THEOLOGY AND THE (POST)APARTHEID CONDITION

Genealogies and future directions
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Rian Venter
EDITOR

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The *UFS Theological Explorations Series* is an initiative of the Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State (UFS), situated in Bloemfontein, South Africa. History, both in South Africa and worldwide, has shown that solid academic research is vital for stimulating new insights and new developments, not only in order to achieve academic progress, but also to advance human flourishing. Through this academic series, the Faculty of Theology at the UFS hopes to make a contribution to worthy causes such as these.

The university wishes the research conducted by its staff to be relevant and innovative within the South African context. In addition, the research should have international impact and visibility and should encourage national and international collaboration. The type of research published in this series is focused on achieving these goals. Accordingly, *UFS Theological Explorations* publishes only research that is of a high academic standard, has been thoroughly peer-reviewed and makes an important academic contribution to fundamental theological issues on both national and international levels. Furthermore, we maintain that good research should not only be aimed at creating significant new academic knowledge but should also be a deliberate attempt to include various and even opposing perspectives. Finally, we believe that it is especially important that research takes into account the social context within which we generate new knowledge.

This series contains both monographs and collected works. In the case of the monographs, one or more researchers work on a particular topic and cover the subject matter extensively. In this way, the monographs make a significant contribution to original research. In the case of the collected works, a group of researchers from various theological disciplines work together on a particular topic. The collected works contribute new insights on the research question from different perspectives and thus advance scholarship collectively.

The Editorial Board trusts that *UFS Theological Explorations* will have a positive and lasting impact on theological agendas all over the world!

**Francois Tolmie**
Series editor: *UFS Theological Explorations*
INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 1

Rian Venter

1

1. Background

Knowledge transmission and generation belong to the core mission of the public university. In democratic South Africa, the transformation of these processes and practices has become an urgent and contested task. There has been much reflection on the transformation of higher education in general, and specifically on the epistemological dimension of this transformation. The Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State has already done some original work on the implications of these for theology. One area of investigation that has not yet received due attention concerns the role of theological disciplines, for example, Old and New Testament, Missiology, Systematic Theology and Practical Theology. A research project was undertaken to address this challenge and this volume reflects the intellectual endeavour of lecturers, research fellows and a post-graduate student associated with this faculty. All the authors are in some way or the other associated with the faculty. The opportunity was also given to younger scholars to share their research with a wider audience.

2. Rationale

The invitation to participate in the project gave the following rationale:

Epistemological transformation is a major dimension of the radical changes which are taking place and find concrete embodiment in curricular and research practices. These cannot be responsibly approached without an acquaintance with the histories of individual disciplines, and their evolving and mutating nature. Applied to theology: each discipline has its own history, and has already experienced reconstruction globally and specifically also in South

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2 See for example Venter (2011), and Venter and Tolmie (2012).
Africa. These genealogical developments and re-envisioning should be systematically mapped. The absence of this in theological discourse is a clear intellectual and academic lacuna in South Africa.

A large number of pressing questions come to the fore, for example, what is the relation between academic disciplines and societal dynamics? What was the character of this configuration during the apartheid dispensation and what re-configurations have already taken place? The critical questions to be addressed are: what are the contours of the (post)apartheid condition and what are the implications for responsible disciplinary practices in theology?

The challenge to be addressed is at least four-fold:

- **Fundamental theoretical perspectives** should be identified and explained. For example, what is the nature of the contemporary social and intellectual conditions – globally and in South Africa? What shifts have taken place in the understanding of the nature of knowledge and what are the implications for disciplinary practices?

- The **historical development** of each major theological disciplinary group should be mapped, at least during the last forty years; 1975 could be a convenient heuristic starting-date.

- **Proposals already made for reconstruction** should be compiled and mapped. Attempts to rethink theological disciplines have been undertaken by scholars. To compile thorough bibliographical searches could be a constructive venture, especially for further reflection.

- Creative and **constructive proposals for future directions** should be articulated. At stake is to think about disciplinary responsibility, within a specific social location, in light of the present challenges and future visions.

