AOSIS

Some reflections on the genealogy of the 'Pretoria model': Towards a definition of theological education at a public university

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In this article, the author engages with the question 'what is so theological about theological education', which he calls the genealogy of theology. This matter is approached from a very specific vantage point as the author was the former Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria (South Africa) and has been engaged in this research project over the last 5 years as the Faculty was under severe review as to its composition and ultimately its very future. This article endeavours to bring to the surface the underlying theology of the author and the paradigm he is operating from. It concludes with a definition of theology as he sees it, but with the explicit qualification of it being situated at a research-intensive university competing for a notable position on the ranking indexes of world universities. A new niche is thus opening up for theology (*vis-à-vis* a seminary or even a Christian university), namely, a 'scholarly endeavour of believers in the public sphere in order to inquire into a multi-dimensional reality in a manner that matters'.

Keywords: Definition of theology; Theological education; Meta-reality; Epistemology; Pluralism; Eccentrism; Truth; Ecodomy; Justice.

Raison d'être

This contribution is, in a certain sense, the conclusion of my research project of the position of theology at a public university. Several publications have emerged from this (Buitendag 2014, 2016; Buitendag & Simuț 2017a, 2017b). This research was undertaken for two reasons: the position and future of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria had been under severe review (2013–2016), and the Faculty had celebrated her centenary in the year 2017. The author was Dean of the Faculty at the time (2010–2018) and took it upon himself to address these issues inquiringly and systematically.

However, there is still 'unfinished business'. This is not only with regard to the historical value of the transformation of the Faculty, but also as a certain *apologia*[1] for my view of theology in particular and therefore a sort of auto-ethnographic inquiry. This is supposed to bring to the surface the underlying theological principles of the 'Pretoria model', or at least the one that I have promoted. I owe it to my colleagues to share some contours of the reference I have been working from.[2]

When the renowned New Testament scholar Marcus Borg turned 70 in 2012, he prepared a special sermon in his home church.[3] The idea for a book was born from this exercise and he realised that, 't[T]he convictions that have emerged in my life seem to me to be important for Christians more generally', and in the Preface he states that, 't[T]his book is personal and more than personal' (Borg 2014:4, 1). It is in this vein that I present my view of inquiry theology at a public university here, and in another article I put the focus on the academia as such, especially with regard to its contingency at Pretoria.

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1. With this Latin expression, I deliberately allude to John Henry Newman's book, '*Apologia pro vita sua*' (2005), written in response to attacks for joining the Roman Catholic Church in 1843. His honest and passionate defence consists of a personal history of his religious convictions. Newman won respect and admiration and clarified perceptions among readers of every faith (see the back cover of the book).

2. *The world as I see it* is the title of a book by Albert Einstein, which is a compilation of essays published towards the end of his life. Despite the severe critique from churches, Einstein said clearly, 'I am a deeply religious man' (2000:5), and 'I maintain that cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest incitement to scientific research' (2000:28).

3. The Trinity Episcopal Cathedral of Portland in Oregon, US.

Note: The collection entitled 'Eben Scheffler Festschrift', sub-edited by Jurie H. le Roux (University of Pretoria) and Christo Lombaard (University of South Africa).

The first of the publications mentioned took as a vantage point the renowned publication of John Henry Newman, 'The Idea of a University' (1982), and developed that conviction in terms of the 21st century and Africa, giving it a more contingent position. The outcome of the research was that especially at a research-intensive university, theology should be exercised as an *inquiry-based* scientific discipline that can indeed contribute to the world ranking of universities, as in the case of the University of Pretoria.[4] This, however, demands a specific understanding of (1) what theology is and of (2) what a university is. Preliminary definitions were subsequently provided.

However, the theological background of both these definitions was not argued, or at least not adequately. This is the aim of the last two publications of this project. The first focuses on the genealogy (DNA) and the second on the archaeology (history) of theological education, with special reference to the University of Pretoria.

