


# Tracing the Trinity in doing practical theology

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Tracing and reflecting on God should be an integral aspect of practical theological reflection. This article focuses on the Trinity as a way of speaking about the identity of God and how tracing it would inform doing practical theology. Practical theologians reflect in different ways on how they trace God. Using the hermeneutical process is essential in practical theology. Both Browning and Heitink explain the interaction between text and context, while Browning and Osmer opt for an ethical interpretation in engaging with the context. Root and Ward endeavour to focus more on the theological aspects of doing practical theology. Root focuses on Christopraxis and Ward on interpreting the Gospel within the current context. A discussion about the immanent Trinity and the social Trinity illustrates the complexity of tracing God in doing practical theology. The conversation needs to be taken further, by discussing three aspects – ecclesiology, hospitality and lived religion – as markers to illustrate the value of a trinitarian reflection for practical theology. Practical theology could benefit by tracing the Trinity and, in so doing, develop and enhance the theological character of the discipline.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The article focuses on the implications of tracing the Trinity in practical theology. A systematic theological reflection informs the discussion and opens a dialogue between the two disciplines. The theological nature of practical theology should be strengthened, enhancing a critical dialogue with social sciences regarding, for example, hospitality and lived religion.

**Keywords:** practical theology; Trinity; hermeneutics; ecclesiology; hospitality; lived religion.

## Introduction

It is possible that a reflection on God in practical theology was not always and still is not an essential aspect of the conversation or reflection within practical theology. The context and empirical analysis may be a dominant voice that may have moved a necessary reflection on God from the discussion to a more secondary level. Ganzevoort (2009), on the other hand, refers to tracing the sacred as an essential aspect of practical theology:

I am ultimately interested in the relationship with the divine itself. It is the encounter with or experience of the sacred that I am trying to understand. For me, theology is the discipline that discerns, describes, interprets, explains, evaluates, and helps to construct the ways people speak about God – the-logia – to God and experience being spoken to by God. For me theology is tracing the sacred. (p. 5)

The tracing of and reflection on God should be an integral aspect of practical theological reflection.

As a theological discipline, practical theology must reflect on and discuss its relationship with God as part of a theological reflection. The question is, 'How does this reflection take place in practical theology?' This theological question is not an addendum in doing theology. However, it should be viewed as part of an integrated process in the whole activity of theologising (Miller-McLemore 2012:24) or in the words of Ganzevoort, tracing the sacred as practical theologians.

Tracing the sacred means different things to different theologians. Osmer refers to discernment as a specific activity of doing theology: 'Discernment is the activity of seeking God's guidance amid the circumstances, events, and decisions of life' (Osmer 2008:137). Osmer views the normative task, what ought to be happening, more within an ethical framework. However, Root (2014:26) asks this question from a revelatory perspective, 'What ought to happen now that we have experienced the event of God's encounter?' De Gruchy (2014:46) refers to the redefining traditions, 'The danger is to control the tradition by selecting only those trajectories that support one's

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argument'. The normative task or tradition should be a conversation with the past and the Scripture about the meaning of the text and tradition for the context or current praxis (Schoeman & Van den Berg 2016:221).

Practical theology takes both practice and theology seriously. It would be possible either to ignore the practice in doing theology and becoming only theoretical, or practical theology might deal with practice in such a way that it fails to be theological (Ward 2017:27–28). It may also be true that 'practical theology has become a discipline fluent in talking about concrete action (practice), but hesitant in speaking of God's action and nature from the locale of the concrete' (Root 2014:13).

The normative component requires practical theology and the field it studies to reflect on the critical practices whereby it lives and on the role of the sacred and transcendent convictions it professes. Greater focus on this theological aspect will advance the discipline and its value for religious communities and the common good in society (Miller-McLemore 2012:25). The text and tradition, as a normative task, should be taken seriously, in order to enhance the theological task of practical theology (Schoeman & Van den Berg 2016:222). The question is beyond the normative task of practical theology, or to put it differently: Should the reflection on the role of the triune God within the discipline of practical theology not simply be a normative engagement?

