

An additional conversation guide to
“Religious Exclusivism and Social Inclusion?
A Religious Response”

Summaries and questions for discussion
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Introduction to the Conversation Guide

The role of the Chair, *The Church in the Context of Islam* is to focus on the development of a Christian theology in the context of Islam. The overarching question of the research of the Chair concerns how the Christian community might relate to a multi-religious society and in particular to Islam. One of the issues in that context is the tension between inclusion and exclusion. Every society and faith community knows mechanisms of in- and exclusion; this is inherent to the existence of communities. So does the church. Even more so, the tension between in- and exclusion is present in the core texts of Christianity, the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

Therefore, the current research project of the Chair (2019-2023) is called *Exclusion versus Inclusion: Searching for Biblical Inspiration*. In this project the overall research question is as follows:

How do exclusive tendencies relate to inclusive aspects of Christianity and what does that mean for the position and calling of the Church in relation to Islam?

1. *Should a Christian faith community be inclusive and to what extent?*
2. *What are the boundaries of inclusion?*
3. *How do these possible limitations affect the relationship between the Church and Islam?*

Within the Islamic context, and also within the Christian community, apostasy, or the renunciation or changing of one's beliefs, is still a sensitive issue. Apostasy is an ultimate testcase for the tension between inclusion and exclusion. Within this research project Biblical texts (especially Deuteronomy 17:2-7) concerning apostasy and the death penalty are studied: how should we interpret these texts, and how does that influence the dogma and practice of the church in an Islamic context nowadays? Do these texts in some way help us understand what kind of inclusivity the church is advocating? Do they represent a way of religious thinking and if so, what does that mean for the Christian community with regard to Islam today? And how do Jewish and Islamic scholars discuss these matters from within their own sources and communities?

With a group of scholars, the Chair designed a meeting of experts to think about the interpretation of exclusive Biblical texts (especially Deuteronomy 17:2-7) and matters of inclusion and exclusion. This resulted in an academic publication: *Religious Exclusivism and Social Inclusion? A Religious Approach* (edited by B. J. G. Reitsma and H. van Nes), which is available through Open Access. On the basis of this publication, the partners of the Chair asked for an additional discussion guide to bring the outcomes of this research to a wider audience. This guide is presented here. It consists of a summary of all the articles in the publication, and in this way brings to the fore a broad range of questions and subjects related to the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. In addition, conversation questions are added to each chapter, hoping to stimulate people in Middle Eastern, Dutch, and other contexts to consider these matters thoroughly and make the issues discussed there, actual and relevant for their own situations.

We hope that this conversation guide will indeed stimulate a lot of inspiring conversations, which will help reflection on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that are and will be of continuing importance for the Church in the context of Islam.

Because this conversation guide is designed to be as compact as possible, there are not many references to resources for further investigations. These references can all be found within the corresponding articles in the academic publication.

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1. Exclusion Versus Inclusion, Searching for Religious Inspiration (B. J. G. Reitsma)

Summary

Introduction

'I killed God and buried Him.' That is what Jason Walters said after he was deradicalized. Walters is an ex-Jihadist who was part of the so called 'Hofstadgroep', a radical Muslim terrorist group in the Netherlands. Raised in a Christian family he converted to Islam when he was twelve years old and quite rapidly radicalized at the age of 19 through contact with the Hofstadgroep. He was – in his own words – a Jihadi seeking to become a martyr. In the course of his arrest in 2004 he wounded five police-offers with a hand grenade. He spent nine years in prison and during that time, through a process of study and reflection, he became deradicalized. When asked how that was possible, he answered: because 'I killed God and buried Him.' According to Walters, the only way to part with extremism was to abandon his faith in one God. For him, believing in one God and being a faithful inclusive citizen of a democratic society simply do not go together; monotheism always leads to exclusion and violence. (*Interview with Jason Walters on the 'De ongelofelijke podcast', August 9, 2019; and in 'Argos', September 29, 2018*).

The question is, is that true? Does believing in one God always lead to the religious and social rejection of the religious other, to the extreme extent of religiously inspired violence? That is not a question only to be addressed by Muslims like (previously) Jason Walters, but by all worldviews. If one considers one's own worldview as true and as the only good for society, it automatically seems to imply that there is no room for other views and opinions in the public space. So, do we have to sacrifice peace for the sake of religious purity or do we have to compromise our faith or worldview for the sake of an inclusive and peaceful society? That is the dilemma that seeks our attention. Is it impossible to be religiously exclusive and at the same socially inclusive and does it matter?

Exclusivism and inclusivism

Exclusivism and inclusivism can refer to three different areas and it is important to understand what these are.

- They can relate to (eternal) salvation: is there only and exclusively salvation through Jesus Christ, or are Judaism and Islam equal ways of salvation. This points to the classical way of describing the Christian view of other religions as exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.
- They concern the question of truth and falsehood. If a certain belief is true, it therefore logically excludes the opposite view. The view of a round earth excludes the belief that it is flat. The prophet Muhammad is either God's messenger or he is not and Christ is either the divine Son of God or he is not.
- They describe ways of living together in society and whether all people are and can be equally included, or whether some should be excluded because of certain beliefs or behaviours and if so, how.

All three areas somehow interlock.

When we explore the relationship between religious exclusiveness and social inclusion, it is not simply choosing between the two, but looking at what kind of exclusivity and inclusivity we wish for. Total inclusivity is not possible or desired, at none of the three interpretative levels of exclusivism/inclusivism mentioned above (salvation, truth and social relations), and the same is true for total exclusion.

Monotheistic Dilemma?

All world views or social imaginaries are to a certain extent exclusive in the first and second sense of the meaning. As a perceived expression of truth based on a certain world view or interpretation of good and bad – either in terms of the present time or eternity – they exclude other options. Still, it is sometimes argued that monotheistic religions are particularly problematic. You simply don't compromise with God. This leads to the dilemma of whether believers should follow the divine laws of the religious community or the laws of their country of residence. It is obvious that monotheism in itself cannot be blamed for this problem. Different forms of polytheism can be as intolerant as monotheism, while even radical monotheism knows many peaceful expressions, such as life in monasteries, the Amish communities, and pacifistic Salafi Muslims, among others. Therefore, the core tension is the tension between exclusive truth claims on the one hand and the desire for a peaceful pluralistic society on the other.

That, however, is a challenge of being human, not simply of being religious. According to Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, people try to overcome the complexity of life by dividing the world into good (us) and evil (the other). He argues precisely that the only way to overcome this dualism is monotheism, for God transcends our particularity. As creator he is universal and not just our God, but the God of all. (*Sacks, Not in God's Name, pp. 194, 195, 205*)

Apostasy

One of the most exclusive forms of religious and social exclusion is the required death penalty for apostasy or idolatry. In all three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is considered an (almost) unforgivable act should believers decide to leave their faith and their faith community, and is liable to capital punishment. Exploring texts on apostasy, such as Deut 13 and 17 in the Jewish and Christian traditions, and certain ahadith or juridical texts (fiqh) in Islam, can help to address the difficult issue of exclusion and inclusion. If the death penalty is the response God requires, then inclusion is undesirable in cases like these. But is that really the case? Do these and other exclusive texts show that inclusion is not the ultimate goal, or should we explore other ways of interpreting them? Are we able to engage in dialogue with people of other monotheistic traditions on these difficult situations? And what is the impact of the kind of society we live in? The history of Judaism, Christianity and Islam reveals that at different stages punishment of apostasy has been present in all three religions. How do we approach these challenges?

It might appear that inclusive holy texts are more helpful in this, and to a certain extent that is true. Inclusive texts underline what we have in common and might provide ways of living together. However, if we do not address the difficult questions in exclusive texts, they will always haunt us, since they also somehow represent the inspired voice of God.

Questions

1. Can you give examples of exclusion and inclusion? To what of the three different areas as mentioned above (salvation, truth and social relations) do these relate?
2. S. O'Grady, a scholar of religion, said in an interview: 'Monotheistic religions have intolerance built into the system. By definition this one God is a jealous God, whether He is called Jahweh, Allah or Father. There is no room for competitors, tolerance is impossible.' (Dutch Newspaper *Nederlands Dagblad*, February 6, 2021, p17.) What would be your response to this and why?
3. What would be necessary if you want to live together with people of other religions in your society? Is that possible and why or why not?
4. Jonathan Sacks speaks as a Rabbi when he says that believing in God the creator can overcome dualism. How could that help you and your community in relating to people who do not share your faith or worldview?
5. Christianity emphasizes that God became human in Jesus Christ for the sake of every sinner. What kind of effect does that have on your relationship with people who are not Christian believers?

2. A Humble Exclusivism? Reconstructing Exclusivism under Justificationist rather than Bivalent Parameters (D. M. Grube)

Summary

Introduction

In this article, I develop a *humble exclusivism*. The guiding motif is to conceptualize an exclusivism that avoids (what I have dubbed) Dawkinsianism (after Richard Dawkins's unwarranted claims that he and his fellows possesses absolute truth). A 'humble' exclusivism pursues its truth claims in an epistemically modest, that is a reflective and self-critical, fashion while still remaining recognizably exclusivist.

The definition of (religious) exclusivism

I distinguish between exclusivism regarding salvation and an exclusivism regarding truth: holding the belief that Jesus is the Christ is the only true description of reality is a form of truth-gearred exclusivism, holding the belief that Jesus is the Christ and is the only way to salvation is a form of salvation-gearred exclusivism. Both forms are related but need to be distinguished from each other. I focus here solely on the former, on the claim that the home religion is true and other religions are false.

Exclusivism and situations of cognitive ambiguity

Next, I ask what makes religious exclusivism wrong. Is it that it implies truth claims of that sort? Yet, this can hardly be the case since we always make truth claims. For example, we make such a claim when we reject the opinion that the earth is flat. If the criticisms that religious exclusivism is elitist, imperialist, and so on implies this, then they are mistaken. Furthermore, we have to emphasize the right and the importance of making truth claims against postmodernist denigrations of truth and in light of the emergence of conspiracy theorizing.

Exclusivism is thus not wrong because it implies truth claims. Yet, it can *become* wrong. This is the case when it is applied in the wrong kind of situations. For example, in situations of (*cognitive*) *ambiguity* it is wrong to be exclusivist. It is, for example, wrong to be exclusivist about the traffic light being green while not being in a good position to judge it.

What holds for exclusivism in general holds for *religious* exclusivism as well: It can become wrong when applied in the wrong situations, for instance in situations of cognitive ambiguity. And religious beliefs *are* formed under a significant amount of cognitive ambiguity. In religion, we do not have the kind of cognitive certainty we have in other domains of inquiry. The reason that religious exclusivism is wrong is thus that it pursued in the wrong kind of situation, in a situation of cognitive ambiguity.

This is a strictly epistemic claim that does not touch, say, the 'certainty of faith'. The latter implies, for example, a certainty of the heart, of tradition, of (mystic) intuition, or whatever. But those kinds of certainties are different from a strictly cognitive certainty. Given this distinction, it makes sense to suggest that we are certain about our faith although we are cognitively ambiguous about it.

In this strictly epistemic sense we *are* uncertain about our religious beliefs. This is the same kind of uncertainty that characterizes many important questions in human life, such as the question whether there is meaning to human life and, if so, what it is. Suggesting that religious beliefs are formed under conditions of cognitive ambiguity does not diminish the value of the religious realm.

Dialogical communication and religious exclusivism

In situations of cognitive ambiguity, we should *dialogue* with the other party. In contrast to situations in which we are certain, for example about the proposition that the earth *is* round, we should treat the other as a (cognitive) peer, and try to learn from them in situations of uncertainty. Dialoguing provides our best chances to arrive at the truth.

Yet, dialoguing is ruled out by religious exclusivism as defined above: If I consider another religion to be false then I will not learn from it. After all, we do not wish to learn from falsity. If we wish to maintain an exclusivism in religious affairs, we should thus (re-)conceptualize it so as to be capable of dialoguing. In order to do that, we need to avoid considering religions that differ from our own religion to be false.

The way to do that is to abandon the *logical principle of bivalence*. This principle implies that there are only two truth values, true and false. A declarative sentence is *either* true or else it is false. This is an exclusive alternative. Thus, religious beliefs that differ from the ones I regard to be true (usually my own) must be false by necessity. Yet, if they are false, I should not dialogue with them. Bivalence thus rules out dialoguing – which, as we have seen, is mandatory in situations of cognitive ambiguity, such as is the case in religion.

A justificationist frame of reference: broken superiority, humble exclusivism

As a solution, I propose to substitute the search for bivalent truth values with that of justification (in a philosophical, not a theological sense). Unlike bivalent truth, justification can be pluralized. It allows me to maintain the conviction that I am justified to hold my Christian beliefs whereas you may be justified to hold your different, say, Buddhist beliefs. Although I disagree with your beliefs, I do not think that they are false in the above sketched sense. Viewing things in such a way opens the way to dialoguing. Since we agreed that exclusivism should be (re-)conceptualized so as to allow for dialoguing, we should re-conceptualize it along justificatory lines.

The difference between a religious exclusivism (re-)conceptualized along justificatory rather than bivalent lines is one of attitude. Whereas the latter attitude believes that it possesses the truth, the former is more modest, thinking that its right to be exclusivist is a relative one (e.g., relative to its context of justification). As a consequence, it will propose its exclusivism in more humble ways than the former: it proposes a *humble exclusivism*.