The volume is an expression of individual intellectual struggle and interpretation of the critical questions. Care was taken not to suggest a blueprint answer. The various chapters are indicative of the vitality of theology at this faculty as well as the diverse understandings of the responsibility of theology under present social conditions.
3. Contributions

The chapters are logically arranged and the volume moves from wider to more specific concerns. The first three chapters in the volume suggest general perspectives on the challenge for theology in higher education, map the changes and formulate some suggestions for the future.

The first chapter by Venter attempts to explain four critical dimensions of the present research project. The specific shape of the research problem is placed within the world of discourses on theological education and a justification for the investigation is furnished. Secondly, the chapter addresses the contentious issue of naming the present social condition. It is clear that no singular interpretation is possible or even desirable; only minimal contours may be drawn. In the third place, the chapter considers the complex relationship between a discipline and society, and reference is made to the fruitful work by Foucault on epistemes, which may be relevant to the South African context. The chapter concludes by suggesting seven markers for the ‘transformation of disciplines’. According to Venter:

At stake are acquaintance with global trends, a conscious account of the character of knowledge, a sense of justice and openness, a solidarity with the continent, courage for conversation, a fine sense of ethics and a responsibility towards the common good.

The contribution by De Villiers provides an insightful historical overview and analysis of the theological discourse in South Africa, with a focus on the role of hermeneutics and on the relationship between theology and church. The growing intellectualisation of theological discourse with an emphasis on conceptual knowledge is pointed out. This, as the chapter describes in the first part, has a long pre-history with the institutionalisation of the study of theology. De Villiers concludes that ‘by the last two decades of the twentieth century … the theological discourse displayed almost completely the intellectual culture of universities that had been developing since the Enlightenment’. The subsequent new interest in hermeneutics had a major impact on church practice and on church/society relations. By the turn of the twenty-first century, an important shift took place – the notion of participatory knowledge gained greater prominence, which counters the disconnection of theology with the social experience of the theologian. An unease and disenchantment with this
social pre-occupation eventually started to set and he refers to the new interest in spirituality and beauty. His proposal for a revitalisation of theology entails an appreciation of aesthetics as an alternative, but legitimate way of generating knowledge and of transforming society. The chapter provides valuable historical descriptions, important analyses of shifts, but also a provocative suggestion for overcoming the limitation of conceptual knowledge and for an alternative approach to transformation.

Resane situates the challenge facing theology in the quest for *Africanisation*. Realising that this notion is open to various interpretations, he opts for one that advocates ‘an African mindset, or a mindset shift from the Western to an African paradigm’. To achieve the Africanisation of theology he proposes *seven shifts* that should take place: from state theology to indigenisation and contextualisation; from liberation theology to public theology; from church theology to prophetic theology; from black theology to reconciliation theology; from parochial theology to theology of dialogue; from ecumenical theology to communion theology; and from Eurocentric hermeneutics to an Afrocentric hermeneutics. Some of the binaries construed by Resane may be contentious, but in this chapter, a large number of contemporary debates and sensibilities are identified. He pleads for ‘a new humanising theology for African people’, and he feels strongly that the ‘contextual relevance of theology in Africa is not an option but a must.’

After these general overviews and perspectives, the remainder of the volume deals with a great variety of specific disciplinary developments. In the first contribution from an Old Testament perspective, Schmidt traces older scholarship and more recent ones pertaining to the divine character or God-talk of *Proverbs* and its Biblical Hebrew proverbial tradition. He indicates how the understanding of the religious character of Proverbs was influenced by social, historical and theological contexts in national and international scholarship alike during the pre-1994 period. The important contributions of scholars like Loader and Nel are discussed. In the second part of the chapter, he discusses new sensibilities introduced after 1994 by African religionists and scholars with an openness to Africa, like Masenya and Wessels, to enhance future studies on the God-talk of the proverbial wisdom tradition.
In his chapter, Snyman traces developments in the study of the **prophetic literature** of the *Old Testament* in South Africa during 1995-2015. After exploring previous investigations on the state of Old Testament scholarship in South Africa, he makes some observations on the publication of articles pertaining to the prophetic literature. An analysis of publications in the journal *Old Testament Essays* forms part of the investigation. Some trends are pointed out, for example, the rise of the number of articles by black scholars. He also considers the question of an orientation to Europe and to Africa. In the end, a few suggestions are made concerning the future of Old Testament Studies in South Africa. He argues that both *the local and the global, the then and the now* must be kept intact to secure a vibrant study of the Old Testament in the years to come and that ‘Old Testament scholarship in South Africa is in a unique position by being the meeting ground for African approaches to the Old Testament as well as traditional Western approaches.’ He also anticipates that ‘a kaleidoscope of different approaches, exegetical methodologies, hermeneutical interests’ will mark the state of Old Testament scholarship in South Africa.

