



Brümmer, Vincent

Vroom of regsinnig? Teologie in die NG Kerk

2013, Wellington: Bybel Media

ISBN: 9780864877185

Resensie deur Helené van Tonder

Soos met sy boek *Wat doen ons wanneer ons bid?* (2011), is Brümmer se werk *Vroom of regsinnig?* toeganklik dog swaarwigtig. Op 'n relatief beknopte manier verskaf Brümmer 'n indrukwekkende oorsig oor sommige van die belangrikste teologiese debatte in die geskiedenis van die NG Kerk. Alhoewel daar al baie oor die betrokke periode geskryf is, is die styl waarin Brümmer dit doen prysenswaardig. Dit is kerklike en intellektuele geskiedenis wat op 'n boeiende manier in gesprek tree met die (ook nie-akademiese) leser. Dit is 'n besondere helder weergawe van die ontwikkeling van teologiese en filosofiese denkstrome van die laat negentiende en vroeg twintigste eeuse NG Kerk, teen die agtergrond van 'n Europese intellektuele wêreld. Die invloed van onder andere Doedes, Van Oosterzee, Scholten, Opzoomer, Gunning, Valeton, Kuiper, en Bavinck word verreken. Wat verder voorop staan in sy werk, is die detail waarin hy die denke en werk van verskillende teologiese rolspelers van die tyd sistematies weergee in die vorming van sy argument. Onder hierdie figure tel veral Andrew Murray (jr), NJ Hofmeyr, en Johannes du Plessis.

In die eerste twee hoofstukke word die teologiese ontwikkeling van Andrew Murray en NJ Hofmeyr bespreek en die invloed wat die Réveil as kritiek op die denkrigting van die Verligting op albei gehad het. Saam met Andrew Murray en Hofmeyr is ook John Murray en Jan Neethling volgens Brümmer hierdeur beïnvloed. Die hoofaspekte van NJ Hofmeyr se teologie word ook hier bespreek, en Brümmer beklemtoon die sentraliteit van die “spiritualiteit van kindskap” teenoor dié van “kneegskap” in Hofmeyr se teologie.

Daarteenoor, soos in hoofstuk drie aan die orde kom, was daar die groep predikante wat “panteïstiese rasionalisme” verteenwoordig het, en in die geskiedenis van die NG Kerk bekend geword het as die “Liberale rigting.” Hulle omgang met die denkrigting van die Verligting was bepaald anders, en het spanning in die NG Kerk geskep. Soos deurgaans in die werk word die standpunt van dié groep grootliks deur Brümmer aan die hand van primêre bronne uit die historiese tydperk weergegee.

Hoofstukke vier tot ses bied ’n gedetailleerde weergawe van Hofmeyr en Murray se reaksie op en vertolking van die “Liberale rigting” en die bedreiging wat dit vir die NG Kerk van die tyd ingehou het. Ook hier word die argument gekonstrueer aan die hand van historiese materiaal en Hofmeyr sowel as Murray word dikwels in hulle eie woorde aangehaal. Brümmer se argument is veral in hoofstuk ses (“Hoe regsinnig was Murray en Hofmeyr?”) besonder interessant. Daar onderskei hy tussen Hofmeyr en Murray se (persoonlike) teologie soos uiteengesit in die voorafgaande hoofstukke en die teologiese argumente wat hulle in die hof moes voer ten einde die “Liberale rigting” (hier spesifiek JJ Kotzé en TF Burgers) se opmars in die Kaapse Kerk stop te sit. In die hof kon die argument nie gevoer word dat Kotzé en Burgers in stryd is met die persoonlike spiritualiteit van Hofmeyr en Murray nie, maar moes hulle aantoon dat die kerkleer soos neergelê in die kerklike belydenisskrifte deur die Liberales weerspreek word. Alhoewel nie Hofmeyr of Murray as konfessionalisties beskou kan word nie, beroep hulle hulle dus (veral Murray as moderator van die sinode) op die belydenisskrifte as ’n meganisme om die “Liberale rigting” uit die NG Kerk te dryf. Brümmer toon aan dat Murray en Hofmeyr die belydenisskrifte in hulle eie werk weerspreek, kritiseer of openlik daarvan verskil het, en skryf dan die betekenisvolle sin: “’n Mens kry soms die indruk dat dit wat hy [Murray] die ‘kerkleer’ noem, slegs ’n ander woord vir sy eie teologiese opvatting was” (108). Brümmer kom baie naby daaraan om Murray en Hofmeyr “onregsinnig” te verklaar, alhoewel hy dit nooit prontuit doen nie.