The underlying theme I have chosen for the conclusion of this project, 'w[W]hat is so theological about a faculty of theology at a public university?', is an expression I borrowed from David Kelsey (1992). Theological education is an equivocal notion that urgently needs revision and contestation.[5] South Africa is not comparable to the United States of America, nor to other countries in Africa or any other continent. We have to find solutions, 'betwixt and between' even in a state of liminality. Venter (2016) is therefore right when he states the challenge:

> A new way of doing Theology is required, a new re-imagining that would take its locale at a public institution within the specific (post-) apartheid context with utmost seriousness … This would require a rethinking of the traditional divide between religion and Theology, and the fragmentation of the sea of disciplines. (p. 5)

In the publication mentioned, I referred to Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum* or 'faith seeking understanding'. I argued that the theologian's task is not only to determine the object of inquiry, but also to be guided by the inherent rationality of the object itself (Buitendag 2016:3). This needs clarification. Farley (1988:18) argues that the desire to understand does not have a restricted object.

Kaufman (1996:loc 2922)[6] has been instructive in understanding the ramifications of this *dictum* and I apply them to my view of theology. Instead of trying to examine the content of faith with the implications of trying to understand

dogmas, the other way of understanding this expression of Anselm is to rather put the emphasis on the *knowing subject*. Theology then becomes 'an inquiry into the meaning in human life of believing (or "faithing")'. Faith is then seen generically as people who:

> live out of and on the basis of their trust and loyalty to what they take to be the most meaningful, precious, important in life; that human lives are always (often?) oriented by some (perhaps implicit) 'centre[*s*] of value'. (Kaufman 1996:loc 2922)

Tanner (2002:205) agrees: 'Humans are active participants, and therefore fully integrated into, physical and natural processes'. Humans, therefore, act out of underlying faith-commitments, which are central to the understanding of human being and well-being. This, contends Kaufman (1996:loc. 2929), makes theology a critical and integral part of university studies.

I concur noticeably with Tracy (2013:5) when he argues that before engaging with the question 'what is theology?', the prerequisite is what is the 'self-understanding of the theologian?'. Beneath the different forms of pluralism lies a common commitment among many theologians to understand and subsequently to partake in genuine public discourse.

Van Huyssteen (2017:6) and others augment this understanding by interpreting faith biologically as well: 'However, this would imply that theology, and theological reflection and knowledge, is not only shaped by cultural evolution but is also definitively shaped by the deeper biological roots of human rationality'. This article ends with a personal reflection of theological inquiry and consequently with possible options for the future of theology at the University of Pretoria.

Pluralism and eccentrism

Tracy (2013) has set the agenda with his seminal work on *Christian theology and the age of pluralism* in which he concludes that the appropriate Christian reaction in this trajectory would be 'analogical imagination'. Interestingly, his analysis of the context often draws more attention than his solution.[7]

What sets the agenda really of Tracy's work is what he calls the 'publicness in Systematic Theology', which offers an extensive exposition of the three publics of theology: *society*, *academy* and *church* (again, note the absence of the in/definite articles). Theologians do not only recognise a plurality of 'publics', but are increasingly internalising this plurality in their own discourses.

Tracy's (2013:5) remark, 'w[W]hat is the self-understanding of the theologian?', links up with my interpretation of Anselm's *dictum* of 'faith seeking understanding' and that

the dimension of the subject as such is easily overlooked. My contention is to be very cautious with the subject-object distinction of everyday consciousness as 'that "dome" of consciousness in which we experience ourselves as "in here" and the world as "out there"' (Borg 2014:loc. 464):

> The deconstruction of both the knowing subject and the known object renders knowledge perspectival, contingent, relative, and subject to suspicion in regard to the subject's interests, values, and social location. (Cooey 2002:174)

I have tweaked Tracy's triad of society, academy and church, as the external form of the theologian's internal conviction, leading to a genuine public discourse. I split 'academy' into university and theology to refine the focus and I have interpreted church as *faith communities*. The former I do because, under a university, I interpret a *public (i.e. secular) research-intensive* university (*vis-à-vis* a Christian university, seminary or Bible School) competing for a position on the world rankings, and with the latter I do transcend denominational impediments and even religions.

A prerequisite to understanding my argument is that I am *not* aiming towards a sort of syncretism of religions, nor do I want to develop a sociological phenomenology and least of all do I want to sacrifice faith communities. Nevertheless, to honour my thesis of moving above differences to a meta-level (not a linear *post* position), pluralism as such should be respected and cherished.[8] Christian faith, for example, is a *particular* commitment to a *particular* narratival understanding of reality. It is about the believing individual within a particular faith-community rather than a grand scheme that justifies overarching religious systems of thoughts.[9] John A. T. Robinson wrote more than 50 years ago that: 'The question of God is the question whether this depth of being is a reality or an illusion, not whether a Being exists beyond the bright blue sky, or anywhere else' (Robinson 1963:55).