The humble exclusivist believes that their religious beliefs are superior to competing ones (otherwise they would not believe in them). Yet, the superiority they claim for them is a broken one. A *broken superiority* is opposed to a Dawkinsianist, triumphalistic one: the holder does not pretend to possess The Truth and refrains from calling their own tradition ‘the illuminated way’.

A (conservative) religious critic may now retort that we should insist on possessing The Truth. If we fail to do so, we are disloyal to our prime task as believers, namely to witness God *as God*, absolute as He is in His glory.

This critic confuses theology with epistemology. Although, theologically, we are obliged to witness to God, we should be very careful how we cash in that claim epistemologically. Immediately identifying one's own truth claims, or that of one's tradition, with The Truth can be 'demonic' (Paul Tillich). It claims absolute validity for that which by its very nature is not absolute and, by Christian understanding, *fallen*:

Following Paul, we see through a glass, darkly, and know only in part (after 1 Cor 13:12).

Questions

1. What is a humble exclusivism?
2. Why is it necessary?
3. What speaks for it from a Christian point of view?
4. What makes identifying one's own religious truth claims with The Truth 'demonic'?

3. Apostasy in Terms of Moral Deviance (R. J. Ermers)

Summary

Introduction

In this article I argue that apostates – people who renounce their family's and their community's religious beliefs – often regarded as heroes by outsiders, are in fact considered by their own in-groups and communities as having also given up fundamental moral principles: they have declared themselves immoral. This explains the conflicts between apostates and their families as well as the families' fears about their position in the community.

The importance of groups

Humans are in essence social beings who have a basic need to feel included by other humans. Evolutionary psychologists have argued that this basic need is related to an evolutionary need for protection. Social psychological research has shown over and over again that being included and accepted by others makes an individual feel better and happier, safer and stronger. The family, the most coherent human group, scores highest on entitativity, the degree to which groups regard themselves as coherent. Different groups form a community.

Group membership is always conditional

Group members have to adhere to written and unwritten rules of their group. If there is too much disagreement and too often, the group may fall apart, with significant consequences for all of its members. Therefore, a member's inclusion in a group (and the larger community) can never be unconditional: when a member endangers the unity of the group because of their behaviour, by scorning, insulting or harassing other members, they will be reprimanded. These processes also occur within a family.

With the help of moral principles groups and communities distinguish between good and bad. In this way, members of a given group will know what sort of attitude is expected of them and what sort of activities they cannot engage in.

Individuals who due to their behaviour are considered immoral by other members of their group also constitute a danger for the group's unity and cohesion. Young group members may copy the undesired behaviour, while others feel embarrassment and distress over the immoral conduct. Dissenting and deviant members, therefore, can be reprimanded, punished, stigmatized and, eventually, excluded from their group. In this context, family members often ask themselves what they did wrong, while trying to keep the behaviour secret.

A stigma-by-association

Yet an immoral individual can damage their in-group in another way: when members of other groups in the community learn about the immoral behaviour, they may believe all members of deviant's group are immoral. In other words, the stigma of one member sticks to their fellow group members: a well-known social mechanism called 'stigma by association' or 'courtesy stigma'. The result of a

stigma-by-association process is that all associates, the members of the deviant's closest in-group including children, risk social exclusion by other community members, and marriages and engagements with members of other families may fail.

In this way, deviants not only cause trouble and arguments within their families, they often also cause a stigma for the family in the community. In this latter situation, families are torn between their love for the deviant member on the one hand and community pressure on the other. Thus, family members may see no other option than to break with the deviant, while other groups, such as friends and employers, in general cut off the relationship more easily.

For example, recently Jeroen Rietbergen, a musician who worked for the Dutch TV programme *The Voice*, and also the brother-in-law of the owner of the broadcasting company, John de Mol, was publicly accused of transgressing important moral norms in his contacts with women. There were discussions on social media, the press and in talk shows. Because of the moral stigma-by-association, De Mol saw no other option than to stop the programme, fire Rietbergen and distance himself from his behaviour (which he did rather clumsily). Linda de Mol, in her turn, immediately ended her relationship with Rietbergen.

People may be morally stigmatized when they express non-conformist convictions. Although in western societies tolerance is an important social and moral ideal, societies have difficulty in coping with citizens who publicly renounce important but arguably multi-interpretable notions like 'democracy', 'freedom' or 'equality' and who, for example, disturb national commemoration rituals. Those who question these important notions, or the pre-determined interpretation, may be considered immoral (and labelled Nazi, extremist, communist, etc.), and face indignant and angry responses.

How is this related to apostasy?

In many publications the positions of Christian, Jewish and Muslim apostates both in the Middle East and Africa have been studied. There, the point of departure appears to be that the apostates and the families have a (minor) ideological dispute, which escalates because the families – the parents in particular – are needlessly 'rigid', 'traditional', 'patriarchal', or overly religious, and against the freedom of religion.

Yet on a closer look, in my view, it appears that apostates have similar conflicts with their families as do those considered as moral deviants, and the apostates' associates appear to have a similar delicate position in their communities (although more research is needed on this). Other research has shown that in many communities, especially in the Middle East, being moral implies being 'religious', in the sense that individuals without religious beliefs are inherently immoral. In this context, believing family members still fear that the dissident member may not enter heaven, that they will lose ground.

In some families the conflicts and arguments with the apostates, after attempts to talk 'sense' into the 'deviant', lead to a break of the relationship with the apostate. When families give in, this is often on condition that if it should leak out in the community, they have all to face the consequences.

The case of Lâle Gül

A case in point is that of Lâle Gül (23), a university student, who in 2021 published her novel *Ik ga leven* ('I will live'), about her youth in a conservative Turkish Muslim immigrant family in Amsterdam. In her novel she ridicules what she sees as the superficial Islamic religious notions and empty rituals. In numerous interviews, Gül repeatedly stated that she now considered herself not merely an apostate, but rather an atheist and an Islamophobe.

Apart from her apostate ideas, she also lashes out at her mother, whom she subsequently calls 'Carbuncle' in her book, and she describes in quite explicit terms the secret and forbidden sexual relationship she had with Freek, a Dutchman.

Many members of the majority Dutch society, politicians and journalists, hailed her as having 'liberated' herself from her 'backward' and 'rigid' Islamic background, comparing her to authors from protestant and catholic backgrounds before. Gül was considered a courageous heroine – even more so when she received threats from people within the Turkish Muslim minority community.

In the meantime, there was much less interest for the fate of Gül's family members, her associates. In interviews Gül herself mentioned how her parents, brother (20), younger sister (10), uncles and minor cousins were harassed by phone calls and degrading comments from the Turkish Muslim community both in the Netherlands and abroad. Gül's little sister and brother had begged Lale not to appear in public anymore and draw negative attention to herself and their family – which she refused.

In our multicultural society there are many groups with differing moral norms. When an apostate leaves one group, people from other groups, especially the majority, tend to applaud the apostate's 'courage'. Yet these outsiders often tend to forget about the fate of the apostate's former group members who almost inevitably will suffer from the stigma.

Questions

1. Do apostates and their families merely have a difference in opinion or is there more to it – as argued in this article?
2. Is it possible to be an apostate of 'communism', 'liberalism' or 'democracy'? Do you agree that this sort of apostasy includes giving up important moral beliefs?
3. How can members of other communities make apostates feel welcome in their new (moral) community?
4. Do you think there is enough attention for the fate of the apostate's associates?
5. What sort of impact could the lack of interest for the fate of the deviant's associates potentially have?
6. What could we in our community do?

4. Apostasy: A Social Identity Perspective (J. Barentsen)

Summary

Introduction

Apostasy is a counter-cultural concept for many western Christians. Freedom of speech and thorough-going individualism underpin a climate of pluralism and multiculturalism. Tolerance of nearly any moral or religious position has become politically correct, rendering the very concept of apostasy suspect. On the other hand, apostasy is an important concept in Islam, along with the death penalty, religious liberty, and political power.

Apostasy may be described theologically as a state of having lost one's faith or one's identification with a particular religious tradition. Though meaningful within some religious communities, this description presents difficulties for a public, multi-religious debate. Apostasy may also be described through social scientific analysis which facilitates interreligious conversation about identity, boundaries, deviance and transgression. This chapter offers a perspective from social identity theory, which describes the complexity of social identity, intergroup relationships, boundary negotiation, and the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Social scientific language complements theological language in the study of apostasy.

What is a Social Identity?

A social identity is a 'sense of us,' which is informed by the perception of similarities and differences with other group members as compared with outsiders. This is not an objective assessment, but a matter of perception, perspective and, thus, rhetoric. Social identities have three main dimensions: *cognitive* (knowledge and content that defines group identity), *affective* (emotions attached to group identity), and *evaluative* (the social value of group membership for the individual). Social identities are motivated by a sense of self-esteem, security, efficacy, or distinctiveness.

Group identity develops around a sense of how some members represent and embody the group more than others ('prototypicality'). Stereotypes portray outgroups as significantly different, marginalization refers to the perception that some ingroup members do not fit very well, while deviance is the perception that some differ so much from the group prototype that they are experienced as endangering group identity. Hence, social identities are always comparative.

Individuals maintain a number of different social identities simultaneously, for instance, cultural, ethnic and religious identities, but also work, family or neighborhood identities. Social identification involves ongoing group and personal identity negotiations to prioritize some social identities depending on the time and context. How individuals handle their multiple social identities is strongly influenced by people's experiences in a pluralistic, highly diverse social society, and by the level of identity or distinctiveness threat they experience.

Apostasy as transgression of identity boundaries

Although religious identity is often secondary, influencing various religious groups and organizations, faith communities are primarily religious in function and identity, while their social, psychological and

economic dimensions are secondary. Hence, religious identity is often the primary religious identity in churches or mosques.

Apostasy involves losing or being denied one's religious identity, usually losing a particular Muslim or Christian community, or the associated network (e.g., Roman Catholicism or Shiite Islam). Even though contemporary trends of cultural tolerance and interreligious dialogue suggest that concerns about apostasy are less prevalent today, many Christian and Muslim communities continue to hold exclusive beliefs, assuming or requiring identification with specific beliefs and practices at the risk of being considered apostate. Apostasy then implies disidentification with a particular faith community and its faith tradition.

Apostasy is thus not only a theological qualification of an individual leaving the faith, but also a social qualification of an individual crossing or transgressing the identity boundary of a religious community. Social identity theory explains the complexity: it is not just disagreeing with some religious beliefs (the cognitive dimension of socio-religious identity). Some individuals manage to stay within their faith community even when they differ in some core beliefs, because they still identify with the emotional and value dimensions of the community. These dimensions together inform the process of apostasy as transgression of the socio-religious identity of the community.

Dynamics of in/exclusion

How is it that individuals come to be and/or feel included in a community of faith, or alternatively, be/feel excluded? Theologically, apostasy as a transgression of religious identity is marked by certain sacred texts of *exclusion* (e.g., Deuteronomy 17:2-7), while other texts *include* ethnic and socioeconomic differences within the community (Deut. 16:13-15, 18-20). In a Jewish context, only transgression of specific covenant obligations may lead to exclusion, because the covenant shapes Israelite identity, while ethnic or economic differences are explicitly included in Israelite identity. This fits a largely agrarian, collective context (as in ancient Israel) where religious, ethnic and social identities overlapped significantly, so that only the gravest of differences, those relating to the covenant, should be marked as apostasy and reason for exclusion.

Modern life is highly differentiated. People move in many different social networks that hardly overlap, with religious identity not integrated but compartmentalized. Thus, most people have meaningful relationships with others, apart from their religious identity. To be excluded or exclude oneself from a religious group does not necessarily breach relationships in other spheres of life, which may well continue without interruption even in the case of religious identity switch/apostasy.

The concept of apostasy functions quite differently in these contexts: although the theological definition might continue unchanged, its social relevance and impact varies greatly. In individualized societies, apostasy becomes a matter of religious preference, with few sanctions in the case of identity switch; in a more collective society, a religious identity switch can be very costly, even resulting in violence and death.

Sacred texts concerning apostasy play a different role in these contexts. In more collective societies, with religious and political powers in close cooperation, these texts become instruments to guard these boundaries and to heighten the cost of religious identity transfers. In societies marked by social mobility and personal preference, these texts have little impact on one's religious affiliations, and even less on other social relationships and identities.

Questions

1. Have you ever experienced such a major change in your religious beliefs and/or practices that you left (or were 'asked' to leave) a religious community?
 - a. Did you think this was a form of apostasy?
 - b. Did the community you left see your leaving as a form of apostasy?
2. How does your faith or religion influence the groups with which you identify or from which you distance yourself? Is your faith the primary dimension for the group, or does it play a less important role?
3. To what extent does a change in your religious beliefs or practices involve a change in social or even economic relationships?
4. Do you feel that your religious identity is the most important identity that influences all other social identities in your life? Why or why not?
5. Are there people that you feel should be excluded from your religious community, while more formally or officially they are included? Or do you think some should be included, that are formally excluded? How does this chapter help you understand your own feelings about this?
6. Have you ever been part of a (sub)group that excluded someone else? On what basis? Was this something that was marked as 'apostasy'?
7. Have you ever felt that someone in your community was an apostate – or perhaps even yourself? Why did you think so? Did your community agree with that?

5. Deuteronomy 17:2-7 Within the Context of Tanakh (J. Dubbink and K. Spronk)

Summary

Introduction

In Deuteronomy 17 it seems that apostasy or 'leaving your religion' is punished by death, a shocking outcome for the modern reader. However, this paper claims that this cannot be regarded as characteristic of the biblical view on exclusion and inclusion.