Hoofstukke sewe tot tien verduidelik die mate waartoe verskillende Europese denkstrome in die Kaapse NG Kerk verteenwoordig is. Supranaturalisme, die Bybels-Apologetiese skool, die Etiese Rigting van Chantepie en Gunning, die neo-Calvinisme van Abraham Kuyper en Herman Bavinck word veral bespreek.

In hoofstuk elf word die bekende Du Plessis-saak aan die orde gestel, en die manier waarop die verskillende (dikwels opponerende) teologiese rigtings wat in die NG Kerk teenwoordig was deur hierdie saak op die spits gedryf is. In die laaste hoofstuk argumenteer Brümmer dan oortuigend dat die teologiese kwessies wat in die Du Plessis-saak na vore gekom het nie nuut was nie, maar in werklikheid die kulminasiepunt van die teologiese geskiedenis soos hy dit beskryf het. Brümmer argumenteer dat daar ’n fundamentele verskil was oor die sin waarin die Bybel as die “Woord van God” verstaan moes word, en dat hierdie verskille met die verloop van tyd in die NG Kerk ontwikkel het. Een aspek van hierdie verskillende opvattings is ook bepalend vir die manier waarop die status van die belydenisskrifte beskou is. Volgens Brümmer is die Bybel beskou as “onfeilbaar geïnspireer om ons waarhede op leerstellige en ook op wetenskaplike gebied te verskaf” (266) of as “onfeilbaar geïnspireer om as menslike medium vir die lewendmakende Woord van God te dien” (266). Laasgenoemde sou veronderstel dat die “pogings van die kerk deur die eeue heen om die heilsboodskap in leerstellinge te formuleer” (267) altyd tydgebonde is “omdat hulle die ewige heilsboodskap in terme van die denkvorme en die veronderstellinge van die tyd probeer formuleer en as antwoord op die vrae wat in dié tyd aan die orde was” (268). Maar eersgenoemde inspirasie-opvatting maak nie voorsiening vir die onderskeid tussen die essensie en die inkleding van die heilsboodskap nie (271), met die gevolg dat ’n opvatting oor belydenisskrifte ontstaan waardeur dit “tot ’n soort hermeneutiese reël” (272) verhef word in terme waarvan die Bybel interpreteer moet word. Brümmer argumenteer dus dat al die klagtes van die kuratorium teen Du Plessis teruggevoer kan word na sy verstaan van inspirasieteorie en sy opvatting oor die “Woord van God” wat daaruit voortvloei (274).

Tog is dit asof Brümmer uiteindelik sy indrukwekkende analise effens in die lig laat. Die werk gaan mank aan ’n bevredigende samevatting of konklusie. Op die tweede laaste bladsy verwys hy na BB Keet se ontleding van die opvattinge oor Skrifinterpretasie wat in gereformeerde kringe gehuldig word. Volgens Keet is daar drie sulke opvattinge, skryf Brümmer, en kan al drie as “regsinnig gereformeerde” beskou word. Brümmer lewer geen verdere kommentaar hieroor nie, en dit laat (hier)die leser met die vraag wat die nut van “regsinnig” as ’n merker dan hoegenaamd is?

Maar dalk is dit juis die eintlike vraag wat Brümmer deur hierdie werk stel.

Conradie, Ernst M

Reconciliation - A guiding vision for South Africa?