This *faith-based* approach is coconstructively speaking from both the inside and the outside, and my main argument for the difference between (a faculty of) theology and (a department of) religious studies at Humanities is thus a *faith* declared (or confessed), presuppositional, reflective mindset. Theology is not mere anthropology. One speaks *from* faith and the other speaks *about* faith. Theology has therefore a principally distinctive epistemology, and yet is very much valid (Laermans & Verschraegen 2001:11).

Scholars in Humanities have, in turn, their own (authentic) presuppositions and no one is superior to the other: 'The university both is and is not a public community. It is but one subculture within the broader corporate life, the

public. The university has its own varied traditions of research … None of its claims is immune to critique from any quarter …' (Brown 2002:134).

Concerning my underlying premise that we have to move beyond a mere 'post' position rather to a 'meta' position, I do want to refer firstly to the exciting suggestion of Kritzinger (2008), who understands missiology[10] as *encounterology*:

> This dimension of the encounter also has a more constructive purpose. It urges the interlocutors to explain to each other the basic message, beliefs, and practices of their religious traditions, in relation to the other dimensions of the praxis cycle/field. (Kritzinger 2008:781)

Although a huge step forward in the interfaith debate of overcoming the opposing *us and them*, the challenge would be in the end to engage on a transversal plane where *truth and wisdom* are humbly and devotedly pursued.[11] Whitehead (1960) formulated it (philosophically though) aptly:

> The dogmas of religion are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the religious experience of mankind. In exactly the same way, the dogmas of physical science are the attempts to formulate in precise terms the truths disclosed in the sense–perception of mankind. (p. 58)

This obviously applies to the discourse among different sciences, as illustrated in a dialogue about ethics, human nature and the brain between Jean-Pierre Changeux, a neuroscientist, and the philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur states that it is an interdisciplinary enterprise to fit together sciences which have different points of reference and, most important, it 'does not take place within a given discipline' (Changeux & Ricoeur 2000:87).

Bhaskar has since moved [12] beyond 'critical realism' and now initiates a philosophy of *meta-reality*. This is a radical extension, yet a proleptic enhancement of critical realism. This philosophy maintains critical realism, but at the same time transcends it to a space where 'the existence of and necessity for non-dual states and phases of being' emerge and the critique of a disenchanted reality is addressed (Bhaskar 2012:165). He contends that 'at every level of our being we are individually, collectively, socially, globally as one, we live or die together in mutual dependence upon the ecosystem that we have been violating' (Bhaskar 2012:93).

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8. I very much associate myself with the Postliberal Theology of the Yale Divinity School in the 1980s where theologians like Hans Frei, Paul Holmer, David Kelsey and George Lindbeck rejected both the Enlightenment appeal to a 'universal rationality' and the liberal assumption of an immediate religious experience common to all humanity. 'Postliberal theology is introduced as a *tertium quid* solution between these extremes of modernism and propositionalism' (Michener 2013:3). In this regard, it is very similar to the concept of postfoundationalism.

9. Beyers (2018:8) sees it correctly when he states that scriptural reasoning reflects a 'post-liberal particularism', acknowledging and preserving the unique identity of each religion. Scriptural reasoning does not seek commonalities or 'consensus', but acknowledges the particularity of each religion.

10. The Pretoria model makes provision in its Department of Religion, for the discipline of 'Missiology'. During the Faculty's Lekgotlas, I argued that this grouping could compromise and even 'contaminate' the character of the Department. Krüger sees the dominant position of Missiology as a residue of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) of not having a tradition of *Religionswissenschaft* as in the case of Netherdutch Reformed Church (NDRC): 'The study of non-Christian religions would take place in Science of Religion, well taught but nevertheless understood as a junior partner to Missiology and capped by a Christian *theologia religionum* – not by theorising arising from the history and phenomenon of religion as a generic field as such' (Krüger 2017:9).

11. Confer my previous remark about the favoured position Christianity has in the Department of Religion Studies with the sub-discipline of Missiology.

