

Piet Beukes: *The Religious Smuts*. Human & Rosseau, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1994, 111 pp.

From a technically academic point of view this is a book that both rewards and frustrates. But as the book, with its eye-catching, full-colour cover, was clearly not written primarily for a small group of technical, academic readers it would be unfair to review it from such a perspective alone. I shall therefore do so with general readers in mind, while also referring to the interests of the specialist scholar. Seen in this light, the rewards provided by the book are

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greater than the frustrations, and even the frustrations have real value for readers of a more academic bent, as I shall explain later.

Written by a person who knew Smuts personally and who had important, extended professional links with him over the last decade of his life as well as having had access to the great statesman's personal correspondence with a key close friend over a period of many years, the main reward of the book is precisely the sense of closeness to Smuts' soul that it conveys. No outsider could achieve that. But this advantage also involves a disadvantage in the form of the dependence of the book on the author's perception of religion. In other words, immediacy involves limitation of perspective concerning the key concept around which the book turns. But that too - frustrating though I found it, has the benefit of whetting the appetite for further research on the religious Smuts.

The book has other strengths than just its ability to open windows into Smuts' soul. Beukes writes in a lucid, flowing way that is free of the often burdensome characteristics of academic prose. For example, it dispenses with things like footnotes, source references and even a bibliography, a policy which make for easy, uninterrupted reading. Chapters are not too long to put strains on the reader's interest nor too short to come over as flimsy. They deal with themes rather than periods in Smuts' life, themes such as the new physics Smuts' beliefs about Christ and about holism and God. Concerning the new physics Beukes shows a good knowledge of writers like Stephen Hawking, David Bohm and Templeton Prize winner Paul Davies, who freely uses the term "holistic" which Smuts introduced into 20th century discourse.

All this is very much to the good of the book, and I have no doubt that for readers wanting an insight into the religious side of Smuts' life and thought, it will serve as a valuable, informative and intriguing source. Historians interested in Smuts will also find much here to interest concerning a facet of his life which has not been nearly as extensively explored as his political and military career.

There are however also some gaps and technical shortcomings in the book, especially for a reader who is seeking an academic type of presentation. The main technical problem for this type of reader is the absence of detailed source references. Beukes, as has been mentioned, relies on personal correspondence and other primary sources for important parts of his story, and I found it frustrating to be unable to establish exactly where and how these might be accessed for further study. One of the things I greatly like about this book is precisely the way it whets the appetite for further investigation into Smuts' religious philosophy - but without giving the detailed footnotes or other source references, duly correlated with a bibliography, which could take the enquiry further. However, not all readers will want this kind of apparatus, and clearly the book was written with their interests primarily in mind.

More interesting, in the judgement of the present reviewer, is the question raised by Beukes' interpretation of the religion of Jan Smuts for anybody with a different (and perhaps more comprehensive) understanding of religion than that shown in these pages by Beukes. "Being religious" is a highly complex and contested concept, making it no simple matter to apply to anybody, least of all to a thinker and public figure as complex as Smuts. For example, does it necessarily involve belief in a God? If so, then much of east Asian and some of Indian religion becomes irreligious. Does it necessarily involve ritual observances like prayer, worship or attendance at places like churches on holy days? That would make some kinds of mysticism irreligious. And what does it mean to be a Christian? Is admiration for the ethical teachings and personal example of Christ enough? Most churches

would say no - but would then battle to come up with an agreed definition of what it means to be a Christian.

The absence of what I would see as a more nuanced handling of these concepts means that Beukes interprets Smuts' ideas on religion in ways that seem to me to portray him as more orthodox or conventional than the quoted sources suggest. As mentioned above, Beukes is well read in the new physics but the book shows little sign of much awareness of what could be called the new theology (apart from a reference to process philosopher A.N. Whitehead). But this new wave of religious thinking is at least as revolutionary in its field as the new physics. It would be very interesting to see whether (as I suspect) Smuts' religious ideas anticipated some of these developments in religious philosophy. Although Beukes does not satisfy this interest except by means of hints and suggestions, his book has the important merit of opening the way for others to explore them. I think it is always a virtue when a book generates new avenues of interest and investigation on a important subject, and Beukes must be thanked for performing this service quite as much as for the many valuable things with which he does deal.

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Robert Ross : *Beyond the pale: essays on the history of colonial South Africa*. Witwatersrand Press. Johannesburg, 1994. 270 pp. Prys : R 70,00.

Hierdie boek is 'n versamelwerk van elf van Ross, wat veral bekendheid verwerf het met sy monografie oor die Griekwas (Adam Kok's Griquas. A study in the development of stratification in South Africa. Cambridge, 1976) se opstelle gedurende die afgelope twee dekades. Hierdie Britsgebore historikus wat aan Cambridge opgelei is se belangstelling uit die Kaapse koloniale geskiedenis spruit waarskynlik uit die feit dat hy in diens van die Rijksuniversiteit Leiden in Nederland staan waar hy Afrika-geskiedenis doseer en dat Nederlandse bronne dus vir hom toeganklik is.

As versamelwerk spreek dit eintlik vanself dat dit in sy geheel nie oorspronklike werk is nie. Trouens, slegs vyf van die elf opstelle word hier vir die eerste keer gepubliseer, hoewel die ses wat reeds vantevore gepubliseer is volgens die outeur grondig hersien en opgedateer is.

Soos verwag kon word, openbaar hierdie werk dieselfde leemtes as die meeste soortgelyke werke en wel in 'n gebrek aan eenheid en struktuur. Die outeur het die werk in vyf afdelings van twee hoofstukke elk, benewens die inleiding, verdeel. Afdeling een handel oor die ekonomie en klassevorming aan die Kaap; afdeling 2 oor ideologieë en rassestratifikasie, spesifiek die oorsprong van blanke oppergesag; afdeling 3 oor die bevolkingsgroei en gesinsvorming; afdeling vier oor die koloniale regstelsel en afdeling vyf oor intellektuele geskiedenis. Die saambindende faktor, volgens die outeur self, is dat dit handel oor klassevorming en dominansie aan die Kaap. Hoewel dit waar mag wees vir die meeste van die opstelle, is dit uiters moeilik om byvoorbeeld die opstel oor die oorsprong van die Suid-Afrikaanse historiografie en Donald Moodie se rol daarin onder hierdie sambreel in te dwing. Wat wel waar is, is dat al hierdie opstelle handel oor die pre-industriële Kaapkolonie en miskien is dit die sentrale tema van die werk.

Alhoewel die aanspraak in die advertensiemateriaal van die uitgewer wat Ross beskryf as "... the foremost historian of the early