

Willem B. Drees / Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld (eds.), *The Study of Religion and the Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe: Academic and Religious Freedom in the 21st Century*, Leiden: Leiden University Press 2008, 503 pp.

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One of the issues which are currently being debated in all parts of the world, and especially in Europe, pertains to the relationship between the freedom of academic thought and religion. The problematic nature of this relationship has been discussed increasingly frequently since the end of the 20th century, a period in which the relationship between the freedom of academic thought and religion has itself become more complex. The concept of freedom of speech, as it is understood by most people, is increasingly a) limited by academic forces, and b) becoming subject to religious scrutiny. Bearing in mind that the great majority of intellectuals today are academics at the same time as being religious, one should recognize that both academics and religious groupings have in a theoretical sense identified the problem, but are in a practical sense still searching for a satisfactory solution.

On this topic, we would like to mention the book *The Study of Religion and the training of Muslim Clergy in Europe: Academic and Religious Freedom in the 21st Century*, edited by Willem B. Drees and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, published by Leiden University Press. The book is a collection of works presented at the conference “Academic Freedom and Religious Freedom: Tensions and Compromises in the Coexistence of Two Fundamental Rights”, which took place on the 27th and the 28th of February 2007. The book contains both the papers presented at this conference and some additional ones, which have been written after the conference. In total, the book contains 18 such works.

The book contains two sections and an introduction.

The first section, entitled “Academic Freedom and the Study of Religion”, contains ten papers, which comment on academic and religious freedoms. The papers contained in this section are written in a scientific and methodological fashion.

Ernan McMullin presents in his paper “*Academic Freedom and Competing Authorities: Historical Reflexions*” the influence of the ancient Greek philosophers, especially Aristotle, on the content of Christian faith. The author also makes the point that Averroës (Ibn Rušd) and other Islamic philosophers have inadvertently aided the development of the Christian faith by conserving and transmitting ancient Greek philosophy and by further developing its main ideas.

Reinier Munk, in his essay “*Freedom of Thought and the Authority of Tradition in Modern Jewish Philosophy: The Cases of Spinoza and Mendelssohn*”, reminds readers of Spinoza’s plea for freedom of thought and freedom of religion, with freedom of thought coming first. Nonetheless, Moses Mendelssohn, writing a century after Spinoza, argues that “science deals with reliable knowledge of truth, i.e. the field of theoretical knowledge, whereas religion primarily applies to the realm of practical knowledge and the realm of action.”

Willem B. Drees, in his work “*Academic Freedom and the Symbolic Significance of Evolution*”, gives a brief overview of the theory of evolution and its influence on modern European philosophical thought, with special emphasis placed on theologies of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

An especially interesting piece of work is that written by Umar Ryad: “The Dismissal of A. J. Wensinck from The Royal Academy of Arabic Language in Cairo”.

The subsequent article is entitled “The Historical Method of Biblical Interpretation: Its Nature, Use, Origin and Limitations”, and was written by Henk Jan de Jonge.

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Review / Rezensien

The most provocative work in this collection was written by Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zaid: “*Trial of Thought: Modern Inquisition in Egypt*”. In this article, the author presents a case study of Abū Zaid and concentrates especially on an incident that took place immediately following the latter’s graduation from university in 1972. Abū Zaid published a book entitled *Critique of Islamic Discourse*, in which he argues that “without the help of some representatives of the political Islamic discourse, these companies [Islamic investment companies, which triggered the social and economic scandal at that time] could not have carried out the largest swindle operation in modern Egyptian history at the expense of hundreds of thousands of Egyptians, who trusted the opinions of these representatives and had confidence in the religious emblems they used.”

The influence that Islamic activists in Indonesia have on the country’s higher education system and the nature of the criticism made of these Muslim activists is portrayed in the work of Muhammad Machasin: “*Academic Freedom in Islamic Studies and the Surveillance by Muslim Activists in Indonesia*”.

Almost as a continuation of the previous work, Albert de Jong discusses in the article “*Historians of Religion as Agents of Religious Change*” the potential “power” which scientists investigating religion have at their disposal.

The last two articles in this section of the book deal with similar topics. This is because both refer to the two events which have probably been most instrumental in shaping contemporary relations between the West, Muslims living in the West and the Islamic World. The first of these articles is entitled “*A Passing Storm or a Structural Shift? Challenges to Academic Freedom in the United States after September 11*” and is written by Beshara Doumani. The second is called “*In the Wake of the Cartoon Crisis: Freedom of Expression of Academics in Denmark*” and is written by Tim Jensen.

The second section of the book, entitled “The Academic Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe”, reports on different experiences and methods used to educate imams (Islamic priests) throughout Europe. The first article refers to the methods employed in Bosnia-Herzegovina (“*History of the Institutionalized Training of Imams in Bosnia-Herzegovina*” by Mustafa Cerić). The second examines the training of imams in all parts of Europe during the Third Reich (“*The Training of Imams by the Third Reich*” by Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld). The third article looks at the modern-day approach employed in the Netherlands (“*The Academic Training of Imams – Recent Discussions and Initiatives in the Netherlands*” by Mohammed M. Ghaly). This is followed by a comparative study of the situation in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and in France (“*Non-Formal Islamic Higher Education in the Netherlands: With Some Comparative Notes on France and the United Kingdom*” by Firdaus Oueslati). The penultimate article then examines the method employed in Vienna, Austria (“*Islamic Religious Pedagogy at the University of Vienna*” by Ednan Aslan); at European Universities (“*Legitimizing Islamic Theology at European Universities*”, author Birgitte Schepelern Johansen). The final article examines the training of Imams in Italy (“*The Training Programme of Imams in Italy*”, author Yahya Sergio Yahe Pallavicini).

The book *The Study of Religion and the training of Muslim Clergy in Europe* provides a detailed, high-quality insight into the problem of academic and religious freedom in modern and post-modern Europe, as well as on the current issue of the religious education of Muslim clergy in Europe. The second part of the book is especially useful as the majority of the authors of the presented texts are themselves working on the subject matter in question. Regrettably, any guidelines and possible solutions to the problem discussed in the introductory part of this book review are missing from the book. Put simply: How can the full freedom of academic expression be ensured, while at the same time protecting basic religious freedoms? Thus, while this collection of works is to be recommended for reading and further study, it is to be hoped that this question might be examined in more detail as part of a conference organized in the immediate future, and that the works presented during the conference might subsequently be made available to a wider public. These works will hopefully present a bridge between evident problems of the freedom of academic and religious expression in modern Europe, and the corresponding problems faced when educating imams.