Obituary: Jacobus Diederik Jan Waardenburg
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It is a privilege to write a brief celebration of the life and work of Jacobus Diederik Jan Waardenburg, known to his family, friends, and to many colleagues simply as Jacques. Although some of his early writings appeared under the name “Dr. J. D. J. Waardenburg,” this formal appellation soon gave way to the simpler “Jacques Waardenburg,” which subtly combined a Francophone connection with his Dutch origins. It is by this name that he will be very widely remembered; it conveys a feeling of most kindly internationality, true to his character as a scholar and as a man. This impression was reinforced by the sympathetic interest in others that his eyes unfailingly communicated, and by his characteristic, very full beard. Any child would spot at once that this was “a professor,” while academics always recognized the sharp brain behind his unassuming, interested, and reassuring presence.

This brain, and the imaginative, humane empathy that went with it, were ever used in search of greater understanding of the phenomena of religion, which were his life-long, passionate interest. Yet by “religion” he understood not some reified quasi-philosophical essence, such as is often still expected by the general public, but rather the consciousness and behavior of specific groups and individuals. Not so much “Islam,” for example, though unlike some with little direct experience of the real field he had no chronic fear of such general terms in themselves, but rather “Muslims as Actors,” a phrase used in the title of a major selection of his writings published in 2007 (Muslims as Actors: Islamic Meanings and Muslim Interpretations in the Perspective of the Study of Religions [de Gruyter: Berlin]). With such an orientation, based on uncompromising humanity, he was able to create a delicate bridge between such apparently distant worlds as classical phenomenology of religion (critically viewed) and post-modernity.
Jacques Waardenburg’s early formation was in the Netherlands, where he was born on 15 March 1930. As a child he experienced the complex pressures of life under the German occupation, and this evidently led to much reflection in the mind of an intelligent and sensitive youth. Though coming from a religious family, he eventually decided against an early option of training for the Christian ministry, and so to the study of theology he added that of the history of religions, in particular of Islam, and in connection with this he also studied Arabic. His student days were spent in Amsterdam and Leiden, but consequent on an extended residence in Paris he published his pioneering thesis in French as *L’Islam dans le miroir de l’Occident* (1961). Particularly informative is the revised subtitle of the second edition (1962), which ran *Comment quelques orientalistes occidentaux se sont penchés sur l’Islam et se sont formés une image de cette religion. I. Goldziher, C. Snouck Hurgronje, C. H. Becker, D. B. Macdonald, Louis Massignon.* It is notable that this work significantly predates the international discussion of “orientalism” that became popular as a result of Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, which did not appear until 1978. From the time of Waardenburg’s work it was already no longer appropriate to speak naively of “Islamic Studies,” excellent though early specialists were. It had become necessary to think of *self-reflective* studies of Islam, including living Islam. This is just the kind of work which he himself pursued over the years through observations in many parts of the world.

In France, Jacques Waardenburg had been greatly influenced by the religiously sensitive Islamologist Louis Massignon, and this reinforced his lifelong view that when studying a religion to which one does not oneself belong it is certainly necessary to empathize with its main concerns. While continuing to explore the academic world, and for that matter the real, social world around him, Waardenburg was able to spend time both in a number of Arab countries and also in North America. Staying at Montreal in 1962–1963, he became familiar with the work of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and his particular approach to comparative religion through the notions of “faith” and “cumulative tradition.” From 1964 to 1968 he obtained teaching assignments at the University of California (UCLA) in the fields of Arabic and Islamic History and interacted there, at Los Angeles, with the prominent Islamologist Gustave von Grunebaum.

Jacques Waardenburg then returned to Europe. Here, in teaching and research, his main contributions were made at the universities of Utrecht

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1 A third edition was published in 1969.
2 A fuller account of these early years by Waardenburg himself may be found in the introduction to *Muslims as Actors.*