

Religion and its Integration in Everyday Life: Public Discourse, Ethical Reasoning, Economic Survival, and Digital Mediation in Contemporary Societies

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It is with great pleasure that we present this edition of the *Journal for the Study of Religion* (JSR) which focuses on religion as embedded in everyday life, public discourse, ethical reasoning, economic survival, and digital mediation. Since its founding in 1993, the journal has occupied a distinctive and valued place in the academic study of religion in Southern Africa. As a bi-annual, open-access journal affiliated with the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa (ASRSA), JSR remains committed to fostering accessible, rigorous, and contextually grounded scholarship, particularly from and about the Global South. In a scholarly landscape still largely shaped by Global North priorities, this commitment is not only significant, it is urgent and essential. From its inception, JSR has sought to provide an academic home for work attentive to the diversity of religious traditions, movements, and formations in Southern Africa and beyond. The journal has consistently foregrounded lived realities, comparative perspectives, and critical engagements with religion as it intersects with social, political, economic, and cultural life. This orientation continues to guide the journal's editorial vision, even as the terrain of religion and scholarship shifts in response to changing social conditions, media environments, and global challenges.

Within Southern Africa, conversations about how religion is studied, taught, and published continue to be shaped by long-standing institutional histories and uneven scholarly infrastructures. One visible feature of this landscape is that journals dedicated to theological inquiry remain far more numerous than those focused on the broader study of religion. This imbalance has practical consequences for how various kinds of research circulate and gain visibility, particularly work that approaches religion comparatively, critically, or across multiple traditions. At the same time, there are important publishing spaces that actively support and extend scholarship on religion beyond narrowly defined frameworks. The *African Journal of Gender and Religion* plays a vital role in foregrounding the gendered dimensions of religious life and in opening space for critical engagements that intersect with religion, society, and power. Similarly, the *Journal of Islamic Studies* offers a platform for multidisciplinary research on Islam, enriching scholarly conversations about religious diversity in Southern Africa

and beyond. It is within this context that the *JSR* seeks to complement and strengthen this collective effort by continuing to provide a dedicated forum for the comparative and critical study of religion across traditions, social locations, and historical moments. Rather than privileging any single religious tradition, the journal aims to support work that reflects the complexity and plurality of religious life, while remaining attentive to the lived realities and pressing concerns of the region.

Along with the *JSR*, the *African Journal of Gender and Religion* and the *Journal of Islamic Studies* contribute to a small but significant network of publication spaces committed to widening the scope of research on religion. It is important to emphasize that their aim is neither to draw sharp disciplinary distinctions, nor to deny the productive overlaps that often exist between different approaches to religion. Rather, it is to acknowledge that not all forms of scholarship circulate with equal ease or institutional support. In a context marked by religious diversity and constitutional commitments to equality and freedom, certain religious orientations, particularly Christianity, continue to enjoy greater visibility within academic publishing. Recognizing these patterns allows for more reflective engagement with how scholarly attention, legitimacy, and opportunity are distributed, and how more inclusive and pluralist futures might be cultivated.

It is also worth noting that the majority of the contributions in this issue engage, in diverse ways, with Christian contexts, discourses, and communities. This emphasis reflects contemporary material concerns of the lived realities of many communities across the continent. Christianity has played and continues to play a significant role in shaping social life, political imaginaries, ethical debates, and public discourse in Africa, while scholarly attention to these dynamics remains vital. Holding this attentiveness to context together with critical reflection is an important part of the journal's ongoing work. At the same time, *JSR* remains committed to fostering scholarship that reflects the continent's deep religious plurality. It remains a priority to seek out and encourage research that engages multiple religious traditions, whether it is related to African Indigenous Religions, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, new religious movements, or hybrid and emerging forms. This work enriches scholarly understanding and speaks to broader questions of coexistence, justice, and epistemological inclusion in diverse societies.

The articles brought together in this issue reflect both the possibilities and the challenges of sustaining such a vision. The issue has four articles and three book reviews and collectively, the articles attend to religion as embedded in everyday life, public discourse, ethical reasoning, economic survival, and digital mediation and illustrate how careful, context-sensitive scholarship can illuminate the ways in which religion shapes and is shaped by power, belonging, and meaning in contemporary societies.