2013, Stellenbosch: Sun Press

ISBN: 9781920689087

Conradie, Ernst M

South African perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity

2013, Stellenbosch: Sun Press

ISBN: 9781920689063

Conradie, Ernst M & Klaasen, John

The Quest for Identity in so-called Mainline Churches in South Africa

2013, Stellenbosch: Sun Press

ISBN: 9781920689223

Reviewed by Rev Cobus van Wyngaard

Dialogues on reconciliation, ecumenicity and church identity

The Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape has been hosting a series of think-tanks on the interface between ecumenical theology and social ethics in the South African context. Some of these discussions have led to the publication of a number of booklets, the first three of which will be reviewed below. The three booklets which developed from these think-tanks held between October 2012 and May 2013 are *Reconciliation: A guiding vision for South Africa*, *South African perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity* and *The Quest for Identity in so-called Mainline Churches in South Africa* (hereafter referred to in short as *Reconciliation*, *Ecumenicity* and *Identity*).

The first two booklets is mostly a dialogue with Ernst Conradie. Conradie's introductions and position papers contribute a large section of these books (75% in *Reconciliation* and almost 40% in *Ecumenicity*), and the chapters that follow are often in explicit dialogue with Conradie's position papers.

Conradie's attempt in *Reconciliation* is to find as much conceptual clarity as possible concerning the notion of reconciliation rather than to deal with a particular substantive issue (17). The audience for this search for conceptual clarity is described as, at least in part, postgraduate students

working on topics concerning reconciliation. The limitation of such an attempt is acknowledged early on: reconciliation is used in a wide variety of contexts, which “raise the question of whether conceptual clarity is possible at all” (24).

Clarity is sought through the exploration of various “aspects of the dynamics of reconciliation”, first in brief, and then as a more in-depth exploration on some of these aspects. The grouping together of aspects according to time, past, present and future, may be noticed as a sort of logic. It is however not presented as a programme for reconciliation, or even as a list of necessary aspects. Rather, Conradie’s position paper can be read as an attempt to list as many of the aspects that may relate to reconciliation as possible. If clarity is indeed found in this approach then it is not found in a neat and final definition of reconciliation, but rather in drawing together and opening up various parts of the conversation.

In a similar fashion Conradie’s position paper on ecumenicity provide a list of possible understandings of the word “ecumenical” rather than an attempt at arguing for one particular narrow definition of the word. It opens up a conversation on how we might possibly think about ecumenicity, rather than drawing up strong boundaries around the word, which he attempts then to enforce through his argument.

The discussion of possible meanings ranges from an etymological exploration, through various church historical uses of the word, but ultimately places the emphasis on how the notion “ecumenical” is used in a variety of particular contexts. These particular contexts can be either in different sections of the ecumenical movement, theological education or searches for a wider ecumenicity through interreligious contact, participation on a global community, a planetary community or being part of the whole universe. The tension between more general and more focused understandings of ecumenicity (such as a search what holds the church together – a return to Nicene Christianity for example) is neither ignored nor resolved.

The position papers in these books should not be read apart from the responding chapters. In the responses other voices at times disagree with the position paper, clarify the position paper or expand on the position paper. Between these voices some of the important contestations on the

various concepts on which clarity is sought are highlighted, and possible new avenues for the on-going conversation are highlighted. The position papers range in length from one or two pages up to extensive chapters of almost 50 pages.

Identity has a slightly different format from the first two booklets. The position paper is written by John de Gruchy and takes up far less space than the position papers by Conradie. The responses come from representatives of the various “so-called mainline” churches, although the voices of Vincentia Kgabe and Mary-Anne Plaatjies-Van Huffel are added to this due to the fact that church leadership remain predominantly male and the editors also want to open up a critical exploration of gender in church identity.

The dialogue between the position paper and the responses are far less pronounced, with church representatives following a pattern of highlighting distinctive theological aspects in their respective tradition’s reflection on identity and drawing out some of the contemporary challenges concerning identity, rather than respond to the position paper. The response papers rather read as further position papers opening up the conversation on identity from various particular denominational backgrounds. The dialogue between these papers remain elusive, but a way forward may be indicated by De Gruchy’s observation that our confessional identities are at times a “veneer placed on top of a more meaningful and immediate sense of being Christian and being church in South Africa” (16). Such a sense of being Christian and church beyond the confines of denominational affiliation is indeed pointed out by a number of the denominational representatives and remain an important tension in the search for identity.