In his contribution, Tolmie addresses the question whether anything has changed in *Pauline Studies* in South Africa in the past 50 years. He does so by comparing some of the recent volumes of *Neotestamentica* with the three earliest volumes devoted to Pauline Studies. The pattern which emerged in the earlier scholarship is an emphasis on specific theological themes (the Spirit, ministry, salvation by faith), which are then worked out thoroughly, with leading European scholars as the primary discussion partners. When this is compared to more recent work, one difference is conspicuous: the interpretative frameworks differ from the earlier exegetical and theological ones. Tolmie proceeds in this argument to attend to trends in global Pauline Studies and identifies three trends: the geographical shift from Europe to Northern America, the increased diversification of the profile of New Testament scholars and the growing interdisciplinarity. Against this background, Tolmie answers his own original question in the affirmative, pointing out three major changes: the broadened diversity of practitioners, the theoretical frameworks and the way the New Testament is appropriated with a greater sensitivity to societal needs. His own constructive proposal highlights five challenges to be faced: The great variety of approaches should be taken seriously as these generate new
knowledge; the same applies to context. Paul should also be taken ‘into the marketplace’, meaning a greater engagement with the humanities is needed. He also pleads for a ‘more comprehensive picture of Paul’ and, finally, that ‘the question of transcendence, of God’, be addressed, stating:

It is easy to lose track of this ideal, be it as a result of overspecialization, too much emphasis on methodology, or perhaps even the mistaken idea that systematic theology will take care of this for us.

The systematic theologian, Urbaniak seeks to compare and assess the Christological insights of Nico Koopman and Tinyiko Maluleke, as representatives of public theology and black theology, based on their engaged-prophetic character. Christological considerations of Koopman and Maluleke are measured according to their prophetic potential, namely, in terms of their ability to articulate an alluring, inviting vision of an alternative community based on the principles of the reign of God and to offer criticism where the status quo does not adhere to that vision. Urbaniak considers Koopman’s reflection on the implications of the lordship of Christ for theology’s engagement in the public sphere; Trinitarian and Christological foundations of human dignity; Jesus as the utmost expression of divine and human vulnerability; and the threefold office of Christ as the key to understanding the public calling of the church. Regarding Maluleke, questions about African culture(s) as a ‘host’ for Christ and identifying an African Jesus in the ‘hidden transcripts’ are investigated. Urbaniak concludes that ‘Koopman’s attempts at engaging with African realities theologically must be generally deemed unsuccessful’, and refers to an ‘African veneer’ in his theology. He postulates that Maluleke’s stress on the multi-faceted reflection on the African appropriations of Jesus, ‘meet the requirements for an engaged and prophetic Christology.’ The difference between the two theologians has to do with their different foci: ‘Koopman’s focus is on the global, Maluleke’s is undoubtedly on the local.’ For Africans ‘[a] global, cosmopolitan Christ, for whom all life matters, can hardly meet them where they are.’

The chapter by Venter investigates how the Trinitarian symbol has functioned theologically pre-1994 and after the dawn of a democratic dispensation. The older generation of systematic theologians can be considered as scholars who appreciated the Trinitarian confession, but they did not employ it as a social critique of apartheid ideology as the discipline was approached in a typical
Western manner. Before introducing the younger generation of scholars, the chapter briefly alludes to the main tenets of the so-called ‘Trinitarian Renaissance’. Discussing more recent trends in South Africa, the author believes there is ‘undeniably greater interest in and enthusiasm for Trinitarian reflection’, but at the same time it lacks in an in-depth engagement with the confession ‘for understanding the Christian vision and for social life’. The chapter concludes with a number of suggestions for the future, pleading for ‘a full Trinitarian theology for (post)apartheid South Africa’, which will be pursued in an interdisciplinary fashion and which will be sensitive to interpretative frameworks and to the political nature of explicating divine attributes.