12. McGrath (2004:140–141) sees in Roy Bhaskar a particularly congenial dialogue partner in formulating McGrath's concept of scientific theology. He commends the contribution of Bhaskar's critical realism in this discourse: 'Bhaskar's critical realism is not being adopted as an *a priori* foundation for theology, which would be to determine its foundation and norms in advance; Bhaskar's critical realism is being used in an *ancillary*, not a foundational role; Bhaskar's critical realism is grounded *a posteriori*, in that its central ideas rest on a sustained engagement with the social and natural structures of the world, rather than a dogmatic *a priori* determination of what those structures should be, and consequently how they should be investigated' (pp. 140–141).

Luhmann's thinking supports this transversal plane of engagement. The most distinctive religious form is the distinction between immanence and transcendence. Laermans and Verschraegen (2001:11) see a paradigm shift in the later Luhmann, which they call a second shift in his thinking: 'the combination of the theory of autopoietic systems with a radically constructivist epistemology'. You must draw a distinction; otherwise, you will not observe anything. Religion transforms indefiniteness to definiteness. 'Religion, then, does not speak of the unobservable as such. It deals with the unity of the distinction observable/ unobservable, with "that which makes the observable itself unobservable"' (Laermans & Verschraegen 2001:13). The real reality or 'the reality of reality' is precisely that which we do not observe when we observe reality (Laermans & Verschraegen 2001:14):

> Translating this into the language of functional analysis, we can say that the fundamental problem of the paradoxical world can be 'solved' (i.e. transformed into minor problems) by religion. Plenitude and voidness is the same, meaningful and meaningless life is the same, order and disorder is the same because the world can be constituted as unity only. But since we cannot accept this last unity as it is, we have to replace it by easier paradoxes: by forms. (Luhmann 1985:9)

Laermans and Verschraegen (2001:15) cite Luhmann proposing that 'communication is always then religious when it observes immanence from the point of view of transcendence . . . Only when viewed from transcendence do events in this world acquire a religious meaning'. Reality is a *res interpres et interpretandum*.

In a work of astonishing virtuosity, Kelsey (2009) develops his account of 'eccentric' human existence in terms of the triune God: God who creates, who promises eschatological consummation and who reconciles. The reality and value of human beings and 'how they ought to be set into and oriented towards their ultimate and proximate contexts are all eccentric, grounded outside themselves in the concrete ways in which the triune God relates to all that is not God, including humankind' (Kelsey 2009:1008). Jesus in his normative role and canonical identity serves as the grammatically paradigmatic humanity. Jesus is both epistemically and ontologically mysterious to us (Kelsey 2009:1051). Human beings are only free as *eccentric* beings, that is, related to in a threefold way by the triune God. Reconciliation makes one aware of estrangement (Kelsey 2009:1036).

This understanding concurs with Pannenberg's understanding of human being. He clearly states that: 't[*T*]he world is no longer a home for man; it is only material for his transforming activity' (Pannenberg 1970:2). The unique freedom, says Pannenberg, of the newly discovered anthropology is 'to inquire and to move beyond every given regulation of his existence [and] is called his "openness to the world"' (Pannenberg 1970:3). Humanity is constantly open to new things, beyond the world and lives under the constant pressure of a surplus of drives. Human chronic need and infinite dependence presuppose something outside itself (Pannenberg 1970:7–10).

Truth and meta-reality

Farley (1988) makes the following important statement about the indispensability of wisdom at a university:

> For knowledge is distorted when it, wittingly or unwittingly, serves unscrupulous social powers, when it violates the concreteness and complexity of things, or when it abandons the wisdom of the past. (p. 17)

Universities need the wisdom that they have been based on historically in order to develop 'overall frameworks and core traditions', which are 'academically mediated' by these traditions (Ford 2007:341–342). Ford concludes by stating that 'the twenty-first century needs some universities where there can be wisdom-seeking study and conversation about what divides and unites people, and where some from diverse communities might be formed in thoughtful collegiality' (Ford 2007:347).

Luhmann (1985) supports this idea of a coherent comprehension meaning too:

> The paradoxical constitution of self-reference pervades all social life. It is nevertheless a special problem in social life. The question of the ultimate meaning can be raised at any time and at any occasion but not all the time. If it can be reduced to one question among others, the meaning of the whole becomes a special problem within the whole. Then, society develops *forms* of coping with this problem, of answering this question, *forms which deparadoxize the world.* (p. 8)

Transcendence is underpinning all human activity and implicitly all life. A transcendental identification manifests in consciousness, non-duality and co-presence, says Bhaskar in his turn: 'Thus everything is at once concretely singularised and at the same time dialectically universalised' (Bhaskar 2012:259). Difference and non-identity are therefore sustained. This philosophy of an expanded ontology of a 're-enchanted reality' goes beyond critical realism, precisely through realism, and is consistent with any or even no faith.