The reference to “so-called mainline” churches in the title of the booklet is clarified by De Gruchy’s discussion of the problems by referring to some churches as “mainline” and then explaining the use of “so-called” to indicate the inadequacy of the word “mainline” (or some of the other descriptors used for the group of churches represented in this booklet). But in many ways De Gruchy’s position paper on the “so-called” mainline churches remain unanswered – the responses are not yet able to explore De Gruchy’s important critique of our easy description of some churches as forming the “mainline churches”.

As indicated, these booklets developed from the dialogues organised by the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape and the various papers should be read together. For those researching these topics in the South African context the series of booklets provide an important point of reference for on-going conversation.

Conradie, Ernst M

Saving the earth? The legacy of reformed views on “re-creation”

Studies in Religion and Environment, Vol. 8

2013, Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien

ISBN: 9783643903044

Reviewed by Dr P Paul Kruger

Who doesn't know the age-old saying that we stand on the shoulders of giants and thus can see further than they? (The Italian intellectual Umberto Eco has some time ago given a very readable updating of this maxim within the *Zeitgeist* of the early twenty first century). The book of Ernst Conradie under discussion provides an excellent service in recognizing some of the *giant (reformed) theological shoulders* we are standing on as we are rethinking the relation creation –salvation/ protology-eschatology. Moreover, he assists us, in an exemplary way, in realizing *the responsibility* we as “contemporary dwarfs” have in developing appropriate (perhaps even giant-like?) shoulders for a coming generation of theologians in the *dürftiger Zeit* we are obviously ecologically entering (cf. Pope Francis' timely and courageous encyclical *Laudato Si*, June 2015; and the highly disturbing – the umpteenth! – study of Paul Ehrlich et al. indicating that we are in the sixth mass extinction of species, also from June 2015). If ever there was a theologian in South Africa who has exerted him- or herself in the developing of broader shoulders in service of present and future generations ecologically it is exactly the author of the volume I am here concisely reviewing!

In fact, Conradie is providing us with a theological feast of, firstly, sharp analysis in a spirit of fairness; secondly, congenial critique given in a creative way; and, finally, intended or unintended, hints for his own further theological journey.

Firstly, then, his analysis of the following reformed theologians as to their views on the relation creation-salvation is, at least to my mind, something like a veritable *tour de force*: Calvin, Bavinck, Barth, Noordmans, Van Ruler and Moltmann. On the one hand, we are given insight as it were into *privatissima* where the author intellectually wrestles one-on-one with each of these theologians. Not only dominant lines of an author's thinking on the relation between creation and salvation are retraced but also surprising "excavations" of neglected emphases are sometimes made. A particularly salient instance of the latter is the way the author integrates recent research on Calvin's employment of signification into his discussion on heaven and sacramental thinking (pp 70-74). On the other hand, the various theologians whom Conradie analyses form a kind of a choir from the midst of which their mutual resonances, dissonances and counterpoints echo forth. Van Ruler, for example, is portrayed as finding his authentic voice from within a "choir", including Barth, Calvin and especially Bavinck (pp 217-219, 263).

Secondly, a fascinating feature of the publication is the creative form of critique it displays. At the end of his treatment of every theologian the author appends a personalised letter. There are truly gems to be found in this unanswered correspondence! Towards Calvin, for example, the author expresses true appreciation for his distinctive use of semiotics – something that all Calvinists today may share with Conradie. At the same time his sharp criticism on Calvin's "authoritarian" rhetoric should also be affirmed (pp 75, 76).

Finally, it seems as if "hints" related to Ernst Conradie's further theological journey might be detected in this comprehensive work. The whole drift of his presentation points to a special congeniality with Bavinck and Van Ruler on the relevant theme. This is exciting in itself! Yet, the following sentence at the end of the author's letter to Moltmann, heightens – at least – the present reviewer's excitement still more: "I wonder whether a return to Van Ruler *after* Moltmann is not the best way forward for ecotheology in the reformed context" (emphasis original).

