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## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The sociology of religion is not an unknown academic enterprise in South and Southern Africa. But it is equally true that it is not widely practised.

For at least two reasons this is quite surprising. Firstly, around the globe a new alliance between theology and the social sciences, sometimes even replacing the traditional philosophical mode, seems to have emerged over the past three decades. As a consequence the sociology of religion, among others, has been revitalised.

Secondly, it has become conventional to say that religion plays a formidable social role in South African society. However, giving substance to this statement proves to be a problem, thereby indicating the paucity of sound empirical evidence and related proper theory.

The purpose of this edition of *Scriptura* is to raise an awareness in this regard. It is not claimed that the sociology of religion will solve theology's chronic relevancy problem. But I am convinced that a proper input from the sociology of religion is indispensable.

This edition of *Scriptura* consists of a variety of contributions. The three local ones serve as illustrations of the significant contribution of dimensions of the sociology of religion to both theological and public discourses. The three contributions by the Warwick scholar, James Beckford, an internationally acclaimed authority in the field of the sociology of religion, provide an undiluted input in this regard into the South African academic discourse in general, as well as in religious studies in particular.

It is my hope that this edition of *Scriptura* will open up new avenues of reflection in the academic study of religion in South Africa.

**Johann Kinghorn**