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REVIEW

PATHWAYS IN ETHICS:JUSTICE INTERPRETATION DISCOURSE ECONOMICS.

NAUDÉ, P.J. (Stellenbosch: Sun press, 2016).
235 pp. ISBN: 978-1-928357-15-5

This collection of essays in theological ethics by one of the leading Reformed (theologians and) ethicists of his generation in South Africa is a welcome contribution to anyone – especially younger and upcoming generations – interested in how to theologize in a crucial period of our post-apartheid/colonial history. His work shows clearly some of the most important shifts, developments, features, and challenges concerning how theological ethics had changed in South Africa after 1994. Though this work is not per se in theology, but in ethics (see title), I deliberately use theology and ethics in tandem, because theology and ethics clearly cannot be separated in his mind. There is indeed an intimate reciprocal bond between his earlier *Pathways in Theology – Ecumenical, African and Reformed* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2015) and this collection of *Pathways in Ethics – Justice, Interpretation, Discourse and Economics*. Just as there was a clear and particular (socio-political) ethical antenna in his earlier *Pathways in Theology*, so too is there a clear and particular living (Reformed, contextual, and confessional) theology in *Pathways in Ethics*.

This is of course nothing new in Naudé's oeuvre, because on numerous other occasions, e.g. *Neither calendar nor clock. Perspective on the Belhar Confession* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010), he has shown how (Reformed) theology (and confessions) has a very particular (ethical) contemporary significance. Although this work collects most of his later writings between 2005 and 2014 – with the exception of one essay, his unpublished inaugural address in 1996 – we should not be tempted to see this collection on ethics as an addendum to his work that either tries to complement, correct, or even contradict his earlier work. To read this collection of essays on ethics in this fashion would be to misread his theological oeuvre in general, because Naudé has an acute awareness of how to do theology within and for different spaces and times. In fact, in the foreword he comments that these different descriptions of rubrics in his theology and ethics are not the building blocks of grand design of which he sets out in the beginning, but rather contours of a particular road and pathway his theology and ethics has shown over the years. These contours come to the fore only after challenges were seen, the invitations accepted, and the creative and original theological work had emerged. Whereas in *Pathways in Theology* it was within the contours of “Ecumenical, African and Reformed”, in *Pathways in Ethics* it is among the coordinates of “Justice, Interpretation, Discourse and Economics”. At first glance it may seem worlds apart (on different maps), but a mere first reading of his work soon reveals their close connection (as part of the same route-and-calling). Naudé provides us with a expansive bridge between the two works when he comments as follows in the preface: “My commitment to an ecumenical Christian tradition with a socially engaged Reformed focus; an acute contextual awareness shaped primarily by events in South Africa and on the African continent, seen from a global perspective; advancement of what one could broadly call humanisation and justice, with a specific heart for socially marginalised people and the natural environment, which has no voice of their own; an inter-disciplinary approach that makes room for synergy among theology, philosophy, hermeneutics and – later in my writings – economics and business.” (x).

It is against this background that we encounter four essays on “Justice and Humanity,” “Interpretation,” “Moral Discourse,” and “Business and Economics” each time. Instead of now providing some noteworthy details pertaining to each of these four well-balanced sections, I rather propose to briefly name and discuss a few other significant areas of interest in his work that run through from start to finish. Not only are we reviewing Naudé in this manner by thoroughly engaging his work – reading between the lines, interpreting and going after and even beyond him – but we also hopefully continue with his work by sensing and exploring some potential within it of which he is probably (un)consciously aware of.