Deuteronomy 17:2-7

According to this text, idolatry and worshipping other gods are absolutely not acceptable. The prohibition on idolatry is deeply rooted in the religion of Israel; it is found in the Decalogue, in the commandment that forbids the making and worshipping of idols (Ex. 20:4; Deut. 5:8). Idolatry is a matter of transgressing God's covenant and an 'abomination' (17:2, 4), an expression indicating a variety of cultic and ethic practices that can have no place in Israel.

Due process is important: thorough inquiry and a minimum of two witnesses (cf. Deut. 19:15) is necessary to avoid false accusations. The witnesses are required to start the execution themselves, obviously to make them think twice and make them even more responsible for the verdict based on their testimony (cf. also the way Jesus uses this: John 7:53-8:11, especially 8:7). All this is meant to 'purge the evil from your midst' (v. 7). Removing evil, unacceptable sins, from society is the first intention of this rule. A pedagogic intent is sometimes added (Deut. 19:20; 21:21), but is secondary.

Historical and biblical theological setting

For a long time, biblical Israel was not as 'monotheistic', as the 'historical overview' of Genesis – 2 Kings seems to suggest. It was only after a long battle that the 'YHWH-alone-movement', which shaped the characteristic biblical faith, finally won, and their views were accepted as normative. The Book of Deuteronomy testifies to this battle: Deuteronomy 17:2-7 is meant to draw a line as a safeguard against apostasy, as that would be disastrous for the whole community.

For twenty-first century readers, Deuteronomy 17:2-7 could easily be mistaken as a text about conversion, 'changing your religion', but the concept of religion as a set of truths, values and guidelines for worship and behaviour that one freely chooses is a modern one. In antiquity much more than in our times, religion was a collective choice or not even a choice. Whoever was born in Israel was a member of the covenant and responsible for upholding the rules of the covenant. Anyone transgressing fundamental rules of the covenant could not remain a member of the group.

Reception history

In the history of interpretation, we do not find indications that the execution of this law was much propagated. We do not know of any examples of executions of perpetrators under this law in the Second Temple period. Jewish tradition, on purpose, added so many criteria that it became almost impossible to carry out the death penalty.

In the history of the Christian church, especially in the time of the Reformation and Contra-Reformation, many people were executed because of assumed apostasy. However, those in power did not base the right to carry out the death penalty on Deuteronomy 17, but rather, for instance, on Romans 13. Calvin uses Deuteronomy 17 to ask for rigidity but also for 'diligent inquiry' and reads verse 7 about the witnesses being the first to throw a stone as a warning against light accusations.

Luther, in a lecture on Deuteronomy 17:1-7, states that with regard to sinning against faith and the word, there is no room for lapse (as is the case with regard to sinning against love), because when faith is lost, everything is lost, while love endures everything. Some commentators follow the line of Luther, indicating that at some point there is no more room for mercy or compromise. They stress, for example, the fact that the faith of Israel is diametrically opposed to the Canaanite religion, as life against death, or apply it to the Christian responsibility to keep the church pure, rather ignoring the violent content of the pericope.

At the other end of the spectrum, commentators focus on capital punishment as cruel and as a form of violence. The first type of reader changes the harsh content of the text by taking it metaphorically: no stoning but excommunication. Readers of the second kind explicitly refuse to spiritualize the biblical text and take the text seriously, including all its negative aspects, but they also, in the end, have to find a way of dealing with the text in the present day.

Exclusion and inclusion within Tanakh

The broader context of the Hebrew Bible shows that there are different voices on the theme of inclusion/exclusion. Safeguarding one's identity can be important in a specific situation. There are many different situations, from family/clan, settlements, tribes, to monarchies and parochial organizations. In each of them outsiders play specific and also often changing roles.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah are witnesses to a theology that is determined by fear. With the events of the exile in mind, the implication is that Israel narrowly escaped annihilation, that new transgressions are a direct threat to its society and foreign influence has to be removed (e.g., Ezra 9:1-15, Neh 9).

In the book of Jonah, a much more lenient view on the heathen (and hostile) city of Nineveh is found than in Nahum: in Jonah, the non-Israelite sailors are doing the right thing; they pray to YHWH (Jonah 1:14). In the story of Ruth, a Moabite woman is presented as faithful to her mother-in-law and to YHWH, while Numbers 25 warns against the danger of Moabite women leading the Israelites astray. The book of Genesis displays open and often even friendly relations between Abraham and his descendants on the one hand and the Canaanites on the other hand (e.g., Jethro, the Midianite father-in-law of Moses).

The book of Joshua offers a very clear distinction between the chosen people of Israel and the Canaanites who are only there to be replaced. However, it is introduced by two stories that put this distinction into a new light: Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute in Jericho, plays a positive role as a true believer in YHWH; she and her family survive the destruction of Jericho. Achan, a member of the important tribe of Judah, is stoned to death for his transgressions, together with his wife and children.

These stories cannot be regarded as an exception to the rule of Deuteronomy 17 that apostasy deserves the death penalty, because outsiders like Ruth and Rahab are only included after they proved to be true followers of the god of Israel. The older situation of henotheism, in which it was

accepted as normal that other peoples served other gods, is replaced in most texts in Tanakh by strict monotheism. Traces of the older situation can be found in a text like Deuteronomy 4:19, which shows that YHWH had no problem with other people worshipping the sun and moon, as long as Israel refrained from it. Alas, this aspect has been ignored in the reception history, and the most radical versions of 'otherness' have frequently been adopted as the only possible meaning. Fundamentalist readers of the Bible to this day have thus justified the unmerciful exclusion of 'outsiders' from the community of believers.

In line with these remarks, we conclude that, in our opinion, Deuteronomy 17:2-7 does not have the last word when it comes to exclusion or inclusion in Tanakh. It should be handled with care when we want to base our discussion of this topic on biblical grounds, as it is not just a text about conversion *and* it should be read together with other texts with a different approach to this theme.

Questions

1. What are your first impressions after reading Deuteronomy 17:2-7: consent, approval, fear, disgust, protest, or something else?
2. Do you regard faith as a matter of personal choice, or do you feel yourself a member of a community of people whose faith you share?
3. Would it be easy for you to change or abandon your religion, or would you experience opposition? If so, would this opposition come from within (your own conscience) or from others, like family, friends, religious or worldly authorities?
4. To what extent is the variety of opinions within the Bible on 'outsiders' problematic for you, and to what extent do you regard this as an enrichment?

6. Otherness and Exile: Jesus's Attitude Towards Apostates and Outsiders (H. A. Bakker)

Summary

Introduction

According to leading Jewish scholars, Jesus should basically be understood within the conservative Palestinian settings in which he was raised. Jesus was more of a marginal Jew, without any particular status, wealth or higher education, than an opinion leader. For other scholars, however, it cannot be denied that this Galilean prophet and holy man was also identified as the embodiment of the Name of God, as the Son of God, albeit in an indirect and interpretive way.

His Own Path

Despite the common ground as to Jesus's social-cultural background and the process of sense-making involved, there is no real consensus as to how disapproving or disqualifying Jesus was, and to whom his criticisms were exactly addressed. In any case, part and parcel of any halachic attitude and discourse in Jesus's day was the practice of social distancing, which was fairly normal. Social distancing was an approved means by which to discipline offenders of religious law, and, if necessary, to ban them from exerting their faith. The stance Jesus took in most cases of law-related social nuisance was noticeably controversial, as I will show by looking mainly at his parables.

Playful Confrontations

Parables have the advantage of providing playful confrontations. The listeners are taken by the hand by story, and in a way experience the message by imagination. The confrontation is acted out safely as an inner moral dialogue that makes the listener decide on the spot: either they surrender to the moral imperative demonstrated in the parable, or evade it.

Identity in Hybridity

It is evident from the parables that Jesus proclaimed a very critical message. Without any doubt, the parable of the evil tenants (Matt 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19) represents an exemplary specimen of Jesus's criticism of the temple aristocracy in his day, particularly the Markan version. Here Jesus defines himself as the final prophet in a long line of messengers from God, whose fate it is to die for the cause of God's property.

Unfortunately, the extended version of Matthew has often been taken as a punishment of the Jewish people as a nation, but this is not the case. So who are these 'others'? Exegetically it seems tenable to argue for an inclusive and exclusive interpretation simultaneously.

Judean hierarchy tended to think in temple-centered terms. In order to maintain a monopoly, its monotheism was rather restrictive, not conversant with foreign people, nations and religious systems. Galileans however, which is Jesus's background, were regularly exposed to the widening outlook of (later) Isaiah, (later) Zachariah, and late Malachi. Their belief system can be typified as

inclusive monotheism: throughout the world and the nations, yes, even in the darkest places and provinces, the light of God will start to shine.

Even though Jesus's intentions were inclusive, they were not all-inclusive. The parable of the wicked tenants demonstrates that, for Jesus, new identity is found in hybridity because the 'others' are being included, whosoever they may be.

In other words: for Jesus the realm of 'otherness' (alterity) is constitutive of hybridized identity, and envisages another type of leadership and new communal identity. Nonetheless, Jesus's notion of 'hybridity' was not just a matter of mixed identity but of convictions crossing social borders, and in particular of conversion. Otherness means either completion or exile, and in Jesus's parables the hearers are invited to enter a narrative in which their imagination, by heart and intuition, will eventually predispose them to one or to the other.

Culture of Excuses

The parable of the great supper heads in the same direction with quite another narrative (Matt 22:2–10 NIV; Luke 14:16–24 NIV). The ramifications mentioned in this parable come close to the measures to be taken with regard to apostasy (Deuteronomy 17:1–7).

Jesus's message in sharing this parable is, again, to emphasize how often God has reached out to his people, in particular people in charge (tenants or listed guests), and how often his message (and messengers) has been rejected. The 'otherness' here is manifested in the surprising new list of guests, namely 'anyone': that is the bad and the good, the poor and the disabled, and all others who were compelled to come in. Those who suffer most from the diaspora and current Roman oppression will be restored and healed in God's Kingdom, but those who look for excuses to remain where they are, seeking compromises in their luxurious and privileged positions, will finally be judged and brought into deeper exile, which is the fate of the apostate. So, Israelites who hide behind sheer excuses may end up becoming total strangers to God. Quite astoundingly, they become the 'others', whereas outsiders are invited to enter the banquet hall. Replacement is the fate of the apostate.

Into Exile

Jesus is lenient and patient in facilitating conversion, repentance, and forgiveness, but he sends people back to exile if they are hypocrites whose ambition it is to thrive in God's mercy and do not treat others in the same merciful way. Both forces are at work in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke), and in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew).

So, exclusion, which is roughly equivalent to banishment (literally and/or spiritually), does not equal capital punishment on account of mortal sin. The sanction of banishment/exile was widely administered, while it was almost impossible to sentence someone to death in rabbinic courts. The gravity of the banishment was that the person not only was exiled, but that he was also banished from the presence of God.

Conclusion

Taking all this into account, Jesus's attitude towards apostates, or outsiders, can be epitomized with the binary of otherness and exile. In his teaching and attitude, in particular in the parables, Jesus

exhibits a typical Galilean orientation, which he deepens through unfolding his own halachic path. His criticism is mainly directed towards hypocrisy, in particular towards those whom he accuses of taking advantage of the system, of God's patience and grace, and at the expense of poor and vulnerable people. In the coming age, which is imminent, and as a matter of fact present in Jesus's words and deeds (e.g., healings and exorcisms), positions and dispositions will be turned upside down. The 'others' outside the system, such as strangers and outcasts and misfits, will be invited to come in, and 'wicked' insiders will be banished to exile. Consequently, otherness and hybridity are constitutive to Christian identity, according to Jesus, whereas exile denominates a type of otherness that seems to be beyond redemption, and irreversibly demarcates sound from toxic (infectious) alterity.

Questions

- 1 Social distancing was an approved means to discipline offenders of religious law, and, if necessary, to ban them from exerting their faith. The stance Jesus took in most cases of law-related social nuisance was rather controversial – as is shown (among other situations) in the parables he told. Can you imagine the disruptive nature of exclusion in Jesus's day and Jesus's way of reacting against unloving practices? Explain what you are picturing or thinking.
- 2 Parables have the advantage of providing playful confrontations. These confrontations are acted out safely as an inner moral dialogue that makes the listener decide to surrender to the moral imperative demonstrated in the parable or evade it. With regard to church services, can you think of creative ways to implement the power of playful confrontations?
- 3 For Jesus, new identity is found in hybridity, because the 'others' are being included, whosoever they may be. It is not just a matter of mixed identity, but of convictions crossing social orders, and in particular of conversion. What is your idea (ideologically) about this hybridity within faith communities nowadays, and what do you see as the main hindrances to realizing that?
- 4 What culture of excuses do you see within faith communities nowadays (starting with your own); can you think of ways to overcome this?
- 5 Within the time of Jesus, the gravity of banishment implies banishment from the presence of God. So the social consequences include religious consequences. How do the social and the religious interact nowadays in your opinion?

7. Discerning the Body in 1 Corinthians 10: The Physical Negotiation of Exclusion and Inclusion by Paul as a Theologian of the Body (P. B. A. Smit)

Summary

Introduction

1 Corinthians 10 is a text clearly concerned with inclusion and exclusion. The key site of inclusion and exclusion in this text is the meal, especially the question as to whether those partaking of the meal of the Christian community, which Paul will call the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, can also justifiably eat foodstuffs, especially meat, that has been offered to deities other than the God of Israel and his Christ (i.e., 'idols' in Paul's idiom).