More precisely, this article focuses on the Trinity: 'The trinity is the Christian way of speaking about the identity of God' (Venter 2004:756). In what way should this inform our understanding and doing of theology? Discussing trinitarian theology is a complex and challenging task (Venter 2010), and this is also true for reflecting on tracing the Trinity within practical theology:

Basically, doing trinitarian theology entails recognising and integrating the various voices in the Bible pertaining to the work of the Father, Son and Spirit related to the issue at hand. The plurality of traditions, which Old Testament and New Testament theology identify and record, should be considered. The final result would never be a simplistic compilation. The very work of the triune God is too rich and too diversified for that. (p. 569)

In the words of Ganzevoort (2009:6), 'Traveling, following, studying or sketching; practical theology is tracing the sacred in spiritual, empirical-reconstructive, and critical-constructive modes'. This article focuses on tracing the Trinity in doing practical theology. The first question is about how some practical theologians are positioning this question within their practical theological framework; the second question is about how a reflection on the Trinity may inform practical theology and thirdly, a few markers for doing practical theology from a trinitarian perspective will be discussed.

## The reflection on God in practical theology

This selection of practical theologians does not provide a comprehensive genealogy in answering the question; it is a subjective selection to reflect on how this was done over the past few decades in practical theology. The focus is on their reflection on God in doing practical theology: How are they tracing the sacred?

Browning (1991:7) proposes that a practical theology should move from practice to theory and back to practice, '[I]t goes from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices'. This movement contrasts the classic model of theory to practice, where the Word informs the practice. Browning (1991:8) describes all theology as a fundamental practical theology with four sub-movements, namely descriptive, historical, systematic and strategic practical theology. Descriptive theology describes the contemporary theory-laden practices that could be used to build a link between context and text, a movement between practice–theory–practice (Browning 1991:47). Historical theology reflects on the meaning of normative texts for the current praxis (Browning 1991:49). Systematic theology is a 'fusion of horizons between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of the normative Christian practices' (Browning 1991:51). This movement is more than an application of the past; it seeks to give a comprehensive view of the present practices. Strategic practical theology is a complex and multidimensional interpretation of the present that links with the hermeneutical process that began with descriptive theology (Browning 1991:55–57).

In the hermeneutical process of the four movements, listening to the text and tradition plays an important role as part of historical and systematic theology: 'Christian practical theology, by virtue of being Christian, will give special weight to classic Christian texts' (Browning 1991:139). Browning considers theological ethics to contribute, in this regard, not to ethics as part of systematic theology, but as part of a strategic practical theology. Ethics from the latter perspective 'addresses the full immediacy of concrete questions about practices' (Browning 1991:141). Browning explores the narratives of the theology of Reinhold Niebuhr to develop the ethical reflection further. The narrative of God unfolds in two stories: God's activity in creating the world and the story about the world's salvation. Three metaphors explain the activity of God in the stories: Creator, Judge and Redeemer (Browning 1991:143). The metaphors should help critically reflect on concrete practices and ask questions about the meaning of their human obligations (Browning 1991:151). Browning uses a practical theological and ethical perspective to reflect on the meaning of God's narrative in specific contexts.

In discussing practical theology as a theological discipline, Heitink opts for a hermeneutical approach to theology that describes the object of theology, not as God. However, Heitink (1999:110–111) views the object of theological inquiry as the human experience of God. Practical theology focuses on ‘the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society’ (Heitink 1999:112). Praxis 1 refers to the mediation of the Christian faith through communicative actions within the church and society: ‘Practical Theology studies how these processes take place, and how these structures can be adapted so that there can be a real transmission of the Christian tradition’ (Heitink 1999:9). Praxis 2 is about the praxis of modern society, the domain or context of action and the background for Praxis 1 (Heitink 1999:168). Theology as a whole is involved in the relationship between Praxis 1 and Praxis 2. Practical theology enquires about the mediation of the Christian faith within the context of society (interacting between Praxis 1 and Praxis 2).

Understanding the Christian faith plays a significant role in the hermeneutical perspective that Heitink (1999:193) develops, the mediation between tradition and experience. The connection between the divine and human reality has a pneumatological basis:

The work of the Spirit cannot be put in a framework of method, but it is possible to give room to the kind of communicative action that allows for a listening attitude, in mutual openness and receptivity. (p. 194)

The circular process of interpretation may follow specific patterns that provide access to the praxis of faith and action. Heitink (1999:198–199) names a few examples: the kingdom of God, the covenant, the Jesus event, the body of Christ and the exodus model. These interpretation patterns help bridge the gap between the Scripture as text and the interpretation of the current situation. Heitink (1999:200) indicates that these patterns need further development.