All in all: this is a very important publication, deserving of a wide readership in South Africa and abroad. It contains the promise of a "giant" synthesis to come!

De Gruchy, John W

A Theological Odyssey – My life in writing

2014, Stellenbosch: Sun Media, Sun Press

ISBN 978-1-920689-43-8 (Printed)

ISBN 978-1-920689-44-5 (e-book)

Reviewed by Lisel Joubert

In his book “a Theological Odyssey” the revered South African theologian John de Gruchy takes us on a journey through his life as a theologian. This is a book that traces his own growth and understanding of the formative role that theology could play in the church but especially in society as a whole in spite of different and changing historical contexts. With the celebration of his 75th birthday in 2014 this book forms part of a celebration and recognition of his creative output through the years amidst the lean and better times of the country and church of his lifetime.

In his prologue John de Gruchy introduces himself as theologian who realises that theology is about more than writing books. “... it is a way of being in the world, of engaging reality, an on-going quest, a form of prayer, a performance located in a particular time and space, and shared with fellow travellers” (p 2). In a creative and honest manner all these nuances are found in the different chapters, in which he reworked the main themes of his own theological history. These themes are The Church Struggle; Doing Theology in Context; In Dialogue with Dietrich Bonhoeffer; Liberating Reformed Theology; Democracy, Reconciliation and Restoring Justice; Christianity, Art and Transformation; Confessions of a Christian Humanist; Led into Mystery. At the end of each chapter there is a bibliography, which can help the reader to pursue some of de Gruchy’s theological insights further.

What intrigues in reading these chapters is John de Gruchy’s understanding of theology as something alive and never stagnant. A theology that is constantly in dialogue with the context: “*Studying* theology is a necessary and important academic activity in which we engage as we explore and excavate tradition, *doing* theology is a faith practise, a committed engagement, a way of being, a passion, a contemporary and existential engagement with the gospel in the world of daily reality” (p 39). His theology then also flows from the interaction with his conversation partners, living

and dead: From Calvin to Bonhoeffer, from modern science to his own late son Steve.

The Chapter on the “Church Struggle” is full of important historical background, which forms the context for “Doing Theology in Context”. The history is presented from his own experience and participation. It is from this context that Bonhoeffer and Mandela’s legacy is looked at in Chapter 3, and questions asked regarding the future of liberation? De Gruchy presents Bonhoeffer as his main conversation partner through the years in the formation of his own integral theology.

Especially important, for those from a Reformed background is the Chapter on the liberation dimension of Reformed Theology. Reformed theology has the potential for creating a just and compassionate society, for critical solidarity, if the proponents are honest and willing enough to retrieve and transform their own traditions. In retrieving these traditions de Gruchy opens up a whole new scope on understanding what it means to be reformed and how want can be Reformed and a humanist (chapter 7). His rethinking and tracing less well-known traditions of Christian humanism helps the reader to rethink the implication of justice and incarnation. To become truly human is a journey, which can erase divisions: “There is a profound sense of human solidarity and compassion that ignores the boundaries of religion and race, culture and country” (page 142).

In Chapter 6 de Gruchy shares his own reflections on the importance of an aesthetic dimension in liturgy, the retrieving of symbols, the importance of worship and creativity: “Beauty as conveyed through the arts can become a way of encountering God” (page 121). The unleashing of artistic creativity helps us to reflect on the God of justice and peace. It reminds us that truth, goodness and beauty is integral to our living in this world in relationship with God.

In this “Odyssey” one does not only read about our history and the events of the past decades, one also reads about the play of beauty and tragedy in life. This book contains insights not just on the realities facing a democratic society but also the realness of sorrow and loss, which invites us into the mystery of God and life (Chapter 5,8). In chapter 8 he invites us to places of imagination where our certainties, all of a sudden in the face of tragedy, loses its certainness: “The way of ‘unknowing’ begins when it dawns on us

that God is beyond our knowing, and therefore that the answers to ultimate questions are also beyond our grasp.” One is not led into an understandable system but into mystery.

