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## **REVIEW – PATHWAYS IN THEOLOGY: ECUMENICAL, AFRICAN AND REFORMED**

P. Naudé, *Pathways in Theology: Ecumenical, African and Reformed*  
Van der Westhuizen, H. (Ed.)  
(Stellenbosch: SUN PReSS, 2015). 371 pp. Price: R425.  
ISBN: 978-1-920689-64-3.

What a welcome addition to the existing trend of collecting and clustering articles within the work of some significant theological scholars in South Africa! Sun Media (publisher) and Henco van der Westhuizen (editor) have done us a huge favour in compiling this selective contribution of Piet Naudé's articles to his fellow pilgrims on the pathways of theology within the ecumenical, African and reformed church to whom we all belong.

Why do I say so? Why do I really want to stress and emphasize this point so much? Obviously one is aware that this is not 'new work', because, except for the one sermon, the other 25 articles have all been published, read and discussed between 1986 and 2014. What then is the real significance of such a project and publication? First, both publisher and editor sense and recognize something of the importance and significance of Naudé's contribution to the current scholarly theological landscape. There is simply no way in which the last three decades of systematic theology (in South Africa, but also on the pathways indicated) can be discussed without the recognition and contribution of Naudé's work and influence. Secondly, and Naudé himself admits and points to the fact that "Hopefully they serve as an example of reflections on the ground-breaking events in South Africa leading up to 1994 and beyond, including a theological understanding of our current situation in a constitutional democracy." (Naudé 2015:1). This is a very handy tool in terms of how one particular theologian theologized, developed, changed his mind (and those of others), contributed, differed, and so forth within a *very dynamic social context* of the past three

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decades. Thirdly, and both author and editor do not refer to this in the foreword and introduction, but surely are aware of the challenge that we cannot continue to do theology without being self-conscious and critical of the (post-) apartheid condition of our disciplines and work. This book – along with the other publications in the series on Dirkie Smit, John de Gruchy, Bernard Latagan, and so on – really helps interrogate, map and reconstruct both the archaeology and the genealogies of our discipline's past and present condition. Receiving a text like this within a (still) very dynamic societal context that is fairly receptive and critical of transforming theological knowledge, surely must be welcomed!

Against the above background and challenge, the title of the book is quite revealing. There are at least five critical remarks to make in terms of the book's title and content. First: The days of doing comprehensive and traditional systematic theology are clearly not the pathway on which we no longer find ourselves, but rather one where “[w]e will learn to live in fragile, pluralist theoretical constructs, doing eclectic and not systematic theology.” (Italics original) (Naudé 2015:233). This telling sentence towards the end of a 2004 article on “Is there a future for scholarship” not only characterizes his thought at the time, but actually comments and summarizes the title and approach of his work. From start to finish, there is no switch from (a systematic) pathway towards (constructive and eclectic) pathways, but rather a creative originality (contextual and societal consciousness accompanied with ecclesial roots) in his work that results in various pathways, namely *ecumenical, African and reformed*.

Second: The three pathways could easily have been named as church, public and contextual. The role of the *church* – whether ecumenical in scope, from within the context of southern Africa, or rooted in reformed origin, tradition and confession – is of main concern and crucial importance in Naudé's theology. Various pathways of the church and church theology are what we find in his work. However, that being said, the editor rightly points to this in his foreword (Naudé 2015:ix-xi). This particular kind of church theology simultaneously portrays a very specific kind of *public* theology. Throughout his work, there is a social, contextual and public antenna and awareness that church/ecclesial/catholic theology should be able to perceive and raise the broader questions for theology and church. Briefly, different descriptions and clusters of the pathways in his theology are possible, but the critical thread that runs throughout all of them is an acute and integrative awareness for all three the publics of academia, church and society.

Third: Following from the above is the critical ability to integrate, re-connect and explore creative potential and tension in embracing multiple identities and being simultaneously both. Put differently: There is a critical

awareness that understanding and exploration of the one necessarily begs for understanding, appreciation and exploration of the other. In his work, there is a dynamic embrace and interaction between church and public, dogmatics and ethics, doxology and praxis, liturgy and life, reformed and ecumenical, *lex orandi* and *lex credendi*, African and European, patriarchal and womanist, prophetic and priestly, critical and committed, and so on. Briefly, there is a creative and explorative intra-, inter- and multidisciplinary approach in his theological work that seeks a more integrative and wholesome theology.

Fourth: One is not surprised to hear the voices of the marginalized people and themes in his work. Whether it is on the pathway of ecumenical, African or reformed theology, voicing the challenges and engaging the relevance of liberationist, feminist, African/oral theology for the publics of church, society and academia in a particular context, the voices and faces of particular people come to the fore. On the ecumenical pathway, a voice says: “In short, ecumenical reception is neither the signature on a contract nor the distant reception of a text, but an embrace of love among sister churches [quoting Houtepen].” (Naudé 2015:26). On the African pathway, he is quite vocal in his critique on Villa-Vicencio’s *Reading Barth in South Africa*: “Villa-Vicencio (and others) thus make two mistakes: their concern for the poor and oppressed is a selective one, omitting any acknowledgement of the oppression of a literate society, and they continue this oppression by the very fruits of their labour.” (Naudé 2015:137). On the Reformed pathway, he allows the *Belhar Confession* (and, by implication, our sisters and brothers, fellow believers and pilgrims on the same pathway!) to voice itself within the DRC family and ecumenical sphere with the clear insight into the tragic revelation of the DRC’s reception:

... the DRC declares that issues such as unity among Christians, reconciliation and justice are matters of great importance *for the DRC in particular*. ... For outsiders it creates the impression that, as far as matters of confession are concerned, the ‘foreign’ topics associated with Marcionism, Arianism, Epicureanism and Pelagianism (Belgic/Netherlands Confession of faith) or Arminianism (Dordt) are for the DRC closer to the core of faith than unity, reconciliation and justice (Naudé 2015:92, 316).

Briefly, a critical engagement and sensitivity for the marginalized and voiceless resulted in a recurring critical edge in Naude’s work.

Fifth: Describing the contextual nature of his work on the pathway of being “African” is such a contentious issue that it may sound slightly pretentious, because although there are articles that clearly indicate this (see 2.1-2.3 on “oral theology, “Zionist theology” and “Jesus as *nanga?*”), the remaining five articles on the “African pathway” deal predominantly with

feminist interpretation and liberation theology's relevance for our context at the time. Obviously, there is an awareness for doing theology in the South African context, but that does not necessarily qualify it as being "African" contextual theology. Put differently, there is the same (if not more!) evidence that the contextual nature is (also) Eurocentric in orientation, being done by a White male, and that the particular contextual pathway's identity could have been more self-critical and sensitive towards this.

In conclusion: I sincerely recommend this work as a critical resource and tool in determining systematic theology in South Africa's past, present and future condition. The second forthcoming volume on *Pathways in Ethics* is eagerly awaited.