Osmer (2008:10) identifies four key tasks that involve practical theological interpretation: descriptive-empirical, interpretative, normative and pragmatic. These four tasks should be viewed as a hermeneutical circle that points to an interrelated process of doing practical theology. This discussion will focus on the interpretative and normative tasks, as they relate to an understanding and interpretation of speaking about God in doing theology. Osmer (2008:82–86) describes the interpretative task in terms of sagely wisdom, including thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgement. Sagely wisdom is embedded in the wisdom tradition of Israel.<sup>1</sup> Sagely wisdom is not only found in the Old Testament, but as ‘an eschatological sage, Jesus offers wisdom of a counter-order, designed to help his listeners imagine God’s rule in new ways’ (Osmer 2008:97). The parables and beatitudes may be good examples in this regard. The normative task is described in terms of prophetic

1. Heitink refers, for example, to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

discernment and refers to three aspects: theological interpretation and the use of theological concepts; the use and development of ethical norms and good practice (Osmer 2008:130–131). The prophets were tasked with proclaiming God’s Word as judgement and hope. Like Browning, Osmer (2008:139) emphasises a theological and ethical interpretation within the present situation and context.

According to Root (2014:8), practical theology should be committed to studying concrete and lived experiences of the presence of God. This would make practical theology both practical and theological, but divine action was not always central in practical theology. He prefers to use the concept ‘Christopraxis’. Root (2014:26) considers the following question at the heart of a Christopraxis practical theology of the cross: ‘Now that the Spirit of the living Christ has fallen on us as a very ontological reality, as something we experience as real, now what?’ Christopraxis is the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ in the world (Root 2014:90). Root (2014:101) describes Christopraxis as Trinitarian because it is constituted in the being of God as becoming in the action of ministry. Why not call it Trinitarian praxis? ‘It is Christopraxis because Jesus is the hermeneutic of God’s ministry, and as the hermeneutic of God’s ministry Jesus is the hermeneutic of God’s very being’. Jesus is unique and, in that sense, the hermeneutic of God. The Spirit is not taking over the ministry of Jesus; it is a retribution for the ministry of Jesus, revealing its location and calling people to join the ministry (Root 2014:101–102). Practical theology is not only the study of the practice of ministry with a scientific logic but also ‘with the desire to witness and articulate how concrete actions of ministry are movements of the Spirit into God’s becoming through Jesus Christ’ (Root 2014:102). Root uses justification as a hermeneutical lens to understand the action of God in and through concrete experiences. Doctrine (justification) should be used as an interpretative lens for Christopraxis (Root 2014:121). Root argues in favour of the importance of a trinitarian understanding of practical theology and highlights the incarnation as central for leading us deep into the human situation (Macallan 2019:390).

Ward chooses to view theology as faith-seeking understanding, which refers to a commitment to the practice of faith and to theoretical reasoning. ‘Faith seeking understanding offers a theological framework for doing practical theology’ (Ward 2017:28). This helps orientate practical theology towards the being of God and constitutes a relationship with God. ‘Faith, then, is not a departure point for practical theology but a characteristic of the way that practical theology is conducted’ (Ward 2017:30). The Christian faith is conveyed as part of a tradition, but this tradition is not unified or univocal; connections should also be made ‘between the voices of Christian communities and thinkers in the past and in the present-day life of the church’ (Ward 2017:37). It should also be remembered that powerful voices may construct traditions and that marginalised voices should not be ignored (Ward 2017:37).

Ward (2017:40) argues that there is a divide in modern practical theology between those who prioritise doctrine and revelation and those who emphasise human experience as the source of knowledge of the divine. Ward (2017:41) prefers to use the concept of the Gospel to speak about the encounter with God and how this is then understood and communicated:

Gospel refers to the work of God in the world and how this work is understood and experienced. ... Gospel combines an understanding of God with the embodied and committed lives of individuals. (p. 48)

The understanding of God includes the traditional language to talk about the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but it could also be understood in less gendered terms as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer (Ward 2017:29).

The use of the hermeneutical process is essential in doing practical theology. Both Browning and Heitink explain the interaction between text and context. Browning and Osmer opt for an ethical interpretation in engaging with the context. Root and Ward endeavour to focus more prominently on the theological aspects of doing practical theology. Root focuses on Christopraxis and Ward on interpreting the Gospel within the current context. These remarks do not suffice, but they at least explain the complexity of tracing God in doing practical theology.

