Religions and **D**iscourse

Frans Wijsen

Religious Discourse, Social Cohesion and Conflict

Studying Muslim–Christian Relations

Religions and Discourse

This book analyses religious identity transformations through inter-religious relations. It aims to highlight the link between religious discourse and social cohesion, or the lack of such a link, and ultimately seeks to contribute to the dominant discourse on Muslim–Christian relations. The book is based on fieldwork in Indonesia and Tanzania, and is timely because of the growing tensions between Muslims and Christians in both countries. Its relevance lies in its fresh look at theories of religion and science.

From its establishment as an academic discipline, the phenomenology of religion has dominated religious studies. Its theory of religion is 'realist' (religion is a reality 'in itself') and its view of science is objectivist (scientific knowledge is true if its representation of reality corresponds with reality itself). Based on Discourse Theory, the author argues that religion does not exist 'in itself'. Human practices and artifacts become religious because they are placed in a narrative context by the believers. By using discourse analysis as a research method, the author shows how religious identities in Tanzania and Indonesia are constructed, negotiated and manipulated in order to gain material or symbolic profit.

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"... practical classifications are always subordinated to practical functions and oriented towards the production of social effects"

— BOURDIEU (1991: 220)

Contents

Foreword

Since the end of the Cold War the dominant paradigm in studies of inter-religious relations has shifted from peaceful coexistence to clash of civilizations. Authors started to write (again) about 'multicultural drama' and the 'impossibility of dialogue'. Clash-of-civilizations theorists perceive religion as an independent variable: a cause of conflict and violence. Reacting against this, others theorize that religion causes peace and cohesion. When I started an in-depth investigation of the relation between religion and (the absence of) cohesion in Tanzania and Indonesia, two countries in which I did fieldwork in the past, I found that science of religion in general lacks the interest and the tools to study interreligious relations. Influenced by the phenomenology of religion, its definition of religion tends to be realist and its view of science objectivist. Moreover it studies the sources and the teachings of religions rather than their practitioners and practices. Thus I set out to contribute to a theory and method of studying interreligious relations. I propose a shift from a 'social identity' to a 'dialogical self' theory of religion, and recommend discourse analysis as an appropriate method to study 'multiple identities' or 'polyphonic selves'. I contend that scholars should neither overrate nor underrate the influence of religious rhetoric in social conflict or social cohesion. The present work is the outcome of a research project on religious discourse, social cohesion and conflict that my research assistants and I have been conducting from 2008 till 2012. I am grateful to Thomas Ndaluka (University of Dar es Salaam) and Suhadi Cholil (Gadjah Mada University), with whom I collaborated to generate and analyse data in Tanzania and Indonesia, as well as to various colleagues and students of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and the Centre for Religious and Cross-Cultural Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, with whom I discussed my findings during various guest lectures and international conferences on discourse analysis in religious studies.

From comparison to conversation

In his *Religion in essence and manifestation*, originally published in German in 1933, the Dutch scholar of religion Gerardus van der Leeuw (1973: 608) wrote a paragraph on the dynamics of religion as a consequence of cultural contact. As the world gradually became smaller religions came to influence each other in unconscious ways through cultural contact. There is assimilation, substitution and isolation. "This type of mission pertains to every living religion," says Van der Leeuw (1973: 612). Missionary expansion becomes very different when it is considered an essential element of the religious community. "Its influence then becomes a fully conscious propaganda" (Van der Leeuw 1973: 612).

Although the phenomenological method is outdated – and we will deal with this extensively later – Van der Leeuw's observations about religious dynamics seem up-to-date. Since the Cold War there has been a global resurgence of religion, accompanied by convergence and divergence between religions. Surprisingly, recent introductions to religious studies and world religions (Hinnels 2005; Esposito, Fasching & Lewis 2008; Court & Klöcker 2009; Woodhead, Kawanami & Partridge 2009) show little or no interest in interreligious relations, not only in sub-Saharan Africa but also in southeast Asia, despite the fact that in these regions large numbers of Muslims and Christians live side by side (Soares 2005: 7). Scholars of religion seem to leave it to other disciplines to deal with interreligious relations. In recent years there have been contributions from political, communication and media studies, international relations and development studies (Thomas 2005; Fox & Sandler 2006), philosophy and theology, but almost none from religious studies.