This view coincides with Milbank's when he sees a certain homology or even isomorphism between metaphysical philosophy on the one hand and political philosophy on the other (Milbank 2013). 'The truth of things of also the reality of things' (Farley 1988:152). The human mind is wired for transcendence. Van Den Hoogen sees transcendence in a framework of *immanent mysticism*, and states enlighteningly: 'Religion is about survival, about history and about being touched by God, by human beings' (Van Den Hoogen 2010:177). Religion is a theoretical and practical system expressing their 'conceptions and expectations of touching God and being touched by God' (Van Den Hoogen 2010:177).

Krüger (2017) maintains faith in this realm and coined the term 'metaphysical mysticism' that transcends paradigmatic theology and philosophy:

> Rather, it refers to a kind of thought and insight into, an understanding of, reality: transcending, radicalising, relativising yet appreciating all constructions of the meaning of things, to

which practical expression of such insight in the form of attitudes, emotions, thinking patterns, words and institutions are added in religions. (p. 2)

On a meta-level, the separate peaks of the one mountain range merge, not as a final destiny, but as 'signposts to a horizon of ultimate silence' (Krüger 2018:v).[13] It is a truth that lies ahead and veiled in mystery, yet of a way for us to participate (Ward 2007:224).

Krüger (2016:12) envisages, thus, an ultimate horizon at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria of a *pax fidei* entailing *Totality* and *Horizon*. The step taken 2 years ago to establish an *Interfaith Commons* at the Faculty[14] points clearly in this direction. This links directly to Moltmann's view that theology must abandon its confinement to the church to search with all others, 'truth of the whole and the salvation of a torn and disrupted world' (Moltmann 2003:7).

Kärkkäinen (2013:10) leans on LeRon-Shults to set guidelines for some positive engagement from a Postfoundational approach.[15] A nuanced and mutually agreed discussion should take place:

Interpreted experience engenders and nourishes all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience;

The objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims;

Rational judgement is an activity of socially situated individuals, and the cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality;

Explanation aims for universal, trans-contextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations. (Kärkkäinen 2013:10)

This resonates with a radically constructivist epistemology that can lay the contours for a meta-reality. Žižek (2005:359) is clear that there is no relativity or plurality of truths because, in any concrete constellation, the truth is bound to emerge in some contingent detail.[16] Truth is always *context dependent*,

therefore not absolute but of some situation. In every plural field, a particular point articulates truth that cannot be relativised; in this sense, 'truth is always *One*'. The heading of this reflection of Žižek is rather important for a meta-reality: *for they know not what they do*.[17] This reminds of Luhmann: the real reality or 'the reality of reality' is precisely that which we do not observe when we observe reality.

Stewardship and justice

God has created the household of life and human beings to live in community with one another.

We are created in God's own image and likeness and have the responsibility to take care of God's good creation. The Christian notion of *oikos* resonates with the African understanding of *ubuntu/botho/uzima* (life in wholeness) and *ujamaa* (life in community). They embrace among others, the values of the fullness of life, full participation in all life processes including in the economy and ecology. It further entails the just care, use, sharing and distribution of resources and elements of life. Where the above and life-affirming relationships have been violated, the institution of restorative, redistributive and certificatory (wisdom) justice is necessary. These principles of justice, reparation, restoration and reconciliation, forgiveness, mutual love and dignity for all God's creation ought to be promoted ecumenically as bases for constructive critique of global capitalism, which increasingly violates life-in-abundance. (WRC 2007)[18]

In 2014, I introduced the concept of *ecodomy* to the Faculty, and it was accepted as the overarching Faculty Research Theme (FRT) for the decade to follow. I encountered this concept for the first time in a publication of the World Council of Churches (Muller-Fahrenholz 1995). He addresses the current world crises with regard to ecological and social disequilibria. We need new visions for 'household politics' (*oikodomia*) on the one hand and a reinterpretation of the traditional 'aliens in a foreign land' (*paroikia*) on the other hand. The constructive and immanent thrust of *ecodomical* communities must incorporate the element of critical non-conformity. This, of course, demands a new paradigm (cf. Buitendag 1997:881–882).