## May a reflection on the Trinity inform practical theology?

In further tracing God in doing practical theology, this section focuses on the way in which the reflection on the Trinity, more specifically, may inform discernment within practical theology. Purves (1998) argues that the doctrine of the Trinity should be the basis for Christian practical theology:

[K]nowledge of God in Jesus Christ leads to a trinitarian way of thinking about God; and a trinitarian theology is inherently practical theology in a primary sense, being a knowledge of God's action grounded in God's being. (p. 225)

Purves (1998:226) emphasises the importance of a hermeneutical process in understanding the Trinitarian basis of practical theology: 'A trinitarian basis for practical theology more narrowly defined, however, leads to a hermeneutical process of interpretation and reinterpretation concerned with the action of the church'. This would lead to a critical interaction between the confessional and descriptive tasks of practical theology, and both are needed in doing practical theology.<sup>2</sup> A discussion on the immanent Trinity and the social Trinity may illustrate this contribution to theological reflection within practical theology.

The immanent or economic Trinity, God with us, reflects on God being as action, the *missio Dei* (Purves 1998):

Christian knowledge of God is knowledge of the *missio Dei*: of God in God's sending and being sent by which we are brought into communion with God. The Father sends the Son in the

<sup>2</sup>This was also discussed in the previous section.

power of the Holy Spirit, and through the Son, the Holy Spirit. (p. 225)

God is known through the actions and the communion of the Trinity. Knowledge of these practices of God's love is, primarily, practical theology (Purves 1998:226). The immanent Trinity, from a reformed perspective, emphasises the activities of (Smit 2009):

[T]he one, living God – undivided, although to be distinguished; rich, complex, full of surprises, yet always faithful to the promises and according to character; full of grace, goodness, and mercy, although with many faces and forms. (p. 65)

A significant development of the *missio Dei* was to understand mission as derived from the nature of God and to 'put it in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology' (Bosch 1991:390). This represents a new theological paradigm. Linking with the Trinity was an important innovation that placed the mission of the church in the hands of God, as mission (Bosch 1991):

[I]s primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate. (p. 392)

Bosch clearly links the *missio Dei* with the Triune God.

The emergence of the *missio Dei* should also be linked to the significant insights from the development of Trinitarian theology (Laubscher 2020:41). Should it be viewed as the *missio Dei*, or as Venter (2004) puts it:

The question could be raised whether there is not a need to speak consistently of *Missio Trinitatis*. That mission is the work of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit has been from the beginning of its articulation the underlying assumption. (pp. 757–758)

The *missio Trinitatis* reflects more accurately the identity of God. In this regard, Flett (2010:n.p.) makes an important contribution to the discussion. The shift from (Laubscher 2020):

[M]issio Dei to *missio Trinitatis* sensitises and empowers us concerning crucial issues like power, justice and alterity, and by implication, to face its history of involvement and participation in colonialism and apartheid, as the church becomes more open and hospitable for God's particular mission in the world. (p. 43)

There is a need for a very articulated description and discussion of the ecclesiology and ministry needed, in terms of a trinitarian understanding, to formulate action within every context.

Flett indicates that the *missio Dei* emphasises the acts of God, on one hand, and is in danger of reducing it to the acts of the church or emphasising the nature of God and then focusing on mission and political involvement, on the other. 'Grounding mission in the Trinity means grounding his movement into the world in his being from and to all eternity' (Flett 2010). The church needs to understand that the turn to the world is not a postscript in the action of God, but that it is

fundamental to the Christian witness. Flett (2010) makes this important remark:

The church's turning to the world is constitutive of her being in relationship with God as he is in himself. Failing to act in this corresponding decision constitutes a breach in the relationship. (n.p.)

The community of faith is not an independent actor, but its actions should be deeply embedded within the relationship with God.

Secondly, the relational understanding of the Trinity may inform practical theology. The personhood of God means and assumes a relationship. God is not static, 'but [he] is dynamically understood: God's being-in-relation' (Purves 1998:323). God is communion and in a personal relationship. 'God is the relations of love and freedom between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit on which depends everything for its being' (Purves 1998:233). God is in communion as the Trinity but also brings us into relationship and communion. Functions cannot replace the persons of God, but communion constitutes individual and communal relationships. The Triune God brings us into a personal relationship and union with Himself through the Son and in the Spirit (Purves 1998:235). Relationality, unity-in-diversity and communion are at the heart of the social trinitarian approach (Kärkkäinen 2009:14).