In his discussion of this topic, Paul seeks to outline a course of action that is characterized by significant nuance. First, it is noticeable that Paul does not problematize 'interreligious' eating together as such, nor does he threaten any sanctions. This creates space for those in the city of Corinth who are compelled to eat with non-Christians for reasons of general sociability, family ties, and interests in the sphere of business and politics. Second, Paul is also clear that as long as foodstuffs do not clearly signify allegiance with deities other than the Lord (and are therefore a form of apostasy), they can be freely consumed. Third, as soon as foodstuffs imply the association with another deity other than the Lord (to be sure, not so much from the perspective of the Christ devotee involved, but rather from the perspective of others), their consumption becomes deeply problematic.

Bodies and the physical in 1 Corinthians 10

The text can be regarded as a theological discussion, ordering and regulating ideas that one should (and shouldn't) have about the divine; it can also be read as a text dealing with the regulation of social behavior – eating meals together is a key form of human sociability. However, when reading the text with these emphases, it can easily be overlooked that it is a text dealing primarily with bodies and their behaviour. The negotiation of the relationships between both the divine and the human and among humans themselves is mediated through physical behaviour in the form of eating. Exclusion and inclusion, therefore, is also a physical, rather than an intellectual or a disembodied social practice (obviously, disembodied social practices are impossible: the social is always also physical, even if this can be easily overlooked). This can be spelled out in a little more detail.

First, this leads to the observation that, although the issues at stake can be seen to be primarily social (who can associate and eat with whom?) and metaphysical (what is the effect of certain foodstuffs?; do pagan gods really exist? etc.), physical behaviour is really what matters. Allegiance to Christ is performed physically by means of partaking of and abstaining from certain foodstuffs. In particular, it is the body of the Christ devotee as seen by others that is the focus of all negotiations of inclusion and exclusion in 1 Corinthians 10. Physical behaviour and all that is in Paul's view attached to it is the starting point of Paul's argument and of his attempt to find a middle way between apostasy (caused by idolatry) and anti-social behaviour in this text, which shows to what a large extent he is a theologian of the body.

Second, the negotiation of social relationships (and of inclusion and exclusion) that takes place throughout 1 Corinthians 10 – as meals are performances of social relationships, expressing and (re)constituting them – takes place through physical behaviour, and thus the body and its (disciplined) behaviour becomes the site where such relationships are negotiated. Certainly, the body is not the body in and of itself but the body as committed to Christ, and especially as it is seen and evaluated by outsiders (cf. v. 29!), who, it seems, must not get the impression that Christ devotees can enjoy multiple forms of *κοινωνία* (*koinonia*, communion) (just like ‘weak’ insiders must not get this idea, cf. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13), even if Paul’s own metaphysical position seems to be that, in the end, all of this does not really matter, given the lack of reality and power that he ascribes to pagan deities. Yet, as Paul cannot control how others see the bodies of Christ devotees and interpret them, he is forced to suggest disciplining these bodies with regard to consumption as soon as such consumption is turned into an explicit performance of *κοινωνία* with another deity than Christ and may be perceived, both by those outside of the community and the ‘weak’ members of the community itself, as a form of apostasy.

Third, when further considering the physical negotiation of allegiance to and communion with Christ (a negotiation of inclusion and exclusion into this communion), it is of importance to note that Paul engages in a search and exploration rather than in the development of fixed rules and regulations. His argument is deeply contextual and depends on the ‘reading’ of physical behaviour by others, in particular by those outside of the *ἐκκλησία*, in contrast to the situation in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, where the perspective of those inside of the assembly matters. Presumably, in a context where eating meat associated with other deities would not have had the implication of being seen as compromising one’s fidelity to and communion with Christ (i.e., engaging in apostasy), such consumption would not have been as problematic as it appears to be in Corinth. A contemporary reception of Pauline ethical considerations in 1 Corinthians 10 would, therefore, be well-advised to take into account the contextuality of his approach and to continue his search for appropriate behaviour in new contexts, rather than to replicate Paul’s findings for the Corinthian Christ devotees in contexts that are rather different from Corinth.

Questions

1. When thinking of inclusion and exclusion, have you ever felt excluded physically from any group or gathering? If so, how?
2. When reflecting on the Eucharist or the Mass (or any other kind of holy meal) in your community, can you think of forms of physical inclusion and exclusion?
3. Concerning foodstuffs, are there any foodstuffs that you wouldn’t want to eat because they would compromise your relationship with the church of Christ?
4. Concerning people, can you imagine any kind of people that you wouldn’t want to eat with because this would compromise your relationship with the church of Christ?
5. Can you imagine any kind of people who wouldn’t want to eat the food you serve or who wouldn’t want to eat with you because that would compromise their beliefs or values?

8. Exclusion *and* Inclusion in 1 Peter (J. Kok)

Summary

Introduction

This paper examines the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in earliest Christianity by focusing on 1 Peter. Peter was one of the most important early Christian leaders and apostles of Jesus. In this paper we critically examine 1 Peter through the lens of Social Identity Theory. Social Identity Theory is a rather new method in New Testament Studies, and is interdisciplinary in nature in the sense that it uses tools that originated in social psychology. This theory is very helpful for us to make more explicit some of the implicit dynamics involved in the construction of early Christian identity and boundaries, that is, how exclusion and inclusion happened during the earliest decades of the formation of the Christian faith. Social Identity Theory helps one to see the manner in which groups create a positive sense of self-esteem, especially amidst conflict, and how they evaluate other groups or create their boundaries so as to differentiate themselves from outgroups and consolidate their identity to the inside. This is especially true in contexts of conflict.

The socio-historical background and social-scientific exegesis of 1 Peter

1 Peter is written within a context of conflict in the second part of the first century AD. Some argue that the text's reference to suffering and persecution needs to be read against the background of Roman persecution. Some argue that there was not at that particular time official Roman persecution except under Nero and Domitian. They would rather opt for the view that the readers of 1 Peter experienced suffering because of social marginalization which resulted from the fact that they became believers in Christ and therefore deviated from the norms of society. Whatever option one decides to follow, the point is more to look at the manner in which the text itself sketches the situation of what they describe as one of suffering and marginalization (1 Pet 1:6; 4:16; likewise, Paul experiencing suffering in Phil 1:7, 13-14, 17, 28-29; 4:14). One of the purposes of the letter is that the author of 1 Peter wants to write a "pastoral letter" in which he wants to console his audience with a message of hope and an understanding of identity that would help them to endure affliction and marginalization.

In 1 Peter, the author wants to shape and sketch the implications of the new identity that believers acquired after their conversion and how that creates in them a sense of identity which should result in a particular ethos within their socio-historical context. Michael Wolter points out that every group has inclusive ethics which they share with the rest of society and that helps them integrate, but every group also has an exclusive ethos which is not shared with the rest of society and serves as a way to consolidate identity and boundaries between the ingroup and outgroup.

In 1 Peter 1:1 we already encounter a very interesting metaphor, namely that the believers to whom he is writing are described as being aliens or foreigners (he uses the term *παρεπιδήμοις*). The mere term "alien" presupposes a person or group of persons who are foreign, strangers, and outsiders, who find themselves in a situation where they are the marginalized "other". But here the "negative" image of "alien" is used in a positive manner. Social Identity Theory shows us that it often happens that a negative label outsiders attach to a group is used by the group itself as a positive self-description. This act thus becomes a metaphor which presupposes the implicit challenge of such

people to either assimilate and do away with the boundaries of the host culture, or live in and with a form of social identity complexity.

Interesting to note now is how the author goes on to *create boundaries that exclude* the ingroup from the outgroup. This forms part of what social identity theory describes as the *evaluative aspect*.

- They used to live in ignorance (1 Pet 1:14 – ἀγνοία)
- They lived in empty, futile ways inherited from their ancestors (1 Pet 1:18 – ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου)
- They participated in all sorts of things Gentiles do, like drunkenness (οἰνοφλυγίας), lustful sensuality (ἀσελγείαις ἐπιθυμίαις), carousing (κώμοις), drinking parties and unlawful idolatry (πότοις καὶ ἀθεμίτοις εἰδωλολατρίαις (1 Pet 1:18)
- They were not God’s people (1 Pet 2:10 – οὐ λαός)
- They were those who have not received God’s mercy (1 Pet 2:10)

Positive ingroup dynamics and contrast between their past and present

This negative portrayal of their previous identity is contrasted with the current identity as exiles in the diaspora (1 Pet 1:1 – παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς) who have been elected and radically drawn into the new *family of God* and participate in Israel’s story. Their old identity is radically contrasted with their new identity. Old is bad, new is better. This is explainable by the evaluative dynamics in Social Identity Theory. The author of 1 Peter uses a cluster of family metaphors (birth, spiritual milk, growth to maturity, obedience, brother and sisters, etc.) to express the manner in which they should understand their new identity and group cohesion. He also links them with the story of Israel and creates a meta-narrative in which they now participate in God’s plan and in which their suffering makes new sense against a larger cosmic narrative.

One would expect 1 Peter to motivate his readers such that they would stay in their little bubble and retract from the world. But he does not do that. He motivates believers to exemplify the utmost best of the values of their context. For instance, he says that believing wives should become even better in expressing the values embodied in the social context of their unbelieving husbands so as to make these men wonder why their wives are so exemplary and when finding out what the underlying motivation is, become Christ-followers themselves and be won over to the faith. 1 Peter does not want believers to react with violence or sectarian withdrawal, but to respond in ways characterized by non-violence, and breaking the cycle of violence as such (1 Pet 2:23; 3:9). We see a directive to love for the ingroup (3:8; 2:17) on the one hand, and remarkably, to submission to “every human institution” which exists outside of the confines of the ingroup. In that sense, early Christians showed what Miroslav Volf calls, a “soft difference” which was in that sense, inclusive and open.

Questions

1. Reflect on the statement that during situations of conflict or affliction we tend to draw stronger boundaries between us and them.
2. Think for a moment about who you are and what you stand for. How is that also directly related to who and what you stand against? Would you agree with a statement like “By saying who I am, I am also saying who I am not. By saying who I am, I am drawing boundaries.”? What are those boundaries? And how does that exclude others?
3. How does 1 Peter’s idea of a “soft difference” and doing good to all people help us to reflect on the manner in which our boundary-drawing could also be boundary transcending?

9. Hebrews, Deuteronomy, and Exclusion in the Early Church (B. J. Lietaert Peerbolte)

Summary

Introduction

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the author of which is unknown, several warnings are found that aim at keeping the believers attentive inside their group. One passage is rather explicit in passing judgement on believers who leave the community of the faithful: Hebr. 10:26-31. The NRSV translates this passage as follows:

For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy “on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Hebrews’ warning against apostasy

The author of Hebrews combines several references to Old Testament passages to point out that God is a judging God, who does not know mercy when it comes to fallen believers. In the course of history, the quoted passage has given rise to many discussions. How can any biblical author speak so harshly and pass a judgement this stern about people who fall away from their faith? Can such a judgemental, hard picture of God be combined with the idea that God is love? How is the exclusion of apostates to be matched with other pictures of God in the Bible?

Some receptions of Hebrews

The Epistle to the Hebrews contains quite a few calls and exhortations. On estimate, one third of the epistle consists of this type of admonition. Later ecclesiastical authors have picked up the warnings of Hebrews and interpreted them from within their own contexts. Clement of Alexandria and Origen, for instance, two important authors who wrote at the end of the second and beginning of the third centuries, took this passage literally and suggested a church in which there would be no place anymore for people who had “betrayed” Christ. Later, after Christianity in the fourth century first became a permitted religion and several decades later was even appointed state religion of Rome, authors have gone to great lengths to explain that apostasy is caused by the Devil: it is he who tries to lead people astray and keep them from living with God and Christ.

The exclusion of fallen believers in the Epistle to the Hebrews

From a modern perspective, Heb. 10:26-31 is a harsh text that raises numerous questions. Can believers in the twenty-first century still deal with this image of a judgemental God? Is possible at all

to still use a term like “apostasy”? Can the borderlines of a faith community be drawn in the harsh style of Hebrews?

It may be a consolation to realize that this passage has been seen by many authors as problematic throughout the history of the church. Only a few authors have supported a literal interpretation. It is probably best to see these admonitions as a form of concern: concern that nobody may fall away from the community of believers. Yet this concern is phrased in a way that may be called sectarian: emphasizing the hard boundaries between the in-group and out-groups, between believers who stay in and those who leave is a characteristic that divides sects from other groups. This specific exhortation in Hebrews may, for that reason, be seen as sectarian in nature. Even this type of material is found in the Bible.

Questions

1. Is the image of a judging God still to be upheld in the twenty-first century?
2. Can we still use a term like “apostasy”?
3. Hebrews warns the believers not to leave the community of faithful and threatens them with permanent exclusion from their salvation. Does it come as a surprise that a threat like this is found in the Bible?
4. Should the Bible be interpreted literally or are there other ways of reading it?

