary to Germany, the discourse stipulates, Middle Eastern states and peoples never underwent any self-scrutiny of their pervasive antisemitic attitudes, once imported from Europe.

Hence, "Middle Eastern" German migrants and their offspring are considered a principal source of contemporary antisemitism, particularly in the shape of pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli attitudes – despite the fact, Özyürek imparts, that antisemitic attacks are overwhelmingly perpetrated by right-wing white racists. The official view of German antisemitism has become predicated on an "export-import" theory.

In response to this shift in antisemitism discourse, Muslim youth have become primary targets for German educational programmes against antisemitism. Focusing on Muslim antisemitism offers relief for the German public, argues Özyürek, from the tension between a desire to preserve a German responsibility for commemorating the Holocaust and a desire to feel proud to be German. Furthermore, it provides a means of including "immigrants of three generations into the fold of German identity and yet

keeping them apart [...] thus subcontracting part of the guilt onto them [...]” while basking in “their continuous investment in fighting against antisemitism in Germany and around the world”. (21)

In the ensuing chapters, Özyürek gives an ethnographic account of young Muslim males involved in such educational efforts. Chapter 1 examines programmes in which participants are encouraged to rebel against patriarchal values and embrace Holocaust commemoration as a path to democratic integration. Chapter 2 describes in detail how the gradual “export–import” theory settled, allowing the projection of unresolved national prejudices onto migrant others, who concomitantly remain posited as inferior. Chapter 3, in turn, explores how Muslim participants’ emotional responses to Holocaust history are subjected to discipline, revealing the narrow confines of ‘correct’ empathy. Chapter 4 develops the book’s core metaphor: Muslims are enlisted as “subcontractors of guilt”, performing repentance for past atrocities they did not commit while being denied recognition of their own experiences of exclusion. Chapter 5, finally, follows the experiences of the Muslim youth before, during, and after their visits to Auschwitz, analysed as a form of moral pilgrimage.

The relatively free-standing character makes each chapter accessible and pleasant to read but also invites a measure of repetition. More problematically, the organisation works against a thorough theoretical engagement with the findings as they evolve across the chapters. While finely chiselled in the introduction, the (sub)contract theory in particular falls short of systematic application or evaluation and hence its analytical value remains unclear and overly schematic.

More convincing is the author’s discussion of empathy, inspired by Husserlian ideas: an intersubjective empathetic position is always framed by an individual-biographical horizon. In other words, one can only ‘stand in the shoes’ of the other as *oneself*. Hence empathy by definition and necessity is con-

tingent and contextual. Yet this is precisely the type of relational empathy that exceptionalist Holocaust discourse stigmatizes as antisemitic.

In elucidating such discursive collisions, the study demonstrates with painful clarity the narrow confines governing the evaluation of Muslim participants’ painstaking attempts at internalising Holocaust memory. Any attempt to relate (personal, familial, national) experiences of racism, violence, or discrimination – no matter how reflected, dramatized, or deeply felt – is discarded as a misinformed and foundationally antisemitic relativization of the Holocaust, not to mention any comparison of the Nazi death machine to other genocidal atrocities.

Here Özyürek exposes the oft-observed particularist/universalist paradox of Holocaust memory in sharp analytical light, complementing towering studies such as Young’s *The Texture of Memory*, Hirsch’s *The Generation of Postmemory*, and Rothberg’s *Multidirectional Memory*. The study is most valuable in its close engagement with the participants, as it captures the labour and pain involved in remembering the darkest moments of human history.

*Torsten Janson*

*Lektor i islamologi, Lunds universitet*

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**Anna Norrby & Clara Nystrand. *Predika ord som glöder – homiletiska verktyg*.**

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I samband med ett symposium på CTR under våren kunde forskarna som presenterat enas om en sak: Som forskare måste vi fundera över vad det är vi lägger vår tid på. Jag instämmer. Att forska är ett ansvar och ett privilegium. Eftersom jag själv vid denna tid befann mig i en form av övergångsperiod mellan mina akademiska och pastorala studier, på väg in i prästämbetet, slog tanken mig direkt: likadant är det med predikan. Precis som forskaren måste predikanten ständigt fundera över vad det är hen lägger

sin tid på, och inte bara på *vad*, utan också *hur* den tiden används och *varför* den ska användas så. I boken *Predika ord som glöder – homiletiska verktyg* bjuds vi in att söka svar på dessa frågor.

