

**The Southern African Journal of
Medieval and Renaissance Studies**

Volume 18 § 2008

**Die Suider-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir
Middeliese en Renaissancestudies**

Jaargang 18 § 2008

RELIGIOUS TOLERATION, MULTICULTURALISM
AND THE “OTHER”

edited by Victor Houlston

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ISSN 1017-3455



Editor's Preface

Since the end of apartheid, South Africa has prided itself on its inclusivity. Race, gender, creed, sexual orientation – all are equal in the eyes of the law, and the organs of state are actively encouraged to combat every kind of prejudice. We have one of the most liberal constitutions on the planet. Steps have been taken to protect the rights and preserve the identities of vulnerable cultural, religious and linguistic groupings against the flattening effects of the globalised media, the internet, the music industry and the mobile phone. This is a society that officially honours diversity, with public holidays for 'Heritage Day', 'Workers Day', 'Youth Day', 'Women's Day' and even 'Family Day'. Yet it is a commonplace that the "rainbow nation" is in reality extremely superficial, existing mainly at the level of the same media hype and political sloganeering that threaten less privileged cultural formations.

It behoves an academic Society like ours to make some contribution to the deepening of historical understanding of toleration and dialogue, based on research into the religious and cultural tensions of the medieval and early modern periods. Accordingly, the Society devoted its 19th Biennial Conference, held at Stellenbosch in September 2008, to the theme *Dialogue, Exchange and Confrontation: Religious Toleration, Multiculturalism and the "Other"*, inviting delegates to share their expertise on such topics as persecution, trans-nationalism and artistic commerce. We invited Susannah Brietz Monta, from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, author of *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), to present the keynote address and participate in the debate. Her reputation as a leading figure in the current rapprochement between literary scholars and historians of the Reformation era, the "turn to religion" in early modern literary studies, commended her. It was a good match, because she showed a rare ability to engage with all the delegates in their areas of speciality and so brought out the interdisciplinary



strength of the Society. In her keynote speech, she used material from specialised research into the publishing history of Catholic devotional texts in Reformation England to analyse some of the commerce between Protestant and Catholic devotional practices at the time. Here we present a selection from her address, from an essay to be published in full in a forthcoming collection edited by Lowell Gallagher, provisionally entitled *Redrawing the Map*. There readers can complete their review of the proceedings.

Professor Monta's address opened the debate on inter-faith dialogue from an historical perspective. The conference encouraged such dialogue, beyond the academic level, by inviting a representative of the Interfaith Foundation of South Africa (now known as the Turquoise Harmony Institute) to present an Islamic view on religious toleration. Adnan Yaman, whose approach follows that of the eminent Turkish public intellectual Fethullah Gülen, drew our attention to the recorded views of the Prophet Mohammed on the ways in which the "People of Book", Jews and Christians, were to be accommodated within Islamic society. As a result, one of the other delegates, Dr George King, the well-known musicologist and performer of early music, went to Turkey on a cultural tour arranged by the Interfaith Foundation, and spoke feelingly of his experiences at an Iftar dinner attended by religious leaders and ministers of state during the fast of Ramadhan in 2009.

Scholarship need not, then, be entirely separate from public life. And it was a feature of the conference that every speaker succeeded in crossing a boundary of one kind or another. The articles presented here range from late antiquity to the seventeenth century, from Europe and north Africa to southern Africa, from religious persecution and toleration to political negotiation, racial perception and legal complexity. All but one were originally delivered as papers at the conference. Conscious of the importance of St Augustine to the thinking and practice of the Christian church on the question of religious uniformity, I later approached Denis Saddington to submit an article on the context of Augustine's conflict with the

Donatists, and he offered an intriguing analysis of the way the Bishop of Hippo Regius tried to reach out to the poor and uneducated in his diocese. This article by a leading authority on the late Roman Empire also deals extensively with the language politics of the region. Augustine is often claimed as an African saint, but Saddington reminds us that terms such as “African”, “Asian” or “European” had very little purchase in antiquity. Perhaps they will gradually lose their significance again now that even post-colonialism passes into history.