10. 'Idolatry' in Rabbinic Discussion: To Destroy, to Bury or Something Else? Some Observations on the Subject of 'Idolatry' in Rabbinic Questions & Answers on the Internet (L. Mock)

Summary

Introduction

This article focuses on the concept of idolatry in online discourses of contemporary rabbis belonging to Israel's Religious Zionist movement. What part do these tendencies, literary, rhetoric or theological, play in contemporary texts? Idolatry seems an archaic concept for (some) other religions and possible deviant behaviour from 'insiders'. Considering the modern society and the recent rapid realisation of technological innovations and digital means of communication, one wonders if idolatry is still a relevant theological concept to relate to the religious other? In orthodox Judaism, contemporary texts are shaped by different historical-theological perspectives: the Shoah (retrieving lost traditions as mandatory), modernity and secularism may enforce conservative tendencies. Another important context is the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 – Jews became a majority in a state with citizens of other religions.

Actualities

The concept of idolatry in contemporary discourse seems relevant considering some recent incidents against churches and clergy in Israel. A deeper analysis of these incidents is needed to determine the exact role of religious motives and political-ideological-social aspects. Moreover, in religious media on the internet, a negative attitude can be observed by rabbis on practical issues: for example, on using Christian calendar dating, prohibiting a visit to the Vatican Museum or the Jerusalem Festival of Light where churches and Muslim places are lit up. In fact, these opinions are almost all based on the views of one religious-zionist rabbi, Shlomoh Aviner, but similar statements by other rabbis may be found on orthodox sites as well. That orthodoxy is not always averse to a more lenient perception of the religious other is found in the Talmud bHullin 13b: "Gentiles outside of Land of Israel are not idol worshippers, but they are holding on to a traditional custom of their ancestors...". In the Middle Ages and Modernity period different pragmatic views and theological concepts were developed for a more lenient attitude.

Contemporary Responsa texts

The rabbinic discourse is highly diverse, comprising amongst others codices, commentaries, sermons, novellae on the Talmud and pietistic-ethical literature. A useful source is the genre of responsa: a question that usually arises from real life addressed to a rabbi, which the rabbi is expected to answer. A helpful tool for analysing discourses is the Responsa Project of the Bar-Ilan University (version 26), digitising amongst others responsa of famous rabbis (not complete). A search for the term 'idol worship' in the last five to six centuries yields 1273 texts (the majority seems to be related to authors of the post-Shoah period). One should be cautious – the high frequency does not show the way it is used, whether it is a reference to the tractate on idolatry in Mishnah or Talmud, a side track in a different subject, or a theoretical question. These 1273 texts are too comprehensive for the scope of this article.

Other contemporary media: Internet questions

Kipa.co.il is an important online-portal for Religious-Zionism in Israel with articles on a wide range of topics, from news, romantic relationships, the parent-child relationship, food and culture to strictly religious issues on the 'Ask-the-Rabbi' page, where some twenty-five rabbis can be addressed.

The 103 questions on idolatry are mostly answered by rabbis, some by a peer-group 'Listening Friends' – some questioners appear to be young adults. The length of the responsa varies from a few lines to a sheet of A4. Fourteen of these responsa deal with Christianity, four with Islam/Druze religion, and seventeen with religions of the Far East. In general, the religions of the Far East are seen as most idolatrous, followed by Christianity which, with some nuances, is seen as idolatrous ('some branches' though are not), while Islam is seen as fully monotheistic. Ten questions deal with inner-Jewish issues like superstition, exaggerated veneration of rabbis in some groups, the Shoah and nationalism in relation to idolatry. The majority are of a halachic nature (25) or deal with general halachical concepts (24). Other questions show a strong personal perspective and reflection (9).

Some questions are related to 'traditional' aspects of idolatry (e.g., objects of Buddhism, Christian statues, Islamic symbols). Other questions relate to the here-and-now and show an interesting scope of possible applications of idolatry by some religious Jews in Israel. Central is the question of how to relate to the other-one, and to the other-culture, without compromising one's own religious identity.

Discussion

Questions often refer to situations of being among other religious cultures while being abroad as a tourist or in the State of Israel in relation to minorities – the relation to Islam/Druze religion, Christianity. Some reflect the influence of the Eastern religions, culture and western lifestyles on present day Israeli society and touch on different perspectives on symbols of modern Western culture: jeans, piercings, movies, television, sport, and secular literature. The questions reflect a certain level of doubt, fear, and guilt towards secular symbols of modernity, that are, to a certain degree incorporated into the lifestyle of (many) believers. The answers offer a kind of coping mechanism for the psychological tensions in engaging with these phenomena. The answering rabbi is sometimes more lenient than the religious vision or mindset of the young adult.

Religious-Zionism

The last category of questions deals with the juxtaposition of the believer and adherent of Religious Zionism vis-à-vis other Jewish groups and certain aspects of Religious Zionism (national pride).

A question on nationalism (answered by 'Listening Friends') refers to doubts over whether being proud of being religious and part of the chosen people could possibly be idolatrous, given the importance accorded by Religious Zionism to nationhood. The answer differentiates between pride in someone's own achievements and pride in being chosen by God, which is after all God's choice, and the importance of remembering the destination and task of the chosen people in the world, as well as a call for developing national pride as reaction to the idea of 'being as all the nations'. This last question and answer especially, positions the questioner vis-à-vis with secular Zionism ('being as all the nations'), secular modernity – the non-Jewish world – and ultra-orthodoxy that rejects (religious) Zionism.

Preliminary conclusions

The internet responsa are a valuable addition to the written sources as they present matters from the mundane reality of everyday life, reflecting the easily accessible form of the Internet responsa. The discourse functions as a marker of orthodox religious-zionist Jewish identity of certain groups and presents two perspectives, an internal and external one. The external deals with contemporary western influences, the popularity of religions of the Far East, touristic encounters with the 'religious other' and the 'religious other' in the Israeli context (Christianity, Islam, Druze, Messianic Jews, Bahá'í). The internal deals with delicate religious queries about the Shoah, or how to deal with other (ultra-) orthodox movements and issues of religious Zionism.

These internet responsa texts make virtually no reference to the Bible – even references to earlier rabbinical sources are relatively rare; the discourse seems to have its own characteristic features. Further analysis of both written responsa and internet responsa is required to sharpen our perspective on these texts and in this respect, the observations offered here are no more than preliminary reflections.

Questions

1. Does the concept of idolatry play a role in your own religion?
2. Does idolatry play a role in your own personal religious views?
3. Could idolatry be used in a positive way in a religious discourse?
4. Do you think that Internet is the right medium to discuss these kinds of sensitive religious subjects?
5. Could the concept of idolatry be relevant for secular people too?

11. *Al-walā' w' al-barā'* (Loyalty and Disavowal); Reconstructing a 'Creed' in the Muslim View of 'Otherness' (Y. Ellethy)

Summary

Introduction

The notion of *al-walā' w' al-barā'* is entrenched in some classical and modern Muslim discourses as one of the tenets of creed that ordains a Muslim's view and attitude toward 'disbelievers'. The proponents of a doctrinal position of this notion in Islam utilise a certain reading of scriptural sources maintaining them as explicit and unequivocal enough to justify the coherence of this 'creed'. Nonetheless, a thorough investigation of these scriptural justifications could reconstruct the credibility of this claim. In modern times, the "doctrine" of *al-walā'* and *al-barā'* was, and still is, enthusiastically used among militant groups to justify warfare activities, not only against non-Muslims but also against Muslims who are not in line with their "islam". The question is whether this 'theory' can be established on explicit and unequivocal scriptural grounds and whether it can justify hate speech and practices against the "other". This study is an attempt to find an answer to this question by examining Islamic sources as embodied in the Quran, the Sunnah and some classical and modern exegetic and legal works. It also tackles the issue of apostasy (*ridḍa*) and its possible liaison with disloyalty, which historically marked the question of freedom of religion in Islam, and still inspires contemporary writings and debates on Islamic exclusivism.

Definition

According to classical Arabic lexicons (Ibn Manzour, Ibn Faris), the term *walā'* linguistically denotes proximity (*qurb*, from the stem *w-l-y*, among many other derivations and meanings), whether physically or emotionally, including being content with and following others as if one belongs to them (Q. 5:51; "who among you take them as *awliā'* [allies, friends; pl. of *waliy*] is one of them"), support and help (*nuṣra*), love (*maḥabba/mawadda*) and the derivative *muwālā* (alliance, friendship) which is to be seen as opposite to enmity (*mu'ādā*). Technically *walā'* means support, help, love and showing honour and respect to those in proximity or to likeminded people both inwardly and/or outwardly. In this respect, it concerns God, his messenger and the believers. On the other hand, *barā'* means, in the context of our discussion, abandoning, severance, distancing oneself from, disavowal and denial of something/someone. Technically it denotes getting rid of and disavowal of, distancing and disassociating oneself from, and showing enmity to something/someone. Again, in this respect, it concerns the enemies of God, his messenger and the believers.

Does it belong to 'aqīda (creed/doctrine)?

There is an established opinion among several mainstream Muslim scholars that the issue of *walā'* towards believers and *barā'* towards unbelievers and enemies of Islam belongs to the fundamentals of Islamic creed ('*aqīda*). It is distinguished in the relevant literature as "the doctrine of loyalty and disavowal" ('*aqīdat al-walā' w' al-barā'*). The paradox of this take on the issue as part of '*aqīda* lies in the epistemological and methodological justifications and ethical scope of this doctrine. It is established in the legal Islamic theory of *uṣūl al-fiqh* that its realm of research is strictly related to

'practical rules' (*ahkām 'amaliyya*) and does not include issues of *'aqīda*. However, in this case, the supporters of the *'aqīda* nature of the notion start with practical rules for dealing with certain groups and ideas considered to be anti-Islamic and incorporate them to the tenets of Islamic creed legitimised by scriptural texts. The question is whether this is a traditionally justified practice of the prophetic era and the following generations of righteous predecessors (*salaf*), which these supporters cherish as the pristine and pure source of Islam. Since the establishment of the first Muslim geopolitical entity in 622 C.E. the Medina Charter stated a strong bond of loyalty to the new established 'state' under the leadership of the prophet, including Jewish tribes and anyone else who joined the people of this Charter. This constitutional document refers to Jews and other partners as forming one *umma* with the Muslim believers. The same document stipulated that Muslims have their own religion and Jews have theirs, both parties are committed to defend or contribute to the defence of Medina and should not keep alliance with or help enemies of the people of the document. This meant that 'loyalty' can be a trans-religious bond based on values of social coherence, political consolidation and protection of national integrity beyond (non)denominational affiliations. In today's national-state democratic constitutionalism, where citizenship shapes loyalties and disloyalties, Muslims and non-Muslims stand together in defence of their national integrity regardless of their different religious belongings. It is true that loyalty and disloyalty can entail a core notion in each faith system that distinguishes between belief and unbelief. However, the pluralistic Islamic view draws clear borderlines between *credo* and *tractatio*.

Scriptural justifications contextualized

Examining the scriptural texts (Q. 3:28, 118-119; 4:89, 139, 144; 5:51, 57, 8:72-73; 9:23; 58:22 and 60:1, 4, 8-9) and exegetic traditions shows how the relevant verses relate to situations of antagonism and enmity between believers and disbelievers and making right and wrong alliances in exceptional war and conflict contexts, as some Sunnah narrations on the reasons for revelation report. It is prohibited for Muslims in these cases to disclose their strategic confidential plans and/or seek support from disbelievers at the cost of their belief and co-believers thinking they will be protected. The Quranic narrative on the issue of loyalty and disavowal is thus, almost in all cases, related to situations of interreligious conflicts, competing coalitions and menacing amities with enemies where belongings and loyalties cannot be negotiable. The reasons for revelation clarify how hypocrites or in other cases some Muslims, deliberately or unintentionally, put the security of their state and the integrity of their faith at risk. This includes choosing the side of enemies, showing them amity and support and disclosing strategic secrets for the sake of protection, honour or power. The Quranic discourse stresses the obligations a) not to jeopardize public interests in times of wars and conflicts, b) not to take enemies as allies at the cost of religious and political loyalties, c) to stand firm in faith issues, d) to avoid hypocritical attitudes, and e) to be loyal to one's religious category (Islam) which demands a Muslim deal kindly and justly with every 'other' beyond these exceptional cases. In this perspective, independently of faith affiliations, loyalties can converge for a 'common good', but disloyalties cannot be tolerated in cases of 'common risk'.

Ridda (apostasy) as disloyalty

The jurisprudential evidences for apostasy in Islamic theology, unlike that of loyalty and disavowal, are extracted from the Sunnah and its narrated reports; the hadiths. The Quran affirms freedom of belief in more than two hundred verses. Several modern scholars have reconstructed the juristic reasoning on apostasy and have posed serious questions, partly on the authenticity and authority of the hadiths

and partly on the *ratio legis* behind the punishment against it. Through the latter, they reflect on whether apostasy involves mere renunciation of religious belief, or has further implications for the Muslim community and state. In fact, the liaison between apostasy and disloyalty lies in the fact that *ridda*, in a premodern context, included disengagement from the community, change of allegiance and therefore enmity with the former socio-political context. It is the case, though, that the number of scholars who support the death punishment for every unrepentant apostate remains influential. The burden lies on the official fiqh and collective fatwa-councils to establish a politically binding theological substantiation of these controversial issues, especially when existing modern and classical authoritative reasoning forms a solid ground to build on.

Questions

1. How are *walā'* and *barā'* defined in the Muslim tradition and how do these notions relate to the Muslim view of the 'other'?
2. To what extent does loyalty and disloyalty in Islamic tradition justify exclusivist attitudes?
3. Which aspects of this view of the 'other' are comparable to Christian exclusivism?
4. How is this view to be reconstructed in light of Quran and Hadith hermeneutics?
5. What is the link between the loyalty-disloyalty theory and apostasy?
6. How can the contextualisation of the interpretation of *walā'* and *barā'* as suggested in this article be of help for those who are (considered as) apostates?