In this book we gain insight into social identity transformations through interreligious relations. We study the elevation of religious

identities above other, particular national, identities (Maalouf 2000: 88). In so doing we hope to contribute to a theory and method for interreligious studies. As indicated above, the study of interreligious relations is not well developed in religious studies. Introductions to religious studies mostly concentrate on the sources and teachings of religions rather than the actual relations between them. When they write about interreligious relations, they do so in a comparative way, first showing what a religion is 'in itself' and thereafter exploring similarities to and differences from other religions.

The dominant paradigm in religious studies is actually suspicious of the study of interreligious relations. Some 'scientists' of religion fear 'engaged' science, which they confuse with promoting interreligious or interfaith dialogue (Westerlund 2004: 125–126: see also Nielsen 2004: 172–173; Schmiedel 2008: 228–229; Bagir & Abdullah 2011: 68–70). According to them religious studies should not promote anything. They have to be 'neutral' or 'objective'. Promoting interreligious or interfaith dialogue may be a task for theologians, but not for scholars of religion.

Let me clarify straightaway that I use the term 'science of religion' as the equivalent of *Religionswissenschaft* in German, almost untranslatable into English and also much more inclusive than natural or exact sciences. It includes social sciences, but also the German *Geisteswissenschaften* (English: humanities). In fact, it tries to overcome the dichotomy between science and the humanities as suggested by Paul Ricoeur (2006) and others (Flood 1999). Trying to overcome the dichotomy between explanation and interpretation in a more inclusive view of science, I do not hesitate to use the first person singular, knowing that the researcher is not just collecting data but is engaged in knowledge production. I favour what Bourdieu (1990: 177–198) calls reflexive sociology.

Because of the aforementioned dichotomy the study of interreligious relations got embroiled in a methodological struggle between 'theological' and 'scientific' studies of religion, based on the European Enlightenment distinction between religious and secular domains of life. But, as we will show in greater detail later, in a globalized world, in which scholars observe a global resurgence of religion (Thomas 2005) and Europe is seen as an exceptional case (Davie 2002), the debate about the distinction between

theology and religious studies has slipped out of European scholars' hands. This is a 'Western' debate criticized inter alia by postmodern and postcolonial scholars. The two trends have similar roots but different agendas. Whereas postmodernism tends to be relativistic, postcolonialism is normative and critical.

According to a growing number of scholars the time has come to establish a new discipline combining the science, philosophy and theology of religions in a discipline that transcends typical Western classifications, namely interreligious studies. The new label is meant to make clear that this way of doing 'science of religion' has a different conception of its object of study, namely 'religion', and of what 'science' is. My book is born of this interest in developing a theory and method of studying interreligious, particularly Muslim–Christian, relations (I do not deal with Buddhist-Christian studies, another emerging field). In the introduction we sketch the contours of this new field and the issues to be examined in subsequent chapters.

1   Outline of an emerging field of study

The study of Muslim–Christian relations started in the late 19th century. It was part and parcel of Europe's colonial and missionary expansion in the world. But its roots go back to the 11th and 12th centuries when European philosophers and scientists studied and translated Arabic texts on the physical and medical sciences, and to the 15th and 16th centuries when European traders and missionaries reached the east coast of Africa and the west coast of India, where they met lively Muslim communities with advanced civilizations and vibrant trade shortly after their conquest of Muslims in southern Spain in 1492 (Jenkins 2007: 104: Hall 1992: 289).

However, the academic study of Muslim–Christian relations has to be situated in the broader field of oriental studies (King 2005: 284–285), intended to groom colonial administrators and missionaries for their tasks

overseas (Said 1977: 210). In the Netherlands, for example, the studies of Islam by Hendrik Kraemer (professor in Leiden from 1937 till 1948) promoted Dutch mission in Indonesia just as the studies of Islam by his doctoral supervisor Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (professor in Leiden from 1906 till 1927) advanced Dutch colonialism in that country (Trouwborst 2002). The Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden, founded in 1851, and the London School of African and Asian Studies, founded in 1916, focused on the study of the languages and cultures of the (Middle) East and, via literature and sacred scriptures, they encountered religions other than their own.