Boken är skriven av Anna Norrby och Clara Nystrand. Båda är prästvigda i Svenska kyrkan och arbetar idag som lärare i homiletik vid Svenska kyrkans utbildningsinstitut. Bägge har forskat kring predikan i Sverige och utomlands. Författarna rör sig alltså både i akademien och kyrkan. Att de är kvalificerade att skriva en bok om predikan är givet. Därmed sagt är det en utmanande uppgift de tar sig an. I alla tider har idén om att ”preaching is broken” florerat. Homiletikböcker, skulle jag vilja mena, arbetar både mot och i samklang med denna tanke.

Boken är skriven med övertygelsen om att världen behöver goda predikanter. De nio kapitlen utforskar vad som formar en predikan i allt ifrån språk och teologi till förberedelser och tilltänkta lyssnare. Vidare tar boken upp vikten av arbetet med bibeltolkning och predikantens roll. I slutet behandlas tal vid kyrkliga handlingar samt de villkor en förkunnare ställs inför när det värsta har hänt i människors liv.

Som bokens underrubrik avslöjar finns här ett starkt fokus på predikan som ett hantverk. Således är boken full av verktyg och råd, och varje kapitel avslutas med frågor som predikanten kan ställa sig när de skrivit färdigt sin predikan. Dispositionen i boken är tydlig och språket är lättläst, vilket gör den läsarvänlig både för den som vill läsa hela i ett svep och för den som vill plocka upp den då och då.

I inledningen konstateras att predikans syfte är förändring. Förändring är den röda tråden när författarna tar sig an predikans varför, vad och hur. Att de förstår predikans syfte som förändring innebär att de ser på trons väsen som något performativt, alltså något som skapas när vi talar eller handlar. Predikan bör således, enligt Norrby och Nystrand, inte förstås som ett isolerat moment i gudstjänsten, utan som något som

bär frukt på längre sikt i den enskilda människans liv, församlingen och världen. Med andra ord betraktar de förkunnelsen som ett ständigt pågående förändringsarbete. De skriver: ”Det är förstas en förändring som till syvende och sist ligger i Guds hand, men som jag som predikant ska bidra till och inte stå i vägen för.” (8) Denna höga ambition är en av bokens stora förtjänster. I en kyrklig kontext där präster blir mindre predikanter och mer administratörer behöver denna typ av ambition uppmuntras och odlas.

En annan viktig poäng i boken är att predikanten och predikan skapar teologi. I titeln på sin avhandling benämner Nystrand denna process som *Teologisering i predikan* (2024). Uttrycket syftar till att predikan inte bara återger teologi, utan att varje predikan formar och formulerar teologi. Detta sker förvisso i samklang med teologi som redan har formulerats, men det är inte allt. Som författarna skriver är det, i rollen som ”lokal teolog”, viktigt att vara medveten om ”både vilken teologi man formulerar och gestaltar”. (39) Vad jag som läsare uppskattar med detta, i synnerhet i en Svenskkyrklig kontext där varje präst är utbildad teolog, är att relationen mellan dessa roller uppmärksammas. Som präst i Svenska kyrkan måste man fortsätta att vara teolog, även om studierna på universitet inte är aktiva. Visst kan man vara teolog på olika vis, men i slutändan går det inte att separera rollerna helt från varandra.

Ämnena ”predikan som teologi” och ”predikanten som teolog” leder vidare till fler frågor om predikanten. Författarna menar att världen behöver goda predikanter, men hur ska dessa vara? Om predikan inte enbart utgörs av själva predikomomentet, utan också av det som sker innan, under och efter predikan, då kan omdömet ”god” i ”goda predikanter” inte enbart baseras på predikostunden, utan också på det som sker hos predikanten innan, under och efter predikan. Om detta sägs inte mycket i boken. Det näst sista kapitlet är förvisso tillägnat detta tema, men kapitlets placering, omfattning samt inledande ord drar ner förväntningarna

på perspektivet: ”Det är ingen slump att vi först nu [...] riktar blicken mot predikanten själv. Predikanten ska helt enkelt inte vara predikans fokus.” (201) Detta håller jag visserligen med om. I ett samhälle där jaget står högst i kurs är det kanske klokt att försöka fokusera på något annat. Samtidigt behöver fokus på predikanten inte nödvändigtvis leda till att sätta predikantens jag i centrum för predikan. Ett gott exempel på detta är de fem prästdygder som biskop emeritus Martin Lönnebo lyfter fram i sin homiletikbok från år 1977: (1) glädje och lydnad i ämbetet, (2) äkta fromhet i kärlek, tro och bön, (3) teologisk insikt, (4) personlig mognad, (5) kunskap och erfarenhet. Alla dessa dygder har med predikanten att göra utan att ha som mål att rikta strålkastaren mot hen. Denna typ av diskussion saknar jag hos Norrby och Nystrand.