A particular recurring theme throughout his work is the significance of doing “public theology”. Already in his previously unpublished inaugural address in 1996 at the University of Port Elizabeth, he – still without naming the concept “public theology” – articulates his vision for a theology focused upon the “whole” of reality whereby it reserves not for itself a “last word” or higher status, but rather constitute itself as a necessary partner in the trans-disciplinary search for knowledge (77). Naudé practices what he preaches when he, for instance at the opening address at the NTSSA (New Testament Society in South Africa) a few years later (2005), questioned their awareness, commitment, and contribution to the construction of a public theology in South Africa (96-102). Such self-secularisation by theology – whereby we either isolate ourselves from other colleagues across and beyond disciplinary boundaries, or specialize in areas few could or even want to question you, or abstract our disciplines from any degree of public good, resulting in inevitable imperialistic tendencies/motives (67-68) – does not mean that we need to return (default) to the liberationist trajectory so eminent in theology before 1994. It is precisely on this point where Naudé’s reading of how to do academic theology post-1994 becomes so interesting, because on either sides of the spectrum we cannot continue with mere echoing either the mode or sentiments of the past. Those ignorant of the inherent socio-political nature of (Reformed) theology, as well as those who assumes unconsciously the mere obviousness of theology in the public domain, are challenged to rethink the best mode for theology’s public presence, contribution, and witness in South Africa post -1994. Contra to what many public intellectuals initially expected – including theologians – was the discovery that the struggle was not over; in fact, it actually intensified from a struggle into various struggles. It is against this background that Naudé’s most pressing concern and contribution comes to the fore, namely first to expose the prophetic discourse inadequacy in engaging with interdisciplinary dialogue and policymaking (see especially articles on “What has Accra to do with New York?; “Is prophetic discourse adequate to address global economic justice?”; and “Economic policy and theological reflection in South Africa”); and secondly, that we as theologians need to turn to the economy as our most important discussion interlocutor for public theology in the 21st century.

Does the above imply that Naudé entirely rejects the prophetic trajectory’s – which played such a crucial role during the struggle against apartheid–presence and potential contribution for theology in the public domain? This is where it becomes so interesting, because it is not necessarily the case. On the one hand, he is aware and in fact credits the strengths of the prophetic discourse, but on the other hand argues that

this primary and dominant mode of theologizing has to make way for a new mode of theologizing, namely public theology that is better able and equipped for interdisciplinary discussion and policymaking. To Naudé's credit we must also acknowledge and point towards the fact that in a number of the other essays he is by no means rejecting or even betraying the preferential option for the poor, which the prophetic theology has taught us (see especially the second article on "In defence of partisan justice"). This solidarity with marginalised people are not (necessarily) left behind when he argues that we need to enter spaces and places of power where decisions and policies are discussed and formed. However, there still seem to be an indication in his work that prophetic theology needs to take a back seat in this new dispensation, allowing for a more predominantly priestly mode of theologizing in the public domain. Stated differently, what becomes problematic is that Naudé represents a very specific and particular form of prophetic theology that surely is prone to this kind of critique. Such a limited, partial, closed, and even hubristic practice of prophetic theology should indeed be exposed, but surely that is not the only form of prophetic theology our tradition and history has to offer? It is crucial to take cognizance of the fact that the prophetic trajectory has manifested itself in various kinds of theology over the years – from black liberationist, to contextual, to Kairos, to confessional, to (even) public theology. To oppose so clearly the prophetic tradition over against the emergence of public theology does not necessarily give enough credit to the *living, evolving, open, changing, receiving* nature of prophetic theology within the Reformed tradition of which he also knows so much (see for instance the great article on "Why is a multiplicity of confessions particular to the Reformed tradition?"). Obviously there are indications, manifestations and proponents within this trajectory and tradition that contradict this, but just as the Reformed story in South Africa is a story of many stories (Smit), so too we can say that the story of the prophetic role of the church in South Africa is a story of many stories.

Beside the above lies a particular truth that goes to the heart of the Reformed tradition, namely that the Word continues to speak for itself. What it asks of us is not primarily whether and how we speak, but do we expect and think that God still speaks to us, and should we thus really listen, hear, and obey? It is precisely for this reason that a particular line within the Reformed tradition and history has taught us that prophetic witness – at least in the line of Calvin and Barth – refers primarily to the proclamation of Jesus Christ, as the Lord of Life, who continuously calls us anew, to seek justice for all. Stated differently, before we discern, struggle, and exchange the prophetic for a more priestly (or even kingly) mode of doing theology in the public domain, I sense that the prophetic

tradition has a deep truth to share, namely that, before we even set out to do our theology, there is a (prophetic) W/word that speaks anew to us. Public theology as prophetic theology is neither primarily something we have nor actually do, because we are always in need to receive, to hear, and thus can only witness to Him who is indeed public ... and prophetic.

(Is this not the actual key that unlocks the great truth that the prophetic is not just and merely concerned about ethics, but a great theological truth that time and time again disrupts our supposed ethics or public theology? Is such an understanding of the prophetic tradition not precisely the reason for the inextricable bond between theology and ethics with which we have started this review?)

In short, I truly recommend Naudé's work, because it not only maps some of the most important shifts in the mode theology has been present in the public domain in South Africa, but also challenges us to discern carefully the various ways possible for us to go after Piet Naudé's legacy.