Practical theologian, Laubscher, and post-graduate student, Wessels explore the theme of prophetic preaching. Pointing out the interest in this form of preaching, they assert that the future cannot be dealt with without a proper historical consciousness and without a clear distinction between the practice of and study of this phenomenon. Informed by the views of Foucault, the two authors investigate four periods of reflection on prophetic preaching – 1974-1983, 1984-1993, 1994-2003 and 2004-2015. During the first period, a greater awareness of context is detected, but the very notion in its plurality was not subjected to scrutiny. Hermeneutics is a strong motif during the second period but remained trapped in a universalised approach. In the third period, new energy and a myriad of new approaches are found. The focus on an adequate understanding of prophetic preaching is prominent in the last period and the conviction has emerged that ‘all homiletic thought is implicitly or explicitly busy with prophetic preaching’. Laubscher and Wessels, in their evaluation of the history of reflection, clearly see change and ‘much more particularity, differentiation, and societal dynamics reflected’. They emphasise that the future of prophetic preaching requires critical engagement with each other’s work and raise the provocative question: ‘what if the study of prophetic preaching actually becomes a tool to protect vested interests and particular histories?’ They assert that ‘our main point of orientation should, in fact, be our rootedness with fellow colleagues in the exposed (post)apartheid condition where we embrace critique and embody self-critique.’

Pali, in his contribution on leadership, calls attention to its multi-dimensional nature and that it is still an undeveloped sub-discipline in Practical Theology.
Its growing importance necessitates a thorough review of approaches. Focusing on studies in the *Journal of Practical Theology in South Africa*, he critically reflects on the transitions in the understanding of leadership and the implications for Practical Theology. He points out at that studies on leadership are indicative of the changes in the discipline of Practical Theology itself. Some of the changes he identifies involve the very definition of leadership; for example, the relational quality between leader and followers has become more central as well as the dynamics of the process. This shift has led to the notion of shared responsibilities and mutual influencing. Another shift Pali identifies implies a greater appreciation for secular leadership theories. In his analysis of articles he, however, finds a sensitivity for the uniquely Christian character of church leadership; one which values humility and holistic growth. He emphasises that ‘quality ethics’, that is, setting a good example, is important in a situation scarred by a history of imperialism. The shift of centralised power to one of networking and appreciation of the priesthood of all believers is clear in the study of leadership. Finally, he believes that ‘[t]o help change the context, there is an increasing need to study the process of influence.’

Schoeman and Van den Berg write perceptively about the drastic *reconstructions that Practical Theology has experienced*. It is no longer limited to church practices but encompasses all domains of human existence. Normative practices are considered part of the fibre of practices and should not be ‘added’. According to them, Practical Theology is widely understood as ‘concerned with the theological study of practices with an emphasis on lived religion’. The discipline has also been decisively influenced by the so-called ‘empirical turn’. They raise the question about a reconstruction of Practical Theology in South Africa with a postcolonial sensibility. The stress on ‘lived religion’ renders the role of faith communities in the life of ordinary people in the interaction between congregation and society crucial in the study of Practical Theology. As the discipline does not ignore a normative component, it makes demands on those who practice it to live by the sacred and transcendent convictions they profess. The chapter attempts to identify the various elements of ‘relevance’. Not only is context discussed, but also the character of methodology.