12. Apostasy in Islam: An Overview of Sources and Positions (R. H. Quadir)

Summary

Introduction

Apostasy in Islam is a sensitive and topical subject. In certain Muslim majority countries, apostasy is a punishable offence, including by the death penalty, even though some of these countries have embraced the Universal Declaration of Human rights, which guarantees freedom of religion. Apostasy in Islam or *al-riddah* (or *al-irtidād*) is defined as voluntarily renouncing Islam. A person who renounces Islam is called *murtadd*. There is no distinction in Islam between leaving, that is, apostasy, and conversion from Islam to another religion. Thus, whether a Muslim converts to Christianity, Judaism, or becomes an atheist, this all boils down to apostasy, and such a person is considered an apostate (*murtadd*). Nevertheless, in some cases, apostasy is more sensitive than in others. For example, in countries inhabited by both large numbers of Christians and Muslims or Muslim countries with Christian minorities, the situation is extremely precarious when it comes to apostasy in Islam.

Legal Punishment for Apostasy in Islam

The overwhelming majority of both classical and modern scholars view apostasy as impermissible and consider it mandatory to put an unrepentant apostate to death. Whereas Muslim scholars differ about repentance, it appears that a majority find that the apostate should be given the opportunity to repent.

Although in the Qur'ān apostasy is viewed as a heinous sin, it does not mention any earthly punishment for it. Rather, it is up to God to judge the apostate in the Hereafter.

Although the Qur'ān appears to be quite clear on apostasy, namely, there is no penalty in this world, the *Sunna* is unequivocal about it. The *Sunna*, which is the collected teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, is known through the *aḥādīth*, that is, the reports of the Prophet deemed authentic. The *Sunna* encompasses his sayings, actions, and tacit approval.

The overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars rely on the verbal *ḥadīth* "whoever changes his religion, kill him" (narrated among others by al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīth* no. 3017 and 6922) with the corollary that the apostate should be executed. This *ḥadīth* is considered authentic by the vast majority of Muslim scholars.

Another *ḥadīth* on which the proponents for capital punishment for apostasy in Islam rely and which is also deemed to be authentic by most Muslim scholars is the following:

The blood of a Muslim, who confesses that there is no God but Allah and that I am His Apostle, cannot be shed except in three cases: In Qīṣāṣ [retaliation] for murder, a married person who commits adultery and the one who reverts from Islam [apostates] and leaves the [Muslim] community. (Narrated among others by al-Bukhārī, *ḥadīth* no. 6878)

A Special Case: Female Apostates

The overwhelming majority of classical and modern Muslim scholars do not distinguish between a male and a female apostate; both deserve capital punishment. Among these Muslim scholars are the founders of the current Sunni schools of law, Imam Mālik (d. 795), Imam al-Shāfi'i (d. 820), and Imam ibn ḥanbal (d. 855). However, the founder of the Ḥanafī school of law, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa differentiates between male and female apostates. Although he too holds that a male apostate is to be executed, he argues that a female apostate should be imprisoned and invited back to Islam but never be killed. He argues that a female apostate is not active in combat or capable of warfare.

It seems that the Ḥanafī school of law views apostasy as a political crime. Females, older men, and hermaphrodites are, in their views, incapable of fighting and combating. Therefore, they form no danger to the community, even if they are apostates.

Apostasy as a Political Crime

Also, contemporary scholars who support capital punishment for apostasy conceive the apostate as someone who is disloyal to the Muslim community and forms an imminent threat to this community. The apostate is also viewed as someone who causes disintegration of the Muslim society, which cannot be accepted. In short, apostasy is viewed as a political crime.

Muslim scholars who object against the death penalty for apostasy

Even though the majority of both classical and modern Muslim scholars favour the death penalty for apostasy, some Muslim scholars are against it. The classical scholars Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī (d. 713) and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 778) believe that the apostate should always be allowed to repent but never be executed.

Modern Muslim scholars who object to capital punishment for apostasy put several arguments forward. First, there are more than two hundred verses in the Qur'ān that emphasise freedom of choice, as the modern Muslim scholar Taha Jabir Alalwani (d. 2016) points out.

The second argument against capital punishment for apostasy is the earlier mentioned ḥadīth "whoever changes his religion, kill him". This ḥadīth is a so-called solitary or aḥad narration that became prominent after the early period of Islam and was not known during the time of the Prophet. During the early days of Islam, it was a solitary ḥadīth and incompletely transmitted as well. Also, the chain of narrators (isnād) of this ḥadīth contains 'Ikrimah (d. 723), who was the slave of Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687). From this stage, this *ḥadīth* got wide circulation. Some Muslims scholars consider 'Ikrimah as reliable, whereas others do not. Thus, the opponents of the death penalty for apostasy consider this ḥadīth weak, and therefore this narration in their opinion cannot be used as evidence that apostasy merits capital punishment.

The third argument against apostasy that Muslim scholars put forward is that the Prophet never killed anyone for apostasy. Several narrations support this claim. The fourth and final argument against capital punishment is the assumption that apostasy goes hand in hand with hostility or taking up arms against the Muslim community. However, the argument that apostasy is tantamount to high treason, rebellion, or waging war against the Muslim community is in my opinion not valid today because an apostate can merely change their personal beliefs while still accepting the social order of the Muslim society in which they live. Furthermore, killing an apostate for simply the possibility of

taking up arms or demonstrating hostility towards the Muslim community is treating this possibility as an actual fact. In Islamic jurisprudence, there has to be definitive proof for capital punishment as a divinely prescribed punishment; a mere possibility is not a sufficient cause for such a severe punishment.

Questions

1. Can apostasy in Islam today still be considered a political crime?
2. Should apostasy be considered a private matter?
3. Should a distinction be made between a female and male apostate?
4. Freedom of religion in general: what should be done when freedom of religion (which is a human right) collides with other human rights?
5. Is the issue of apostasy unique in Islam, or does this also apply to other religions?

13. Exclusionary Texts in 'A Common Word' (G. Speelman)

Summary

Introduction

In Muslim-Christian encounter, exclusionary texts both from the Qur'an and the Bible play a role. Often, Christian authors have tried to give their interpretation to Qur'anic texts about religious others. Also, Christian authors try to understand biblical texts about people who do not follow Christ.

The same is true for Muslim authors. How do they interpret their own Scripture, especially the Qur'an, and how do they interpret Christian scriptural texts about religious others, that might be read as exclusionary texts?

A Common Word

In October 2007, an open letter entitled '*A Common Word Between Us and You*' was sent by 138 Muslim scholars to 27 Christian Church leaders. The sending of this letter was part of a carefully planned media-event. The letter was published on the internet (www.acommonword.com), as were the subsequent reactions by church leaders and others.

The appeal to Christians to enter into dialogue with Muslims in *A Common Word* is supported by a theological argumentation that uses texts from the Qur'an, Hadith and Bible. The authors of *A Common Word* stress the common ground between Biblical and Qur'anic texts. They claim, using as their starting point Jesus's double commandment (love of God and of the neighbour) as their frame, that the core message of the Qur'an and Hadith is not essentially different from the Christian core message. They hope to set up conversations and forms of cooperation between Muslims and Christians worldwide on the basis of the structural similarities between their sacred Scriptures.

Exclusionary texts are common, both in the Bible and in the Qur'an. In both Scriptures, there are many texts distinguishing good people from evil people, and groups of faithful believers from groups of unbelievers. The former are walking with God, whereas the latter are excluded from the community of the faithful. In this sense, many sacred texts offer the opportunity to exclude contemporaries or fellow citizens from the in-group. The presence of such texts is not surprising. It is the use of each text, their interpretation in the present context that is of importance.

How do the writers of *A Common Word* deal with such exclusionary texts? In order to answer this question, I will look in more detail at one verse quotes from the Qur'an, and then at the way the authors interpret three texts from the Gospels.

The interpretation of Sura 3:64

Building on this assumption of common ground, it is argued on the basis of the Qur'an, that people of the Scripture should come to a common word. This is supported by the quotation of sura 3: 64:

Say: O People of the Scripture! Come to a common word between us and you: that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside God. And if they turn away, then say: Bear witness that we are they who have surrendered (unto Him). (Āl 'Imran 3:64)

This is potentially an exclusionary text, and has often been so explained in the Islamic tradition. According to many Muslim exegetes, the admonition to come to a 'common word' assumes that the Jewish and Christian contemporaries of Muhammad did, in fact, ascribe a partner to God (the Christians) or that they took others for lords besides God (the Christians and the Jews). So, the turning away of Muhammad's conversation partners in sura 3:64 apparently is the expected outcome of the conversation. The 'we' in the clause 'We are they who have surrendered' consists, according to the traditional exegesis of this passage, of the group of Muhammad's followers: they are the true worshippers who have surrendered (aslama) to God and are therefore 'muslims' (*muslim* is the participial derived from the infinitive of the verb *aslama*, to surrender). The writers of *A Common Word*, however, give a slightly different interpretation to this potentially exclusionary text. They connect the clause '*that we shall worship none but God, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him*' to total devotion to the one and only God, a devotion they also see in Christians.

For the second injunction, '*that none of us shall take others for lords beside God*', the writers of *A Common Word* follow the exegesis of the classical scholar Al-Tabari, who says that this part of the text should be read as an injunction 'that none of us should obey in disobedience to what God has commanded, nor glorify them by prostrating to them in the same way as they prostrate to God'. The writers of *A Common Word* see this as an appeal for believers to follow the dictates of their own conscience instead of submitting to coercion from religious authority. Jews, Christians and Muslims, they write, 'should be free to each follow what God commands them, and not have "to prostrate before kings and the like".' Political pressure to accommodate the majority belief in a society is out of the question, because that would mean a submission before 'kings and the like', instead of an assent out of free will to serve God and God alone. To reinforce the implication that this part of 3:64 is dealing with freedom of conscience, the writers of *A Common Word* make a connection with a Qur'anic quotation from sura 2:256: 'There is no compulsion in religion.' And this quotation is in turn linked by them to the second biblical commandment 'love your neighbour as yourself'. The implicit reasoning that underlies this arrangement of texts is that *justice* and *love of the neighbour* are closely connected, and that freedom of religion is an important component of justice. The beginning of the verse '*Come to a common word between us and you*' can be interpreted, as indeed Tabari does, as meaning to 'come to a *just* (ādil) word between us and you', making the verse into a call by God to cooperate for the sake of justice. Thus, a traditionally more common exclusionary interpretation of sura 3:64 is transformed into a plea for freedom of religion.

The interpretation of Mark 9:40, Matthew 12:30 and Luke 11:23

The authors of *A Common Word* also pay attention to possibly exclusionary texts from the New Testament. They quote from three passages from the Gospels and discuss these texts (ACW, p. 15).

Is Christianity necessarily against Muslims? In the Gospel Jesus Christ says:
He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters abroad.
(Matthew 12:30)
For he who is not against us is on our side. (Mark 9:40)
... for he who is not against us is on our side. (Luke 9:50).

Here the writers of *A Common Word* put in juxtaposition one possibly exclusionary text (Matthew 12:30) and two possibly inclusionary texts (Mark 9: 40 and Luke 9: 50). How to combine the messages of these texts? Are the Gospels in contradiction with each other? In traditional polemics between Muslims and Christians, Muslims accuse Christians of falsification of their scriptures (tahrif). Internal contradictions between Gospel texts is an argument that plays a major role in these polemics. The

authors of *A Common Word* do not refer to this background in their analysis. Rather, they assume that there must be an underlying reason for the apparent contradiction, and try to clarify it.

In order to do so, they make use of the Christian commentator Theophylact of Ohrid (1055–1107). This commentary is very popular in Eastern Orthodox churches. Theophylact reasons that there is no contradiction between the three gospel texts. They only address different contexts: ‘The first statement (in the actual Greek text of the New Testament) refers to demons, whereas the second and third statements refer to people who recognised Jesus, but were not Christians.’ (ACW, p15)

The argument of Theophylact goes as follows. In Matthew 12, Jesus is in discussion with the Pharisees who accuse Jesus of using the power of Satan to drive out demons. The answer of Jesus is referring to the demons themselves (they are not for Jesus, therefore against him) as well as to the Pharisees (they are the ones who scatter abroad, and who sin against the Holy Spirit by assigning Jesus to the realm of Satan). The text excludes not only demons and Satan, but also those who emphatically deny the divine power of Jesus. In Mark and Luke on the other hand, Jesus is in conversation with his disciples who are troubled because another person has driven out demons in the name of Jesus, but refuses to join their company. In these texts, there is an inclusion of outsiders, but under certain conditions. Those outsiders are speaking in the name of Jesus, that means that they do not deny His divine powers but align themselves with them, without becoming fully-fledged members of his movement. The authors of *A Common Word* are connecting these benevolent outsiders with Muslims. Like the healers in Mark and Luke, Muslims to some extent acknowledge the divine powers of Jesus without becoming part of the Christian community. In this way, an inclusionary text from the Gospels is interpreted as potentially also including Muslims. They write:

Muslims recognize Jesus Christ as the Messiah, not in the same way Christians do (but Christians themselves anyway have never all agreed with each other on Jesus Christ’s nature), but in the following way: ‘... the Messiah Jesus son of Mary is a Messenger of God and His Word which he cast unto Mary and a Spirit from Him....’ (Al-Nisa’, 4:171). We therefore invite Christians to consider Muslims not against and thus with them, in accordance with Jesus Christ’s words here. (ACW, p. 15)

The writers of *A Common Word* here open up the inclusion of Muslims in the group of people who are ‘not against and thus with’ Christians, at the same time affirming the enduring differences between Muslims and Christians when it comes to the nature of Christ. A remarkable feature of this passage is that so far, both the terms ‘Muslims’ and ‘Christians’ seem to refer throughout the document to stable and unified entities. Nowhere are there signs of a recognition of the diversity and lack of consensus on some issues within both communities. But in this passage, there is a reference to Christian internal diversity. This diversity may create a space for Muslims – who generally do not acknowledge the divine nature of Christ – to include unspecified groups within the Christian communities within their religious in-group. It also opens up the possibility that among Christians there may be a movement of convergence with the Muslim viewpoint on the Divine nature of Christ. The religious other is seen as someone who resembles ‘us’.