En fråga dröjer sig kvar efter läsningen. Med jämna mellanrum gör författarna olika iakttagelser, till exempel gällande vad som griper tag i en lyssnare (14), eller att en predikans fokus ofta kantrår åt *då* eller *nu* (71). Var kommer dessa iakttagelser från? Från deras forskning, studenter eller personliga erfarenheter? Detta hade jag som läsare gärna velat veta, både av nyfikenhet och av trovärdighetsskäl, för något som gång på gång slår mig när jag läser böcker eller samtalar om predikan är hur mycket något så enkelt som preferenser spelar in.

Sammanfattningsvis är *Predika ord som glöder* ett viktigt bidrag till både kyrkan och akademien. Jag rekommenderar alla predikanter att läsa den. Dels för att det inte finns så mycket i denna genre på svenska, dels för att den är välskriven och bjuder på spännande läsning. Även vid de tillfällen då jag inte är enig med författarna väcker den hela tiden värdefulla frågor att arbeta vidare med.

Linnea Helgesson  
Teol. master, Malmö

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Johan Adetorp & Stefan Arvidsson (red.).  
*Moderna gudar – Progressiv religion i vår tid*. Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2025. 192 s.

Denne antologi stræber efter at præsentere, hvordan forskellige religioner har imødegået og omfavnet modernismen. Dette gør bogen via to introduktionskapitler om henholdsvis ”progressiv religion” og ”traditionell religion”, ni kapitler som gennemgår religionerne jødedom, protestantisme, katolicisme, islam, shinto, hinduisme, buddhisme, teosofi og ny-åndelighed og et sidste kapitel som præsentere et didaktisk perspektiv på, hvorledes man kan anvende bogen i religionsundervisning. Hvert af kapitlerne om de individuelle religioner er struktureret efter samme model: ”Indledning”; ”Rørelser, organisationer og institutioner”; ”Texter, myter og tolkningssæt”; ”Ritualer og opførendekoder”; ”Estetiske og symboliske udtryk og mediekkanaler”; ”Slutord”. Bogen er derfor pædagogisk udformet, hvilket bliver særligt brugbart i det sidste didaktiske kapitel. Redaktørerne har valgt at undgå komplekse fagtermer, og der er heller ikke nogen henvisninger i selve brødteksten.

Kapitlet om ”Progressiv religion” af Stefan Arvidsson fungerer af gode grunde som en introduktion til bogens tema. Arvidsson indleder med at introducere spændingen mellem tradition og forandring, og slår fast, at antologien omhandler moderne reformreligioner. Det vil sige perioden fra 1500 og frem. Efterfølgende giver Arvidsson en kondenseret, men god, introduktion til modernitet og moderne kultur. Arvidsson forklarer velbegrunder valget af betegnelsen progressiv frem for moderne, fordi det omfatter både de som ser modernitet som det ultimative udfald, og de som venter på en endnu bedre fremtid. Herefter præsentere han fire progressive idétraditioner: liberalismen, socialismen, feminismen og humanismen. Af disse savner jeg lidt mere om religion blandt LGBTQ+ under delen om feminisme, som blot nævnes kort på følgende side. Efterfølgende giver han en række kommentarer om de fire temaer som hver af kapitlerne om de

individuelle religioner indeholder. Til sidst berør han begreberne andlighed og anpassning. Sidstnævnte får knapt en sides plads, men denne del kunne med fordel have fyldt meget mere. Det ville også bidrage med en teoretiske tyngde, som savnes lidt. Grundlæggende er Arvidssons kapitel dog en god introduktion til de forskellige variabler som har påvirket religioners udvikling i moderne tid, og giver et godt fundament for de individuelle kapitler.