The article by Thandi Gamedze and Sarojini Nadar, '*Sanctifying settler colonialism: An intersectional discursive analysis of a South African Christian Zionist media statement*', offers a timely examination of how religious language circulates within contemporary political and media contexts. Focusing on a digital statement issued by South African Christian leaders in January 2024, the authors trace how pragmatic, ethical, and theological discourses converge to generate moral authority and legitimize particular political alignments. By placing this statement in conversation with the 1985 *Kairos Document*, the article sensitively highlights shifts in religious authority, from slow, collective theological discernment to the affect-driven immediacy of digital circulation. The contribution invites reflection on how moral language, media form, and power intersect in shaping public religious interventions today.

In '*A religious minority in post-apartheid political secularism: Muslim active citizenship*', Ala Rabiha Alhourani turns attention to Muslim civic life in Cape Town, offering a grounded account of how religious identity and public participation are negotiated within South Africa's post-apartheid secular framework. The article indicates how Islam is not experienced merely as a marker of minority differences, but as an integral part of the country's cultural landscape. By foregrounding ethical motivation, belonging, and social engagement, the article provides insight into how pluralism is lived in practice, contributing to broader conversations about citizenship, inclusion, and social cohesion in diverse societies.

Tsitsidzashe Bvute's '*Pentecostal moral bricolage and women's survival in Zimbabwe's Kukiya-Kiya economy: Lessons from Beitbridge border post*' brings into view the moral worlds of Zimbabwean Pentecostal women navigating economic precarity through cross-border trade. Drawing on ethnographic research, the article analyzes the concept of moral bricolage to capture how ethical frameworks are creatively reworked rather than abandoned under conditions of constraint. This

contribution offers a nuanced understanding of how religion, gender, and survival intersect within informal economies shaped by systemic inequality and state failure.

In ‘*Religious communication in the digital sphere: Framing Prophet Bushiri’s YouTube sermons*’, Ambrose Kolawole Dada and Janelle Vermaak-Griessel examine how religious authority and persuasion operate in online environments. Through a critical analysis of framing strategies in digital sermons, the article sheds light on the role of media in shaping religious influence, commodification, and meaning-making. The article highlights the importance of sustained scholarly attention to digital religious communication, particularly as such platforms increasingly shape contemporary religious life.

In addition to the articles, the issue also covers three book reviews. In the first book review, Alapa Odugbo focuses on a book authored by Tshepo Chéry titled ‘*Kingdom come: The politics of faith and freedom in segregationist South Africa and beyond*’. Odugbo signifies that the book provides an important contribution to African religious historiography and postcolonial political thought by bringing to light the role of Black South African clergy in theological and political struggles for freedom in South Africa.

In the second book review, Senzokuhle Doreen Setume reviews a book edited by Philipp Öhlmann and Juliane Stork titled ‘*Religious communities and ecological sustainability in Southern Africa and beyond*’. Setume demonstrates that the book provides an understanding of the role of religious communities in ecological sustainability in Southern Africa. Foregrounded in the context of global warming and its impact, the book not only reflects on the deteriorating relationship between human beings and the environment, but also the role that religious communities are playing or could play better to address ecological sustainability.

The last book review is authored by Tshenolo Jennifer Madigele. Madigele reviews a book titled ‘*Lived religion and lived development in contemporary society*’ edited by Öhlmann, Ignatius Swart, Birgit Weyel, Simangaliso Kumalo, and Marie-Luise Frost. While highlighting the interdisciplinary, empirical, and decolonial frameworks employed to explore the intersection of lived religion and development, Madigele argues that the book provides meaningful insights into practical theology, indigenous epistemologies, and ecological ethics.

Collectively, the contributions in this issue draw attention to the ways in which religious meaning is produced, communicated, and negotiated across a range of social locations and media environments. Whether through digital platforms, civic practices, economic strategies, or ethical deliberation, the articles underscore the importance of attending closely to how religion is lived, interpreted, and mobilized in contemporary contexts. They also remind us that scholarly engagement with religion requires ongoing critical reflection, methodological openness, and engagement across fields and traditions.

The articles and reviews in this issue emphasize the epistemological importance of scholarship rooted in the Global South, work that does not simply add to existing conversations, but reshapes them by foregrounding different histories, experiences, and analytical priorities. However, assembling issues of the JSR that reflect these commitments remains an ongoing challenge. Structural inequalities in global knowledge production, disciplinary legacies, and uneven institutional support continue to shape what scholarship is produced, submitted, and published.

Finally, the editorial team extends their sincere thanks to our authors, reviewers, readers, and editorial board for their ongoing commitment to the journal. We look forward to an exciting year ahead, during which we hope to launch several new initiatives currently under development, including a featured researchers section, a mentorship program, and additional ventures aimed at strengthening the scholarly community and connection. We remain grateful for the collective labor that makes this journal possible and look forward to the conversations still to come.