The underlying concept is taken from 1 Corinthians 14:12 in the Greek New Testament, *oikodomé*,[19] where it is used in reference to God's household or total cosmology. Ecodomy looks at religious worldviews and norms, but has a strong interdisciplinary research focus on aspects of global justice, human dignity, reconciliation, moral formation and responsible citizenship. Ecodomy's central message of a holistic approach to life looks at the interrelations of the

13. Krüger's (2018:v) hermeneutical approach is as follows: 'sound historical-critical understanding of the context of the various traditions and figures; reconstruction of the subjective intentional structure of such persons and their teachings; design, by the author, of a theoretical map of the overall terrain of "metaphysical mysticism", on which all such journeys of the spirit are to be located, while providing a theoretical context for understanding them tendentionally (i.e. taking the ultimate drift of their thinking essentially to transcend their subjective intentions); drawing out, within the space available, some political (taken in a wide sense) implications from the above, such as religio-political stances as well as ecological and gender implications'.

14. The principle of erecting a facility on the eastern side of the Faculty's current building was approved by the Department of Institutional Advancement at the University of Pretoria and the raising of necessary funds is currently in process. This facility will reinforce the nature of the Faculty as an inclusive centre of critical theological inquiry, encountering and embarkation on meta-reality. It will be a learning space, student-centred, consistent with the University's goal of social responsiveness and impact on society, and will enhance the Faculty research theme of *Ecodomy* [stewardship of creation] in a very practical way.

15. Wentzel van Huyssteen has published extensively on postfoundationalism and I deliberately use a recent article of his delivered at the University of Pretoria, as the tacit background for my argument here (Van Huyssteen 2018).

16. In another article, I touched upon the fruitful perspective of William Alston that could augment this view: 'The putative direct awareness of God and the reaction to such an awareness is, in the derivative sense of the word, also an indication that God exists. Only in a "doxastic" practice is it first possible to determine whether a subject really experiences a given object, so that "epistemic justification" exists for the witnessing of faith. For this reason, "religious experience: is not a purely subjective phenomenon either, but has to be interpreted within a larger framework' (Buitendag 2009:8).

17. Žižek bases this on the mathematical principle that the total permutations are the square of the variables, thus two variables would have four options ($2^2 = 4$). The syllogism goes as follows: (1) I know what I know; (2) I know what I know not; (3) I don't know what I know not; and (4) I don't know what I do know.

18. https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/neoliberal-paradigm/dar-es-salaam-statement-on-linking-poverty-wealth-and-ecology.

19. Kok (2015:3) claims that: 't[7]he verbs οἰκοδομέω, οἰκοδομεῖν' and οἰκοδομὴ(ν) [noun] (1 Cor 14:12) denote the act of building or constructing or edifying, or the result thereof (a building/construction), whereas the noun οἰκοδόμος refers to the "builder of a house" or "architect" (Ac 4:11; cf. Lk 20:17). These terms (οἰκοδομέω/ οἰκοδομὴ[ν]) are used in the New Testament in a literal 7 (the act of building) *and* a figurative sense of the word (edifying or edification; cf. 1 Cor 14:12; 2 Cor 12:19; Rm 15:2; 1 Cor 14:3, 26)'.

economy, ecology, theology, religion, life and poverty to the self and society.[20]

The theme intends to address issues of ethical thinking and ethical decision-making on various societal issues and spheres of life while taking religious worldviews, values and norms into consideration. The project is furthermore indispensable to the building of leadership (human capital) and the processes of ethical thinking and ethical decision-making in both the tertiary environment and society at large. Important foci include aspects of social justice, human dignity, reconciliation, moral formation and responsible citizenship. In short, these aspects are directed towards a theme such as 'Life in its fullness' with keywords, including the well-being of the household, economy, ecology, theology, religion, life-giving and impoverishment.