Questions

1. How do you interpret exclusionary texts in the Gospels? Would they hinder you from opening up to your neighbour who has a different religion or life stance?
2. How would you explain the differences between Matthew, Mark and Luke in the passages above?

3. What we see in *A Common Word* is a group of Muslim scholars interpreting three Gospel texts. In the movement of Scriptural Reasoning, where Jews, Christians and Muslims read together out of each other's Scriptures, one of the basic rules is: *Feel invited to explore others' texts. And also invite others to explore your texts.* (See: <http://www.scripturalreasoning.org/guidelines-for-scriptural-reasoning.html>) Would you agree with this rule, or would you argue that the Christian community is the 'owner' of the interpretation of the Gospel text, just as much as the Muslim community is the 'owner' of the Qur'anic text?
4. Would you agree with the writers of *A Common Word* that stressing commonalities is a good starting point for Muslim-Christian encounter, or would it be more helpful to start acknowledging and exploring our undeniable differences in tradition?
5. How could a group of Christians and Muslims begin to understand each other's religious texts? What is needed for that understanding?

14. Canaan and the New World: Native Americans Engage the Legacy of Exclusionary Readings (E. D. Hof)

Summary

Introduction

This article argues that we have much to learn from Native American theologians when finding constructive ways to deal with the topic of exclusion in our faith practices. Native American theologians read the Biblical texts about the conquest of Israel from an existential perspective, since they are all too intimately aware of the disastrous result of the conquest of the Americas. The conquest, settlement and drive towards extinction of Indigenous Peoples was partly fuelled by theological arguments, derived from the conquest by Israel of Canaan. In order to understand the current Biblical interpretations of Native Americans, we need therefore to first take into account the hermeneutical foundation on which the conquest was based.

Canaan and the New World

After the “discovery” of the Americas, Europeans had to grapple with the meaning of the encounter with people who differed in so many ways from what they had previously experienced. The conquest of the Americas was also a theological and hermeneutical endeavour of meaning-making. Through deliberate theologizing, First Nation people became othered as “heathen”. (*Within the article I discuss various strategies that aided this identification as “heathen.”*) The idea of God’s providence was fundamental in crafting the legitimization for conquest. It was seen as God’s providence, for example, that the English, who lived in cramped cities, had suddenly the possibility to expand to the enormous, vacant land of North America. Obviously, the land was not vacant, but rather densely populated, but the wilderness myth nevertheless became a foundational myth. The religious practices of the indigenous peoples were seen as irredeemably pagan, and they came to be identified with the inhabitants of Canaan, while the settlers identified themselves with the new Israel.

Indigenous Theological Contributions

Indigenous thinkers today still wrestle with the legacy of Biblical interpretation by the colonial settlers. They utilize various strategies to reinterpret the Biblical texts.

- Some thinkers discredit the biblical texts altogether. For them, the damage that has been done is too severe to be able to be repaired. Whether or not the conquests described in the book of Joshua really took place or not, the fact of the matter remains that the ideology of the Bible writers actively condoned and espoused an ideology of conquest. For victims and survivors of genocide, this makes the Bible damaged beyond repair. I suggest that we should take this approach seriously, and not discredit it too easily, because we should give proper attention to the pain that lies behind it. If we can take the losses seriously and not gloss over them too quickly, we can incorporate the practice of lament. Lament grieves for the wrongdoings and confesses the sins of a hegemonic biblical interpretation. We grieve because we have lost brothers and sisters to a hermeneutic of exclusion.

- The second reading approach interprets the Bible in a way that is both Christological and true to indigenous concerns. Many evangelical readings fall in this category, since they stress the primacy of Christ for reading the Bible.
- The third reading approach reinterprets specific biblical passages, while abandoning other passages. The Bible is read with indigenous frameworks in mind. Feminist indigenous readings of the Bible belong in this category.

Where do we go from here?

When reading exclusionary texts like Deuteronomy 17 with indigenous concerns in mind, they acquire a new urgency. I argue that people who read the Bible through the eyes of faith should be serious about reflecting on our hermeneutic. All hermeneutics that aid oppression need to be denounced and are consequently false, since they are not true to the life-affirming message of the gospel. Not all ruptures might be mended, not all wounds can be healed, at least not in the present age. We need to be mindful of the true costs of exclusionary readings of the Bible, since reading the Bible is not just an intellectual pursuit, but has real world consequences. Although the Netherlands and Belgium do not have an indigenous population in the same way as, for example, the United States, Canada, New Zealand or Australia do, we still have to confront our legacy of colonialism. We still have to reckon in our society with racism and exclusion on the basis of heritage. The voices of Native American theologians are therefore indispensable to enter into a specific hermeneutical dialogue with Dutch Christians from formerly colonized nations to hear about the way they have experienced exclusion and/or inclusion.

Questions

1. Do you recognize that you often chose the perspective of Israel and not the perspective of the conquered peoples when reading the Bible? How would it influence the way you read the Bible if you changed your perspective?
2. One of the authors discussed in the article claims that the texts of conquest in the Bible are not a “bug” but a “feature.” In other words: they are not a lamentable mistake, but are integral to the biblical message. How do you evaluate this statement?
3. How would your Bible reading change if you were to read the Bible “together with all the saints,” including the believers who have great difficulty with certain passages since they have been used to legitimize violence?
4. How would our mission practices change if we radically adopted the perspective of indigenous peoples?
5. Do you think there is a way that we could incorporate lament in our church practices? How?

15. The Pela as Model for Inclusive Peacebuilding (S. Ririhena)

Summary

Introduction

In his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel P. Huntington posited the thesis that cultural and religious identity (Christian West and Islam) are the sources of conflicts. Conflicts which, according to him, are irreconcilable. In the Moluccas, the *Pela*, an alliance between Christian and Muslim villages, among others, shows the opposite.

The Pela

The strength of the *Pela* lies in their pre-monotheistic Nunusaku or Ambon religion. Both groups (Muslims and Christians) are aware of their common origin on the invisible mountain Nunusaku. The first Moluccans, their ancestors, lived there. The story goes as follows: when a girl was murdered one day, the gods sent the people away in two groups. Moluccans call this banishment *Heka* Nunusaku (*Heka*: to separate). One group was a union of nine (*Uli Siwa*) and the other a union of five (*Uli Lima*). From the beginning, there was animosity between the two groups, which often degenerated into bloody fights over scarce goods such as rich fishing waters and fertile land between two villages. After the fighting stopped, the two villages met to make peace and hold a *Pela* ceremony. In the ceremony, both *Rajahs*, village chiefs, made a cut in the palm of their hand and let a few drops of blood flow into a bowl of strong drink (sageru = rice wine). After the two *Rajahs* drank from the bowl, everyone present took a sip from the bowl, and from then on they were brothers and sisters, *Pela*. At the ceremony, the ancestors were invited to witness the covenant and ensure that the rules and the promises, which had been sworn to, were observed. Violations would be punished. With the conclusion of the *Pela*, the war was over. The word *Pela* literally means to stop immediately and later it acquired the meaning of covenant. The *Pela* is also called Leka Nunusaku (Leka: to bring together, to unite), a vehicle to repair what had gone wrong on the invisible mountain Nunusaku on the island of Ceram.

The *Pela* rules must be strictly adhered to. The rules are as follows: 1) *Pelas* help each other for better or for worse. For instance, when building a big project like a church or a mosque, but also when there are natural disasters. 2) Always keep promises. 3) If a *Pela* asks for something, for example food or a place to sleep, don't refuse. 4) In the hard *Pela*, members are not allowed to marry each other (exogamous), because they have "the same blood" in their veins. It is considered incest.

Moluccan Adat and Christian-Muslim Relations

For centuries, Muslim and Christian *Pelas* have lived peacefully alongside and with each other. The basis for their common world and human view was anchored in their Nunusaku or Ambon religion. After the advent of monotheistic religions, one *Pela* village chose Islam and the other chose Christianity. They saw these as just two variables of Nunusaku religion. What prevailed over religious differences was their common origin and interpersonal relationships. The emphasis on the common resulted in a loose form of horizontal syncretism between Christians and Muslims. What role and significance *Pela* played in the *kerusuhan*, in the civil war, is illustrated by the case of two nearby *Pela* villages: the Christian village Buano Utara and the Muslim village Buano Selatan. The former is the

larger of the two. In the 1999–2002 fratricidal war, sparked in part by the Central Indonesian Government and the Indonesian military, the old Adat institutions (traditional law) proved unable to withstand regional, national and international influences. After Buano Utara attacked its *Pela* village, an epidemic later broke out in Buano Utara. Many members of both villages saw in it an intervention of the ancestors. The young people have a different explanation. The epidemic must be set against the worldwide developments in the field of diseases. In so doing, they push aside their ethnic identity and their loyalty to the Adat institutions. The Buano elders believe that the core of the problem is the fact that young people study outside the region. When they return, they find that the traditional institutions are no longer appropriate to the modern age. Despite the different views, the vast majority of Buano and the other *Pela* villages in the Moluccas believe that the revaluation and strengthening of the Adat institutions, such as the *Pela*, can promote cooperation between communities and between different faith groups and reduce tensions and conflicts.

Questions

1. What do you see as the strength and weakness of the *Pela*?
2. Can the *Pela* serve as a model for inclusive peacebuilding in conflict areas elsewhere in the world (apart from the Moluccans)? In what way?
3. Do you think the *Pela* model works effectively in conflicts between Abrahamite faiths? How?
4. Might awareness of a common origin of human beings play an important role in conflict resolution? Why / why not, and how?
5. Imagine a specific element of your own worldview / theology that can play a significant role in potentially preventing conflict.
6. How might the biblical-theological concept of covenant (*berith / diatheke*) broaden and deepen *Pela* and vice versa? Do you see any relevance of this concept for situations nowadays?

16. Gender Related Inclusionary and Exclusionary Practices within Evangelical Churches in the Netherlands (L. Dijkhuizen and J. Barentsen)

Summary

Introduction

Inclusive and exclusive practices are part of innovation and changes in religious organisations like churches. This research offers unique insights into these processes. Two cases of change in leadership roles related to gender balance have been analysed and discussed. The empirical research was conducted in large evangelical churches in the Netherlands which have recently opened all church offices for female participation. By conducting interviews, individually as well as in focus groups, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are explored. These dynamics are interpreted through the lens of a social identity approach and related to the change in authority. Data shows that the shift in Bible interpretation on female leadership as well as the practice of including women in a previously male domain affected the perception of the church's social and religious identity. This resulted in some leaders leaving the church due to the authority shift, which can be perceived as a form of apostasy, although this appears to be a complex and fluid concept.

The case study

The research was conducted in two selected churches, which are well-known in the Netherlands and can be seen as representative of the evangelical movement. The results of the empirical research show that to create a change in leadership a safe space is essential in which the current and the desirable situation in the church, as well as the authority of the Bible, can be discussed. The notions 'biblical' and 'unbiblical' proved to be sensitive in both settings. The churches experimented with the labels of the discussion, essential or non-essential, identity or creed, and with different hermeneutical approaches in interpreting the bible on the topic of female leadership.

Inclusion and exclusion

Feelings of inclusion and exclusion were experienced in a complicated way. Before the transition towards inclusive leadership, women were not only excluded from leadership positions but also from spiritual or sacramental acts. However, not all women felt excluded; according to the interviewees, some felt satisfied in supporting their husbands in their leadership roles. Conversely, after the transition, some elders felt excluded because of their experience of 'not being heard' during the process. A minor group left the church because of the change of view on female leadership. They referred to the so-called 'slippery slope', describing cultural compromises which lure the church away from biblical truths. However, whether people feel included or excluded is not an objective given but a personal and social evaluation relative to one's degree of identification with the group and its many practices and activities.

Authority

This process is closely related to how people perceived the authority of the Bible and various identity figures. It is likely that those who did not feel heard and left, did not do so simply because of a difference of opinion, even if some people signalled that their conviction had such value to them that a policy change would result in their leaving. Rather, this change of policy represented to them a crossing of identity boundaries, with an illegitimate interpretation of the Bible and hence a violation of the authority of the Bible. Even the authority of an identity figure was not enough to persuade these people to join the rest across this boundary. Although no one used the term “apostasy” to describe or defend their leaving, implicitly their sense of what counted as apostasy prevented them from crossing this boundary.