I kapitlet "Traditionell religion" af Johan Adetorp indleder forfatteren med at der findes en antagelse om at førmoderne religioner skulle være mere konservative end moderne og at han ikke ønsker at ændre dette billede. Tværtimod vil han vise, hvordan flere af fortidens religioner har forsøgt at modstå forandring med det formål at præsentere noget som virkelig kontrasterer følgende kapitler. Kapitlet dækker vidt og bredt: fra oraklet i Delphi og islandske goðar til en forunderlig mængde referencer til etruskerne – som forsvandt som en politisk enhed omkring 300 fvt. Alle disse antikke religioner virker malplaceret i en antologi med fokus på tidlig moderne tid og frem. Begrebet "traditionel religion" er også i sig selv problematisk, da hvad som kan kaldes "traditionelt" afhænger af kontekst og periode. For eksempel var vedisk religion traditionel i forhold til tidlig buddhisme, men buddhisme kan i dag opdeles i både traditionel og progressiv. Kapitlet forsøger altså at sige noget generelt ud fra et så bredt og spredt materiale, at selv en religionshistoriker som jeg, der ynder at bevæge sig indenfor det komparative, må holde tungen lige i munden. Trods antologiens mål om at undgå tunge teorier savnes her et religionsvidenskabeligt grundlag. En fordel havde været at skelne mellem det Jan Assmann har kaldt "primære" og "sekundære" religioner – hvoraf meget af det Adetorp vil formidle hovedsageligt kan appliceres på sekundære religioner (altså religioner baseret på en ultimativ sandhed), mens mange af de religioner han referer til hører under kategorien primære religioner. Det minder

om fordums tids religionsfænomenologi, når Adetorp sammenligner på tværs af kulturer, tidsperioder og religionsformer – eller æbler og appelsiner, som Bruce Lincoln har beskrevet det i sin kritik af lignende uhæmmede komparationer. Tilsvarende kritik er fremført af Oliver Freiberger, som også advarer om, at for store komparationer kan lede til en vis form for *confirmation bias*. I kapitlet "Traditionell religion" kommer det til syne ved, at det præges af flere mærkelige og ligefrem postulerende udsagn om fortidens samfund. Visse dele fremstår nærmest fjendtligt stillet omkring religiøse specialister og oldtidens magthavere, hvilket jeg ikke rigtig ser har nogen religionsvidenskabelig hjemmel eller synes relevant for antologiens tema. Kapitlet synes overordnet, i mine øjne, som malplaceret og på visse steder problematisk.

Når det kommer til kapitlerne om de individuelle religioner fungerer den stringente opbygning godt og gør hvert kapitel overskueligt. De manglende referencer har den ulempe, at det kan være svært helt at følge, hvor visse udtalelser har deres rod i tilfælde af at man er særligt interesseret i et specifikt emne indenfor en religion. I stedet for henvisninger har redaktionen valgt at hvert kapitel har en liste med forslag til videre læsning. Disse lister varierer i længde ("nyandlighed" har blot fire litteraturtips, mens buddhisme har tretten) og mangler til tider diversitet (i kapitlet om protestantisk kristendom er fire af ti referencer til Gary Dorriens serie *The Making of American Liberal Theology* (2001; 2003; 2006; 2023)). Visse af kapitlerne fokuserer også på meget specifikke grene af deres religioner, såsom afsavnet af progressiv pietisme i kapitlet om protestantisk kristendom.

Det sluttelige didaktiske kapitel er bogens klimaks, idet det forener alle de tidligere kapitler i en fin pædagogisk øvelse. Her gennemgår Nicole von Rost Biedron forskellige måder, hvorpå man ud fra de foregående kapitler kan diskutere progressiv religion i religionsundervisningen. Eneste *aber dabei* jeg har med dette kapitel, er brugen af ordet "progressive religioner" frem for "progressi-

ve strømninger” (eller lignende). Det giver et indtryk af, at dette er helt nye religioner vi taler om, hvilket ikke er tilfældet med de fleste af religionerne i de individuelle kapitler. Men det kan betegnes som i småtingsafdelingen.

Foruden kapitlet om traditionel religion, og nogle småting i de individuelle kapitler, så er bogen grundlæggende et fint bidrag til studiet af progressiv religion i moderne tid. Den er oplagt at anvende i undervisning, særligt med de allerede velformulerede diskussionsspørgsmål i det didaktiske kapitel, men med visse forbehold og introduktion af ekstern litteratur. Det er derfor en skam at kapitlet ”Traditionell religion” falder en smule udenfor, men eftersom det ikke rigtig hænger sammen med resten, kan man med fordel skippe det.

*Lisa Bukhave*  
*Doktorand i religionshistoria,*  
*Uppsala Universitet*  
*DOI: 10.51619/stk.v10i12.28015*

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