Conclusion: A definition of theology at a public university

I have not proposed any complete or even definable theology. Theology is far too wide, too deep and too high for such attempts.[21] My approach has an unfolding nature. As it develops, it becomes refined and expands laterally and existentially. Moltmann (2000) says it powerfully in terms of his personal career as a theologian:

> For me, theology was, and still is, an adventure of ideas. It is an open, inviting path … The road emerged only as I walked it. And my attempts to walk it are of course determined by my personal biography, and by political context and historical kairos in which I live. (p. xv)

For the sake of open discourse, comprehensiveness and comprehension, I am[22] willing to barter in my theology the classical term of 'apologetic theology' for a decentred and 'alienated theology', with an approach, '*as if* one were a stranger to one's own narrative tradition, seeing and critiquing one's own tradition from the vantage point of the other's narrative tradition' (Fasching 2002:167). When Tracy (2013) discusses the social portrait of the theologian concerning the three publics of theology, he states:

> Yet perhaps some explicit reflection on the several publics of the contemporary theologian, indeed of several internalized selves, may aid us all at least to hear one another once again. In that renewed conversation, we may well find that anyone who reflects on ultimate issues is really a 'single one', but, precisely as such, one who does not retreat to privateness. (p. 6)

Theology is to me about the creation and the Creator, or more correctly, an attempt to be a responsible discourse partner in the public domain in the human being's search for meaning and comprehensiveness. I am of the opinion that theology can contribute to this enterprise. To experience the real as creation is to acknowledge that the real is not absolute, but contingent and therefore changing and fragile (Farley 1996:72). Theology has a distinctive yet responsible epistemology. Inquiry is indeed not without presuppositions, but at least it has a rational and an accountable claim.[23]

Therefore, I define theology as follows (Buitendag 2014):

> Theology is a scholarly endeavour of believers in the public sphere in order to inquire[24] into a multi-dimensional[25] reality in a manner that matters. (p. 6)

My engagement with insights from physics and pieces of evidence from biology shaped me gradually to reflect increasingly in a more inductive and an *a posteriori* way on reality. The *creatio passiva* [created result] gradually becomes the focus and not so much the *creatio activa* [creating act] as such in contemporary theology. Theistic language of revelation is neither heard nor appreciated by people outside orthodox theology. I realised increasingly that the fierce resistance against a natural theology caused much damage to Protestant theology. It became elitist and removed itself from the world debate.

I sense in my own mind a shift away from discontinuity to *continuity* with nature and subsequently epiphenomenal and epigenetic processes, although I fully realise that humans do not live only in nature, but in language and story as well.

I fully support Nancey Murphy's concept of the ontology of human beings being 'non-reductive physicalism' (Murphy & Brown 2007:48, 148). Meta-theories like constructive critical realism and integral theory can open a trajectory of addressing global issues of the 21st century.

Kroesbergen (2019) argued that Wittgensteinian philosophy can offer a valuable contribution to the debate about the kind of religion that has become the most visible component of Christianity in Africa. All of these approaches mistakenly assume that it is clear *what it is* to believe in the reality of spirits and miracles. Wittgensteinian philosophy of religion, however, shows which concept of reality is at work in what people say about religion. It does so by providing reminders often making use of anthropological material.

This falls within the re-emerging brand of ethnographically informed philosophy of religion.

23. This, perhaps, is the shortcoming of a definition like that of Kärkkäinen: 'Systematic/constructive theology is an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical) and in the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures, and living faiths. It aims at a coherent, inclusive, dialogical, and hospitable vision' (2013:12–13). Farley (1988:64) does much better: 'Theology is the reflectively procured insight and understanding which encounter with a specific religious faith evokes'.

20. A publication, 'Ecodomy – Life in its Fullness', was subsequently published by some members of the Faculty offering a coherent and conceptual portrayal of aspects regarding Ecodomy (see Human 2017). This was based on an international conference of the Faculty in September 2014 in Pretoria.

21. A more extensive version of my theology as such appears in Veldsman et al. (2017:102–106).

22. Inspired by Marcus Borg's view of 'personal and more than personal', I have attempted to substantiate my engaged or existential approach to theologise and endeavour to get to grips with reality from my faith in Jesus, the Son of God. It is an illusion that one can speak from some neutral vantage point.

24. I have done away with the word 'understand' in my definition, seeing that I have a metareality as the ultimate; I seek for a neologism making provision for reflexion and feedback loops. It is not under-standing but 'above-standing', moving onto a transversal plane or the 'mountain tops'.

25. Farley (1988:32) warns against the fragility of knowledge and states that everything actual is 'dimensionally complex'.

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