There were also religious scholars and missionary institutes that specialized in oriental studies. Among religious scholars significant contributions were made by Louis Massignon, a convert to Roman Catholicism, later ordained priest in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, who became professor of Muslim sociology at the *Collège de France*, Paris; John Spencer Trimingham, a missionary in Sudan and secretary of the Church Missionary Society, who was professor of Islamic studies at Glasgow University and the American University of Beirut; and Duncan Black MacDonald, who was not a missionary himself but devoted his life to the training of missionaries, teaching them to respect Islam at Hartford Theological Seminary, Hartford.

Religious or faith-based institutes that specialized in oriental studies are the *Institut de Belles Lettres Arabes*, founded in Tunis by the Missionaries of Africa in 1926, now the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam in Rome, and the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies founded in Cairo in 1953. Later came the Centre for the Study of Islam and Muslim–Christian Relations, which was the outcome of an interfaith consultation held at the (Quaker inspired) Selly Oak College in May 1975; the Duncan Black MacDonald Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations at the (originally Presbyterian) Hartford Seminary in 1972; and the Centre for Muslim–Christian Understanding at the (Jesuit) Georgetown University in Washington in 1993 (in 2005 it added 'Prince Alwaleed bin Talal' to its name following a grant by this Saudi Arabian prince and businessman).

However, Orientalism was not only expansionist and imperialist. It was also explorative and dialogical. Max Müller, the German born, Oxford

based philologist who is often named as the founding father of 'science of religion', belongs to this more enthusiastic and sympathetic tradition (King 2005: 282–283). Rudolph Otto's definition of the holy as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* can easily be applied to Islam. Islam was both frightening and fascinating, making scholars curious and inspiring esteem. The dominant paradigm was the Enlightenment view that saw other cultures and religions as primitive and infantile. But there was also the Romantic view that saw the Muslim world as the cradle of European civilization and science. In fact, the very concept of 'Europe' emerged out of the encounter with the Muslim world (Jenkins 2007: 107; Hall 1992: 289), thus confirming the notion that intercultural communication does not reveal but constitutes difference.

In faculties of theology 'other' religions were first studied by fundamental theology and later by missiology. Fundamental theology dealt with the foundations of faith and, as far as other religions were concerned, with apologetics. Against the background of natural law and Judaism it showed that the only true religion was Christianity. Missiology as an academic discipline started in Germany in the late 19th century with the appointment of Gustav Warneck as the first Protestant missiologist at the University of Halle in 1873, and Joseph Schmidlin as the first Catholic missiologist at the University of Münster in 1910 (Bosch 1991: 491). It studied other religions as a function of the communication of the Christian faith (Kraemer 1956), in conjunction with religious studies as an auxiliary science. Kraemer (1960) was the first theologian and scholar of religion to speak about 'dialogue' between the cultures and religions of the world.

Religious studies as an academic discipline likewise studied 'other' believers. But chairs for religious studies were located in faculties of theology, the very first at the University of Geneva (Platvoet 1998: 140 n. 6), often in conjunction with other disciplines such as philosophy of religion, systematic theology, ecumenical studies or mission studies. Since the 1950s fundamental theology and mission studies have developed the study of 'other' believers and interreligious relations under labels such as theology of religions, theology of interreligious dialogue, theology of religious pluralism and interreligious theology.

Since the early 1990s the term 'comparative theology' has been reinstated. This term was already used by Cornelius Tiele (the Dutch scholar of religion who is seen as Max Müller's rival as founding father of science of religion; see Martin & Wiebe 2012: 589–590) in 1893, but at that time free from the ideological discourses that surround the term today (Hintersteiner 2007: 465–467). Whereas in the United States comparative theology is mainly text-oriented (exegetical), in the United Kingdom it is largely thought-oriented (philosophical).

Since the late 1990s religious studies has been included in intercultural theology at some universities (Utrecht), at least temporarily, or combined with intercultural theology (Salzburg). At other universities religious studies was taught in conjunction with Islamic theology (Free University of Amsterdam, University of Leiden). In keeping with growing secularization in Europe, mission studies and intercultural or comparative theology on the one hand and religious studies on the other gradually parted ways, and eventually religious studies became an independent discipline or department, except at some German (and French-speaking) universities (Heidelberg, Erlangen, Rostock, Fribourg), where the link between the two disciplines persists.