De Gruchy ends this “Odyssey” with reflections towards the future, looking at specific moments in the Western Cape welfare and rethinking global responsibility and resources for the future. He helps the reader to understand that gospel language, like “peace” is not a cliché but something that all are invited to strife and hope for.

For anybody who would like to engage with the theology of one man’s lifetime this is a must read, especially for those who are convinced that theology is a constantly lively engagement with God in context. The words that act as a refrain right through all these different chapters and quests are justice, beauty, love, being truly human and restoration. All these are building blocks of his writings that still inspire and will keep on inspiring.

Lessing, H, Besten, J, Dederling, T, Hohmann, C and Kriel, L (eds)
The German Protestant Church in colonial Southern Africa:
The impact of overseas work from the beginnings until the 1920s

2012, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster.

ISBN: 9783447067751

Reviewed by Retief Müller

This grand and ambitious work gives a comprehensive perspective on the subject matter. The book is divided into three parts, which follow an extensive introduction that gives an overview of the history and theology of German Protestant work in colonial southern Africa. The introduction furthermore elaborates on issues of method, theory, hermeneutics, and terminology. All of this is very insightful and will particularly be so for a reader who is unfamiliar with the particularities of German mission theory and practice in this period. When an introduction takes up fifty-four pages, and still manages to wet the reader’s appetite for what is to follow in the rest of the book, it might be taken as a sign not only of interesting content, but also linguistic readability.

The three main parts are divided as follows: “Part 1 – The overseas work of German churches and missions”, “Part 2 – The origins, development, and identity of the German-language minorities in southern Africa”, and “Part 3 – Consequences of German immigration: Settler congregations, missions and African societies”. These are further subdivided into a total of thirty-one chapters.

There are a few typos, such as one might expect in a text of this breadth, but generally the editorial standard is acceptable. Here and there, I was puzzled by the structure of the book. For example starting on page 269, one finds “A chronology of the history of the Lutheran Church in South Africa (1652-1928)”. This is a very helpful chronology by Georg Scriba, but I had to wonder whether it would not have made better sense to place this much earlier, even immediately after the introduction. It might also have been more useful if it included developments in Namibia. That way it could have aided the entire volume as a point of reference for the reader.

Although the vast majority of chapters exemplify rigorous historiographical research, I was somewhat taken aback by the inclusion of a sermon by Bishop Schindehütte (pp 583ff). I was also ill prepared for the chapter by Isaak, (pp 563ff), which in spite of its intriguing title, “Cultural dominance and mental slavery”, proved to be a polemical text.

In spite of these minor criticisms the overall impression is that this is an important book, and a benchmark addition to published resources on the protestant missionary movement in southern Africa. This book, of course covers mainly German involvement in these parts, although there is a comparative chapter on Lutherans and Anglicans by Kevin Ward. However, it is precisely the fact that this very German subject matter is presented in English, which I find to be so beneficial. I do not mean to suggest that all useful academic material should be in English, as has increasingly become the trend at South African institutions of higher learning, and also elsewhere in the English-speaking world. But the reality is that I would not have been able to prescribe a German language text to my students at this point in time, certainly not for my undergraduate students. With this text, however, I am able to teach beyond the binary divide of Afrikaans versus English missionary attitudes in South Africa. This text might for example serve as an excellent complimentary text to Richard Elphick’s

“The Equality of Believers”, a book that for all its worth does not really do justice to the diverse stories of the German missions in these parts.

Much of the book under review, of course, concerns Namibia, and that is an additional positive aspect from the point of view of strengthening a curriculum on Southern African Christianity. In a post-colonial, post-apartheid context, South Africans have tended to narrowly define our imagined boundaries with respect to the rest of our region, a region with a deeply intertwined history as this volume illustrates.

I conclude by heartily recommending this book as an invaluable source in southern African church and mission history.