

Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of the *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* (*STJ*). This new theological journal is a continuation, albeit with a new face, of the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif / Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* (*NGTT*). What is the scope and vision of this new journal? It can be formulated as follows: “*STJ* is a multilingual, South-African theological journal that aims to serve academy, church and society with high-quality theological contributions. The journal’s roots in the Reformed tradition stretch back to the nineteenth century. *STJ* sees being reformed as participating in a dynamic and living tradition with a strong commitment to responsible Biblical interpretation, critical engagement with the past, ecumenicity, a practical-theological focus, and an emphasis on the public character of theological reflection. *STJ* is serious about being situated in Southern Africa and the African continent while simultaneously being aware of the global challenges for theology today.”

A few important aspects already come to the fore from this brief description. First, *STJ* is an academic theological journal that aims to serve theological discourse in South Africa through the publication of high quality contributions – hence the journal’s commitment to sound academic practices, such as a thorough peer review system and internationalisation. We believe that good theology, with the necessary accompanying responsible historical and theological hermeneutic, is sorely needed amidst the role that religion – and the critique thereof – play in our current polarised and globalising society.

Secondly, *STJ* is a multilingual journal, and at the moment we consider articles in English and Afrikaans. Dutch articles are also considered on occasion, and it is furthermore our hope that the capacity will grow to publish articles in other African languages as well in the future.

A third aspect that also arises from the above vision statement is that *STJ* (as continuation of *NGTT*) has its roots in the Reformed tradition. The first edition of *NGTT* was published in 1959, and *NGTT* in turn developed from *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel* (“The Reformed Banner”), a journal that was founded in 1933. One can argue, moreover, that these journals stand in a longer theological tradition of Stellenbosch theological journals that

stretches back to the nineteenth century. The choice for the new name, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal*, thus links *STJ* to this specific theological tradition. With the establishment of theological faculties in Pretoria and Bloemfontein this tradition broadened. We welcome the continuing need for cooperation between these faculties. If one peruse the theological contributions in *NGTT* and *Die Gereformeerde Vaandel*, as well as the contributions published in other Stellenbosch reformed theological journals in the first decades of the twentieth century and the last decades of the nineteenth century, such as *Die Soeklig / Het Zoeklicht*, *Die Ou Paaie*, and the *Gereformeerde Maandblad*, one gets a good sense of the viewpoints, controversies and tendencies that marked this reformed tradition. Reformed theology and churches in South Africa have, without doubt, a fascinating, albeit also a complex and ambivalent, history. *STJ* is conscious of the fact that it developed from this specific tradition, but also wants to affirm that this tradition is a living tradition that continuously lives with openness towards the future in the light of an honest and responsible engagement with the past. Against this background, the journal wants to publish contributions concerned with responsible Biblical interpretation, a deferential and critical engagement with the past, ecumenicity, a practical-theological focus, and an emphasis on the public character of theology.

A fourth aspect that one can highlight in light of the vision statement is the acknowledgment and celebration of the fact that the journal is situated in the Southern African and wider African context. Theological reflection that arises from or are informed by our various African contexts can contribute richly to the challenges posed by these contexts, as well as serving the global theological conversation on various important themes.

In light of these remarks above we welcome submissions to *STJ* from scholars in all the various theological disciplines, as well as from related disciplines. We also hold the view that interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research can bring further depth and renewal to our theological reflection. It is furthermore the commitment of *STJ* to make the articles published in *STJ*, and its preceding journals, as accessible as possible. Under the editorship of Gerrit Brand (2011-2013) *NGTT* became an open access journal, and we are committed to make the various editions of *NGTT* – and now also *STJ* – accessible to a broader public, thus contributing to the wider dissemination of academic theological research. We are currently digitalising the articles

of *NGTT*, and you can visit the archive on our webpage for the articles since 2000. We hope to make all the *NGTT* editions available in the future, as well as articles from some of the older journals that are part of this trajectory.

We are proud to present a diverse content for this first edition of *STJ*. We are fortunate to be able to publish several articles by highly respected international and national theologians. We can mention in this regard the article by Prof Wolfgang Huber, the well-known German theological ethicist, and former bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, entitled “Why Ethics?” that was presented in February 2015 as his inaugural address as honorary professor in the discipline group of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology at Stellenbosch University. This article – dedicated to the memory of the previous Rector of Stellenbosch University, Prof Russel Botman – offers important perspectives on the need for responsible ethical reflection in our globalizing world.