Alexandra Walsham’s recent study *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester University Press, 2006) has plausibly put the case that the Augustinian imperative to persecute heresy (the ‘Charitable Hatred’ of her title) fuelled the fires of the Reformation era but coincided – and even collided – with a deep-rooted inclination to live and let live. We observe this dynamic at play in a brace of articles on the treatment of Jews in late medieval Italy and England and another pair on the Catholic-Protestant divide in England and France during the Reformation. Michael Bratchel digs deep in the court records of fifteenth-century Lucca to find that relations between Christians and Jews were anything but entrenched and hostile, but governed instead by pragmatic considerations in a fluid and evolving economy. Katharine Geldenhuys analyses the representation of Jews in an English miracle play performed in East Anglia on the feast of Corpus Christi towards the end of the fifteenth century. The playwright appears to be somewhat confused about Jews and Moslems, and the action of the play obliterates all distinctions as Christ in the miracle-working sacrament draws all people to himself.

There was no room for such complacency in the fierce struggle for ecclesiastical supremacy in Elizabethan England, even if apologists for both sides were supremely confident of the truth of their position. But there was a form of public drama. This is Nicholas Meihuizen’s refreshing approach to the various marriage alliances mooted by the dowager Queen Catherine de’ Medici. She proposed three of her sons as suitable partners

to Queen Elizabeth: Charles (Charles IX), Henri (Duc d' Anjou, later Henri III) and Francois (Duc d'Alençon, later Duc d'Anjou). These negotiations, especially the last, alarmed the forward Protestant party in England, who hoped that the Roman travesty of the Christian faith would soon be eradicated. They did not welcome the prospect of a Catholic consort at the heart of the realm. By the end of the century, events in France, on the other hand, were moving towards a *de facto* pluralism, with the conversion of the Huguenot Henri de Navarre and the waning of the Protestant threat. Catholics in England, who had hoped for some relief from persecution from the proposed Alençon match, were now looking to Elizabeth's successor (whoever he or she might be) for a possible new dispensation. In this context, the public disputation between the Huguenot nobleman Philippe du Plessis-Mornay and the Catholic Bishop Jacques Davy du Perron, held at the French royal palace of Fontainebleau in 1600, was of great interest. My study of the reaction of the Jesuit leader, Robert Persons, is an attempt to tease out the implications for religious polemic at the time of the accession of King James VI and I.

The Jesuits were commonly abused as "Machiavellian", yet they were Machiavelli's fiercest critics. The curious ambivalence with which Machiavelli was received in England is the subject of Arlene Oseman's article on Ben Jonson, who roundly condemned Machiavelli yet can be shown to share his acutely realistic view of human self-realization. If we pay attention to Machiavelli as a dramatist, we get a new perspective on devils and disciples. Jonson did not seem to be able to make up his mind whether he should be Protestant or Catholic, and his relation to Machiavelli illustrates how multi-dimensional was the intellectual exchange between Protestant England and Catholic Italy.

In the final article in this collection, Heinrich Ohlhoff details the reaction of Dutch travellers to the indigenous people of southern Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a reaction that embraces difference over a wide spectrum: these Dutch Protestants did not know what to make of the customs, the language, the dress and the religious



practices of the people they encountered in a land they thought they were “discovering”. Just as Machiavelli was foreign but fascinating to a Westminster boy, so the “Hottentots” were a challenge to men whose fathers and grandfathers had fought religious wars some thousands of miles away.

It is to be hoped that the more we know about religious and political conflict in Europe at the time of colonial expansion, the better we may come to understand the history of the interaction of peoples in southern Africa. Perhaps the most important insight to emerge from this collection is that there is never just one “other” against whom to define one’s self: each of us is surrounded by many “other”s, and at various times and in various places the “other” can become “one of us”. In these matters of prejudice, antagonism and confrontation, paradoxes abound.

Victor Houlston

Johannesburg, November 2009