At other universities mission studies, religious studies, intercultural and comparative theology were taught under new labels. Specialized research centres, chairs and master's programmes emerged, including the Centre for Intercultural Theology, Interreligious Dialogue, Missiological and Ecumenical Studies (Utrecht), Centre for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies and John Hick Centre for Philosophy of Religion, successors to the earlier-mentioned Centre for the Study of Islam and Muslim–Christian Relations (Birmingham), Centre for Christianity and Interreligious Dialogue (London), Centre for Muslim–Christian Understanding (Georgetown), Centre for Muslim–Christian Studies (Tripoli, Oxford), Centre for Interreligious Studies (Bamberg, Oslo) or Multireligious Studies (Aarhus), Centre for Interfaith Studies (Glasgow), Centre for World Christianity and Interreligious Studies (Nijmegen, Dublin, Uppsala), and Centre for the Study of Islam and Muslim–Christian Relations (Hartford).

However the field is defined, the paradigm shift from mission as propagation of faith to mission as interreligious dialogue was a condition for

studying other religions on their own terms, and paved the way for a more dialogical science, including dialogical science of religion (Tworuschka 2008). Ultimately dialogical science is based on the epistemological premise that accurate knowledge of others is gained in face-to-face encounter (Al Zeera 2001). Thus there is an epistemological shift from a 'detached' approach to religious studies to a more 'engaged' approach in interreligious studies, rooted in dialogical or interactive research, also called practical science of religion.

The research object of this emerging field of study is the dialogue, interaction, understanding, conversation, encounter and communication between practitioners of various religions (Soares 2005: 3). The studies are multi-perspective and poly-methodical. They explore the relations between believers of different religions and the reason why they are like that. It is generally accepted that academic religious studies, whether interpretive (e.g. hermeneutic) or explanatory (e.g. empirical), is descriptive and analytical.

Some scholars of religion do not hesitate to introduce a normative and even strategic perspective as well (Turner 1981: 354–355). Like Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Mircea Eliade (McCutcheon 1997), they expand the aim of their studies to include a humanitarian ideal of unity and peace. They ask not only how actual relations are, but also how they should and could be. Critical philosophers such as Habermas (2006) argue that relations should be non-dominating and open-ended. In this book we take a critical stance (Flood 1999: 221–237; Kippenberg & Von Stuckrad 2003: 69), not to be equated with theological or 'applied' science of religion.

In keeping with postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis, we argue that if interreligious relations are hegemonic, scholars of interreligious relations cannot be neutral and detached. Put differently: a scholar of religion can study Islam without being a Muslim. But it would be difficult if not impossible to study interreligious relations without being involved in one way or another, even if such involvement entails fierce rejection of involvement of whatever kind.

Thus many more scholars of religion tend to study interreligious relations (Hock 2004; Nielsen 2004), and the boundary between theology and religious studies has become blurred (Flood 1999: 18–20; Panikkar 1999; Hick 2007). As we will show later in greater detail, there is a shift

from a systematic to a practical science of religion (Tworuschka 2008). Like intergroup or international relations theory, we speak about interreligious 'relations' and not about interreligious 'encounter' (Soares 2005: 3) or 'dialogue' (Wierzbicka 2006), which seem to have philosophical or theological connotations.

Interreligious studies comprises history and anthropology, philosophy and theology, communication studies and science of religion, economic and political sciences, as well as pedagogy of religion (e.g. interreligious learning). Although the study is multidisciplinary, we explore interreligious relations from the angle of a theory of practice, particularly communicative practice (Blommaert & Verschueren 1991). We are critical of interpersonal, intergroup or international relations theories which work with essentialist, hence exclusivist notions of identity and necessarily lead to a 'cultures collide' (Blommaert 1991: 20) or 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) perspective.

2   Controversial issues

Underlying the foregoing sketch of this emerging field of study are some controversial issues, which differ in Europe, the United States of America and the Western world generally, and in the non-Western world (as will be shown later, 'Western' and 'non-Western' are historical rather than geographical categories). As we deal with interreligious, particularly Muslim–Christian, relations, these controversial issues have to do with the theory of religion and the theory of intergroup (e.g. interpersonal, intercultural, international) relations, as well as with the view of science.