Transition in leadership

These social identity processes can be interpreted as long-term leadership processes to create safe spaces that would enable the community to experiment with new insights and emotional attachments while maintaining the value of belonging to the community. These insights are generated by including narratives of personal experiences with female leadership and (new) emotions attached to it in the overall process of deliberation. New insights are also generated in attempts to renew one's reading and understanding of Scripture by reinterpreting key texts, or by assigning different priorities to various texts on both sides of the debate.

Conclusion

The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion before, during, and after a process of change affect the perception of the church's socio-religious identity within the leadership, and a (often implicit) sense of apostasy influences feelings and behaviours on both sides of the issue. We may conclude that these dynamics form a complex combination of personal, institutional, and convictional factors. Within this research, leaders and other identification figures play an important role in inclusion and exclusion processes at the institutional level. At the convictional level, leaders attempted to create safe spaces to allow individuals to experiment with new Bible reading strategies and new convictions. In some cases, they were able to use their granted authority to enable people to adapt or change their personal convictions. Positively, these identity figures were able to manoeuvre the group away from turning the debate away from the notion of apostasy. Negatively, a strong identification figure could also be experienced as so dominant that people opted for (self) exclusion. In the cases investigated, this was an exception and not the general response. Although all interviewees insisted on the importance of the Bible as the authority, we can conclude that a more narrative hermeneutical approach changed the way the Bible was experienced as authoritative. This does not mean that convictions changed automatically, but it was a way to move from a propositional approach, in which a bivalent true/false paradigm shaped the discussions and led to polarization, to a more narrative approach where differences could be explored, negotiated, and tolerated.

We discovered that the concept of apostasy in this process of transition is present but complex. It is fluid and can be applied to more than one group. The term ‘unbiblical’ is used by people who left the church, but also in the focus groups with the current leaders to describe the traditional view on female leadership.

Questions:

1. Transformation processes are challenging for many people. Think about a recent process of transformation either small or big, in your personal, work or church context. Did you feel included in the process? And what was the impact on the group identity? Please share your findings.
2. Did you notice certain identification figures or markers (like a policy document or a holy book) in the transformation process you described? What was their role, and was this role intentionally used in the transformation process?
3. In the discussion on female leadership the authority of the Holy Scriptures was an important factor. However, the way that authority was understood changed during the discussion process depending on the interpretive principles used (for example, seeing the Bible as normative or as narrative). How do you see how these two perspectives might affect what you think of as the authority of the Bible?
4. When group identity changed and boundaries shifted, some people felt excluded and left the church; these people did not see female leadership as the biblical way forward. However, there is no information on how many people did leave (or not even attend) the church in the years before this transition because of the fact that women were not allowed to serve in leadership positions. Discuss a matter in your own faith community which might prevent people from joining or cause people to leave if it was on the agenda for discussion. How is your faith community managing this matter? Think of a fruitful way forward in discussing or implementing this delicate topic.
5. We framed leaving the faith community as a form of reversed apostasy (the remaining community is seen as 'apostate' by the ones who leave). How would you describe apostasy? Do people leave your community for reasons that would fit your description of apostasy? What is or could be a response to these people and to the remaining faith community?

17. Religious Exclusivism, Social Inclusion: Missiological Reflections (D. Nagy)

Summary

The identity questions

Initiating conversations about religious exclusivism and social inclusion at the level of faith-communities implies conversations about belonging. Conversations on belonging in their turn necessarily ask the “Who are we? Who am I?” and “How am I/we?” questions. In the case of faith-communities, these identity questions can only be answered in a relational way; the unavoidable relationality is the relationality with God. So, questions about God’s identity enter into conversation: “Who is God?” and “How is God?”

The language through which faith communities and their theologians describe, explain, and formulate their beliefs in God’s relationality with the world at large (inhabited planet, universe, cosmos, creation) in, for example, doctrines, symbols, confessions, texts, and narratives has immediate consequences for the practices of a particular faith-community and its members in the lived life (both within and beyond liturgical settings). Within a faith community the question of belonging then translates into further questions such as, “Based on our faith who does and who does not belong and why?” Thus, the question about the other enters the stage: “Who and how is the other?”

The dynamics of relationality

Whether and, if yes, to what extent can a faith community be theologically exclusive yet socially inclusive depends on the answers to the three-fold identity questions introduced above: what faith-communities and individual believers think, believe, and confess about God and how that confession and belief translate into practices of relationality with the whole creation are interrelated matters. In the limited framework of these reflections, the focus lays on relationality with and among God-I/we-fellow human beings/communities and their social organisations (churches, faith communities, other sorts of groupings). Matters of exclusion and inclusion, belonging or not belonging become meaningful and existential when one looks at them within the dynamics of triangulations of these basic categories of agency.

Identity and belonging require an elaborate set of terms based on which particular relationality is settled. One of the central notions through which exclusion and inclusion is being negotiated within and by various Christian communities is the notion of sin. A notion which needs explanation and becomes meaningless in abstraction. Sin when associated with false belief (doctrines) and/or wrong action (ethics) affects relationships. The meaning and implication of sin for practices of exclusion and inclusion needs further attention.

The terms exclusion and inclusion suggest a clear position of power on the part of those who are able to exclude or include. There too, sin, needs to be addressed. This terminology also suggests that there are people and communities who are objects of exclusion and inclusion. Such power-relations unavoidably evoke the notions of violence and aggression. Terminology is never innocent. Language and speech, sooner or later, for better or worse, becomes embodied in actions, lives, and relationality.

Exclusion and inclusion in which context?

The somehow abstract model of triangulation of the basic agencies (God, I/we and fellow human beings and their social organisations) needs further articulation in relation to the contexts (socio-political, religious, cultural, geographic) in which they need to be considered. One of the most explicit contexts in which triangulations result in practices of exclusion and inclusion is the dynamic and fast-changing multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural context of Europe. Within this context I propose two main venues for further exploration. The first one is the venue of theology and people of other faiths/ideologies. The second venue I propose is a theological engagement with social exclusion especially through the phenomenon of loneliness.

1. The question of the religious other has been one of the major definers of identity for and among people in Europe and beyond. There is a complex history of how religious identities shaped relationship with the rest of the world and how encounters with the religious other led to peace or war and to complicity in exclusion throughout history. Therefore, there is a need to revisit histories of identity formation in relation to the religious other and it is important to do so from and within the realities of the histories and dynamics of migration and religious identities. European societies, and faith communities struggling with identity questions, need a new language which comes forth from the encounters with the religious other living next door, the religious other as fellow citizen. Without the experiences of such encounters, questions about religious exclusion and social inclusion cannot be answered and the identity questions remain channeled through essentialisation. “Islam/Christianity/Judaism/ Buddhism/and fill it in/ is such and so”, “Muslims/Christians/fill it in/ are such and so.”
2. The second avenue proposed for further explorations is an approach to exclusion and inclusion through a societal problem: the phenomenon of loneliness. For a long time, social inclusion has been dealt with within societies from the perspective of poverty and deviance. Recent research, however, discloses that numerous societies in Europe struggle with the issue of loneliness. Loneliness thus becomes a major factor in addressing the issue of social inclusion. Loneliness, when perceived as a form of exclusion, invites and urges faith communities to examine the question to what extent is there a link between their theology (beliefs and practice) and the phenomenon of loneliness (exclusion, abandonment, individualism) within a society? To what extent are faith communities complicit in causing loneliness as a societal phenomenon? Three further societal issues may help in exploring practices of exclusion and inclusion related to loneliness: (im)migration, internetisation, and intergenerationally. These three sociological triggers of isolation/exclusion within societies invite faith communities to revisit their theologies of relationality; for example, instead of scapegoating secularisation (personified!) faith communities may ask questions about their own practices of abandonment: whom they abandon and why?

Explorations of practices of exclusion and/or inclusion through the two directions proposed above serve to dismiss any dichotomy between mission and social action, and seek to demonstrate that theology encompasses the whole life, mind, and heart of a community and a believer. It is impossible to love God and hate the fellow human being. It is impossible to turn to God yet turn away from the fellow human being. The question where is your brother/sister/fellow human being remains an identity question; a question of who is missing, who is not there, and why?

Questions

1. To what extent and how has our own faith community been involved in practices of religious exclusivism and social inclusion throughout its history till the present?
2. What does our community say/teach/share/confess about God and how does this speaking about God (theology) relate to how our community practises exclusion or inclusion in relation to individual persons and other communities? (Create mind maps.)
3. What are the conditions through which belonging to our faith community is being acknowledged or denied (e.g., who or what is the authority, what power-relations do we see)?
4. Who are the religious others in the vicinity (village, town, city) of our faith-community and how do we relate to them?
5. Who are the lonely ones in our community and in the socio-political, religious and cultural context our community is part of?

18. Religious Exclusivism, Social Inclusion: Theological Reflections (B. J. G. Reitsma and H. van Nes)

Summary

Introduction

The main question in the enquiry presented in the volume *Religious Exclusivism and Social Inclusion: A Religious Approach* is how religious exclusivism relates to social inclusion. In the final chapter we highlight some of the theological challenges that arise from this research.

1. What about inclusion?

In the discussion within society today, inclusion seems to be the norm. People are suspicious of exclusivism; but is that justified? Is it possible for inclusion to exist without some kind of exclusion at all? We can see this tension between exclusion and inclusion in the area of sociology (*Is it possible for groups to exist without some kind of exclusion of others outside the group?*), in the area of beliefs (*When something is believed to be true, does it necessarily exclude the opposite view?*), and in the social realm (*All kinds of arrangements within societies exclude people who do not want to live in conformity with that arrangement*).

A special form of exclusion is how we deal with the reality of evil. Differences in worldview also result in different views on what is good and bad and what should be excluded from society. The exclusion of evil should be right, but the question is who decides what is evil and what is not?

This enquiry into the possibility of being religiously exclusive yet socially inclusive has made clear that social and religious exclusion and inclusion are linked or even completely interdependent. Religious exclusivism can lead to social exclusion, but the opposite can be true too: a certain kind of sociology and psychology can lead to a problematic theology. There is both exclusivism and inclusivism at the religious and the social level. All of this shows that this research needs a wider perspective.

2. The nature of holy texts

A second issue that surfaces from our discussion is the question of the nature of Holy Scripture and its interpretation. The question of exclusive and excluding texts, especially when they are violent, brings up the question of what to do with these texts. What kind of hermeneutics do we use? How do we read inspired texts and how do we bridge the gap between the original context and the present? And what to say about the question of how what is named as the New Testament relates to the Hebrew Scriptures (in the Christian tradition) or how primary and secondary sources of revelation relate to each other (in the Judaic and Islamic tradition)?

3. The nature of God

Following from the discussion concerning our view of Holy Scripture, is the question of how we understand the nature of God. How does God's exclusiveness relate to his inclusivity? In the Bible God seems to be very exclusive in his ordering of the stoning of idolaters and apostates, yet at the same time very inclusive in his love for the whole world. If there is no God but God (Jewish and

Islamic traditions) and there is no Lord but Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6), what then does that mean for those who do not believe in this God? Are they excluded from God's community? Or is God unconditional in his love? And how to relate this to the concept of 'eternal judgement', the final judgement and exclusion of evil and restoration of justice and peace at the end of time? How does the just side of God relate to his creatorship and his love for his creatures?

4. The nature of religious communities

Exclusive texts, like those on the validity of the death penalty on apostasy, raise questions concerning the identity of the religious community. These texts presume more or less clear boundaries around the communities. When these boundaries are crossed, there are consequences. But can we define religious communities by clear boundaries and therefore point out who is in and who is not? Or should we consider boundaries to be more or less fluid, depending on cultural, sociological or religious factors? What about so-called secret believers?

It is helpful to distinguish between bounded and centred set communities. Bounded set communities define a community by clear and strict boundaries. This can be a specific definition of faith, ethical rules and principles or other issues, meant to clearly distinguish between believers and unbelievers. Centred set communities are defined by the direction or movement of the people involved: all who are oriented towards the centre (e.g., Jesus Christ in the Christian tradition) are part of the community.

5. To execute or not

During the research, the question arose whether the religious communities ever strictly applied the principles of exclusive texts like Deuteronomy 17:2–7. In general, it seems that communities have been lenient, at least as far as it concerns the official religious or worldly authorities. However, in different contexts the situation for apostates is quite delicate and apostates experience difficult conditions of social exclusion and loneliness. Here again the question arises if this is mainly a social phenomenon or also a religious one.

6. Living together in a multireligious world

In thinking of living together in a multireligious world, a lot of questions come to the fore. What does the tension between exclusion and inclusion, religiously and socially, mean for the way of living together in a global world? And how do we give account of our history, and the pain and distrust that it has brought? Should we address the issues of apostasy, exclusion and inclusion together in interreligious engagement? Are we justified to critically reflect on the religious sources of the other, and is it possible to address difficult questions within our own faith communities? Is religion somehow offering us ways to cope with differences, while at the same time contributing to them? A lot of questions, that make us conclude that we need to work more on the question of how to live together as people from different religions or beliefs.

Questions

1. How do you see the balance between exclusion and inclusion? Is there a best situation, and what would it look like?
2. Thinking about the nature of holy texts, what kind of authority would you ascribe to the holy texts of your faith tradition?
3. What do you believe about the nature of God? How do you see God's exclusivity versus God's inclusivity?
4. When you think of the religious community you belong to, would you define it as a bounded or centred set community? What examples do you see of this? And what are your ideas about it?
5. Living together in a multireligious world can be a challenge. Religion contributes to the differences in society; do you think religion also offers us ways to cope with differences in a constructive way?