A theologian that is well known for his emphasis on the notion of responsibility, also within the context of his resistance against to Nazism, is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The seventieth anniversary of his death was commemorated worldwide in April 2015. In 2015 we also commemorate and celebrate the hundreth anniversary of the birth of Beyers Naudé, the well-known Reformed pastor and anti-apartheid activist who played such an important role in the struggle for liberation and justice in South Africa. John de Gruchy brings the legacies of Bonhoeffer and Beyers Naudé together in his insightful and informative article: “Beyers Naudé: SA’s Bonhoeffer? Celebrating the Centenary of the Birth of Beyers Naudé (1915 – 2015)”.

Several of the articles in this journal deal with issues related to the discourse on public morality. The article by Bowers-Du Toit and Forster assesses the promise of a value-driven approach to the discourse on theology and development, while Van Niekerk’s article focuses on poverty in the Karoo through the lens of the question of the implications of faith convictions for a theology of transformation. The article of Cilliers engages with the ethical-political preaching of Desmond Tutu, while Kotzé addresses in her article the implications of the concept of “liberal democracy” for biotechnology, in conversation with the political theology of Jürgen Moltmann. Van der Merwe’s article investigates the theological implications of some insights from the current interdisciplinary conversation on the concept of

“happiness,” while the important theme of hospitality is addressed in the article by Lategan, Burggraave and Vanlaere.

Several articles in this *STJ* edition enters into conversation with events, communities, or themes associated with the Reformed tradition. In this regard we can refer to the articles by Echeverria, Froneman, Jackson, Katts and Strauss. Some of these articles might ignite further discussion. The article by Compaan as well as the article by Potgieter and Van der Walt enters into conversation with debates often associated with postmodern thought, while Smit investigates Jesus’ Farewell Discourse in John 13-17 as a missional narrative.

Next to academic articles, we also want to include in *STJ* longer peer-reviewed review articles. In this edition we publish in this category Ernst Conradie’s review article of the reworked edition of the well-known Stellenbosch philosopher Anton van Niekerk’s book, *Geloof sonder sekerhede*. We also include here several book reviews. Paul Kruger reviews Ernst Conradie’s *Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on “Re-creation”*. *Studies in Religion and Environment*, whereas Cobus van Wyngaard gives his assessment of three books in a series (with Ernst Conradie as editor or co-editor) that deals respectively with issues related to reconciliation, ecumenicity, and ecclesial identity. Helené van Tonder reviews Vincent Brümmer’s *Vroom of Regsinning? Teologie in die NG Kerk*, for which the author this year received the Andrew Murray-Prize for theological literature. In addition, Lisel Joubert – who received the Andrew Murray-Gerrit Brand Prize (awarded this year for the first time, and partly named after a previous editor of *NGTT*) for her book *Ontmoeting met Heiliges* – offers her reading of John de Gruchy’s new book, *My Life in Writing*. De Gruchy was last year’s recipient of the Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Prize for his book *Led into Mystery*. The Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Prize was awarded this year to Denise Ackermann for her book *Surprised by die Man on the Borrowed Donkey*. We hope to publish in upcoming editions reviews of Ackermann’s and Joubert’s books. For an interesting video-clip of a conversation between Dirkie Smit and Denise Ackermann at the launch of *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey* at a conference in September 2014 in Stellenbosch, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5W8NQIJ-Qds>. Also of interest for South African readers is the book *The German Protestant Church in Colonial SA: The Impact of Overseas*

Work from the Beginnings until the 1920's (with Hanns Lessing as one of the editors), and it is reviewed here by Retief Müller.

One of the aims of *STJ* is to stimulate further conversation on theological themes, and with this in mind we include a section called “Discourse.” In this edition Ernst Conradie puts forward 12 theses on the place of Christian theology in multi-disciplinary conversations, with brief responses to Conradie by Wentzel van Huyssteen, Gys Loubser and Daniël Veldsman.

Robert Vosloo (*Editor: STJ*)