As far as religion is concerned the main issue is whether religion is seen as an autonomous reality that exists *sui generis* (in its own right) or whether it is reduced to a reflection of something else, such as psychological or social processes. This is often seen as the distinction between a theological and a scientific view, the assumption being that the theological view

is necessarily unscientific. Whereas Durkheim saw religion as a symbolic expression of society, Weber viewed it as an independent, causal variable, that is a variable that makes a difference. Weber endorsed the autonomy of the conceptual order. Although both views play a role in the analysis of religiously related conflicts, most scholars of religion maintain that there is a dialectic relation between mental (e.g. symbolic) and material (e.g. socio-economic) structures (Hannerz 1992: 10–15).

This has consequences for the theory of intercultural communication. Is communication seen in a non-constitutive or informational way as the transmission of messages from senders to receivers, or in a constitutive way as construction of meaning, which is almost always the outcome of a power struggle to define reality? If cultures are perceived as systems of meaning shared by members of a group that are more or less stable and exist independently of actors, cultures are almost bound to collide (Blommaert 1991: 18–21). In that case there is a 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996).

Secondly, opinions about the consequences of cultural contact differ (Burke 2009: 102–115). Some scholars hold that there is cultural homogenization or 'McDonaldization' (Ritzer 1993). People with different cultural orientations increasingly think, behave and speak alike. According to other scholars there is cultural diversification or 're-tribalization' (McLuhan 1962). People define narrow identities and fight a holy war against other 'tribes' (Barber 1995). Yet others hold that these narrow identities should not be interpreted as revivals. They are – to a large extent – local products of globalization processes; hence there is cultural diffusion or 'glocalization' (Robertson 1992).

Since religion is widely regarded as a cultural system (Geertz 1973), religions are not excluded from intercultural, intergroup or international relations theories. Thanks to scholars like Samuel Huntington (1996) who theorized about a clash of civilizations, particularly between Christianity and Islam in the post-Cold War era, and Peter Berger (1999) who wrote about the worldwide resurgence of religion, religion is back in academia after decades of neglect. Increasingly religion is studied by a variety of disciplines as a factor in intercultural communication and international relations, in economic and political sciences, peace and development studies (Thomas 2005).

However, these disciplines quite often operate with essentialist definitions of religion and objectivist methods of studying them. It is widely acknowledged that traditional (i.e. essentialist and objectivist) approaches to studying religions and interreligious relations no longer suffice to cope with religious dynamics in a complex world (Flood 1999; Jensen 2003). As a result an interdisciplinary field of study in interreligious relations has developed, known as interreligious studies. What we have seen before with the emancipation of science of religion from theology of religions is happening again: the emancipation of interreligious studies from the science, philosophy and theology of religions.

This book may be seen as an introduction to this emerging field of study. The body of knowledge to which it seeks to contribute is the growing field of interreligious communication and hermeneutics. The dominant view in the West is that rationality is universal, hence offers a common ground for communication, and that understanding is possible if people use sound arguments. From the perspective of intercultural philosophy it is accepted that human potential is universal and thus shared by all people to some extent. But people are also products of socialization and acculturation, hence the way they apply their rationality may differ greatly. Thus there is 'understanding misunderstanding' or 'misunderstanding understanding' (Mall 2000: 13–14).

For those who are influenced by the linguistic and pragmatic turns in cultural (and religious) studies this is obvious (Jensen 2003: 14). In this book we go a step further. We draw on insights from critical theory (Fairclough 1992: 9) and cognitive science (Van Dijk 2008: 110) to develop a 'critical analysis' of discourse (Fairclough 1992: 23) or 'sociocognitive approach' to discourse analysis (Van Dijk 2008: 119), which we apply to the religious field (Bourdieu 1991b). People do not simply 'decode' utterances. They arrive at an interpretation through an active process of linking the utterances to what they know already (Fairclough 2001: 8–9, 118–135).

Fairclough (2001: 8–9) criticizes cognitive psychology because it ignores the social conditions of "mental maps" or "members' resources" (Fairclough 1992 qualifies members' resources both as "social" and "socio-cognitive"; Fairclough 2001 equates "members' resources" with the "cognitive apparatus" that the interpreter relies upon to interpret and again