In his contribution, Van der Watt accepts the difficult task of finding an answer to the question ‘is there a credible way of redeeming mission and
Missiology from its own past of entrenching social inequality and serving the colonial project?’ and argues that Missiology remains an ‘essential’ discipline in a pluralist, postcolonial and post-Western/Christendom era. The emergence of postcoloniality, postmodernity and the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity form the critical changes in the context of mission. He identifies a number of features at stake in the re-imagining of Missiology, mentioning inter alia, the missio Dei as the foundation, the turn to pneumatology and thinking from the margin. Van der Watt discusses the position of Missiology as a theological subject area and its relationship to the other fields of study, and suggests that it could contribute ‘to the revitalisation and contextualisation of the other disciplines’. The major shifts taking place requires also a reflection on Missiology in the non-West and he argues that it should be liberated from ‘its captivity in Western intellectual traditions and institutions.’ In the final part of the chapter, he proposes a number of elements that should receive attention in a ‘relevant’ curriculum.

4. Comments

The chapters in this volume not only convey an impression of the vitality of theology at the University of the Free State but also in South Africa. Theology is a dynamic field of study which is pursued with enthusiasm and great commitment. The sheer energy in the enterprise cannot be missed. Although the South African community of theologians is relatively small, the volume and quality of creative work produced should not be missed. Obviously, not all disciplines in the theological encyclopedia have been investigated; the chapters reflect the interests of the (limited) number of theologians associated with the Faculty of Theology. The hope is that this volume may stimulate further reflection of similar nature by other theologians.

The deep and radical changes that theology has experienced during the last few decades cannot be missed. All contributions, despite their differences, give expression to fundamental shifts which have taken place in all theological sub-disciplines. Theology is a dynamic enterprise and the social conditions in South Africa have been a major impetus to stimulating dynamic and creative theological thinking and production. Social conditions have unleashed energy and given birth to creative new thinking, exploration and innovation.
A greater awareness of situatedness and of contextuality runs like a golden thread through the chapters. The various disciplines and their practitioners reflect a deepened sense of location and the vicissitudes of the specific social conditions. At the same time, the contextual antenna registers global changes and developments. It is unlikely that this dialectic between local and global will disappear – the South African context is important, and the wider global conditions are crucial. Theology in the future will most likely take place in this healthy field of creative tension.

A closer scrutiny of the chapters may generate suspicion that the turn to Africa and to the complex reality of the South African context, is fairly artificial and even devoid of intellectual vibrancy. The reasons behind this may be complex. It could testify to the sheer staying power of Western theology, of the one-sided experience of practitioners themselves, or of a lack of intellectual apparatus to discern multiple contextual voices. The turn to postcolonial Africa in her vibrant plurality, riches and distinctiveness has not been completed. Basically all the chapters evidence fundamental shifts, but the direction of these shifts remains uncertain. What an intellectual commitment to a democratic South Africa entails, intellectually and academically, seems elusive. A full-fledged African refiguring of the disciplines remains a future challenge.

An awareness of the imperative for de-colonising the disciplines is present in many of the contributions. What this entails for the disciplines is not clear yet. This is a most crucial task that must still be explored and addressed in-depth and comprehensively by theologians in South Africa. During the preparation of the volume, the #FeesMustFall movement was taking place in the country, and the slogan of ‘free, fair and de-colonised education’ was often heard. What this implies for theology and the disciplines require much more fundamental examination.

**Bibliography**


Knowledge transmission and generation belong to the core mission of the public university. In democratic South Africa, the transformation of these processes and practices in higher education has become an urgent and contested task. The Faculty of Theology at the University of the Free State has already done some original work on the implications of these for theology. One area of investigation that has not yet received due attention concerns the role of theological disciplines, and especially the relation between academic disciplines and societal dynamics. This research project addresses the challenge and this volume reflects the intellectual endeavour of lectures, research fellows and a post-graduate student associated with the faculty.

Each theological discipline has its own history and has already experienced reconstruction, both globally and in South Africa. Some of these genealogical developments and re-envisioning are mapped by the contributions in this volume. The critical questions addressed are: what are the contours of the (post)apartheid condition and what are the implications for responsible disciplinary practices in theology? The chapters convey an impression of the vitality of theology at the University of the Free State and in South Africa and give expression to fundamental shifts that have taken place in theological disciplines, and also of future tasks. This research project aims to stimulate reflection on responsible and innovative disciplinary practices of theology in South Africa, which, we envisage, will contribute to social justice and human flourishing.

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