The immanent and the social Trinity may inform practical theology and help further develop the theological reflection by tracing the Trinity.

## A few markers for doing practical theology from a trinitarian perspective

The conversation needs to be taken further and may include many more markers, but the following three aspects – ecclesiology, hospitality and lived religion – are discussed as markers to illustrate the value of a trinitarian reflection for practical theology.

A general ecclesiology refers more to the history and polity of the church, whereas an ecclesiology from below is developed within congregational studies (Schoeman 2020:95–98). Behind a concept such as 'missional ecclesiology' lie significant theological developments connecting the call to the church of communion and the mission of the church (Laubscher 2020:39). The formation of a trinitarian ecclesiology is a logical consequence of the identity of God (Venter 2004):

Although the radical distinctiveness between God and church is fully recognised, the issue at stake is the quest for an appropriate ontology of the church, which is identified as a form of correspondence between the triune God as communion and the church as communion. (p. 759)

The church is a relational community, leading to a concrete understanding of ecclesiology. This, for example, changes the view on power and authority in the church and congregations.

The understanding of the triune God as 'three co-equal perichoretic persons in communion is a critical ethical model for restructuring of the Church' (Bitrus 2018:157). The structure of congregations and the leadership style of congregational leaders should reflect their relationship with and understanding of the triune God: 'a church that lives out Trinitarian communion will evolve egalitarian structures which promote equitable participation of all for the common good of the church' (Bitrus 2018:157). Bitrus emphasises the understanding of the Trinitarian communion for restructuring the church in Africa.

The *missio Dei*, or more specifically formulated as the *missio Trinitatis*, may contribute towards a profound missional focus on the proclamation of the kingdom of the Father, sharing the life of the Son, and bearing the witness of the Spirit (Macallan 2019:391–393; Smit 2009:74). The congregational identity is constituted through a relationship with and understanding of the Trinity. This should inform, for example, worship in the congregation. 'The first response to the revelation of God's triune identity is spontaneous worship and celebration' (Venter 2004:762). Purves (1998) states:

The Christian life is a sharing through the Holy Spirit in the mission of the Son to the glory of the Father. This is what it means to live trinitarian faith. (p. 235)

This has profound implications for the way in which worship is understood in worship service, liturgy, sacraments and the faithful life of a community of believers. 'Worship has the dynamic of a God-me or God-us relation' (Purves 1998:236). The ministry of the congregation will focus on where the *missio Trinitatis* is directing the congregation towards, for example, poverty and inequality in the community. Furthermore (Venter 2004):

[I]nstead of a commodity society, we find the church as gifting community. Exchange is replaced by a reciprocity or mutuality of giving. The generosity of God opens the possibility for an economy of life, with abundance in the Spirit instead of scarcity. (p. 761)

The ecclesiology of the congregation should reflect this as a movement away from maintenance or consumption.

A trinitarian perspective might, secondly, contribute towards a more inclusive understanding of hospitality and formulated explicitly as hospitality towards the marginalised or the other. A trinitarian understanding is not a turn away from the world. Quite the opposite, it calls for an engagement with life, 'what personhood, otherness, unity, relationship, community ultimately should be, are revealed by the triune identity of God' (Venter 2004:761). The engagement of the Triune God should not be described in static categories, but dynamically with the expression of perichoresis, as 'a kind of divine playfulness as an expression of immense joy and rotating communion' (Louw 2019:6). Perichoresis contributes towards understanding God in terms of space, place and embracement:

In this sense, one can conclude that divine perichoresis is about the playful event of encounters wherein both God and human

start to face one another, but, at the same time, become a kind of countenance to other human beings in their quest for dignity, justice and caregiving. (p. 7)

The trinitarian perichoresis is about restoring human dignity through divine caring and hospitality.

The relational understanding of the Trinity – the divine life as a communion of three persons within and outside the congregation. Venter (2010) suggests:

The Christian God is conspicuously other-welcoming; the creation was an act of welcoming the other over against God-self; the incarnation was an assumption of the human nature; salvation is the acceptance of the sinner. Trinitarian theology speaks the grammar of hospitality. (p. 570)

Relational matters should be viewed in another light, looking at the other; 'relationality in a trinitarian sense has a unique dimension: it is living from and for others; in short – love' (Venter 2004:762). The congregation is hospitable because the relationship with the Trinity constitutes its identity.

The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians rooted their views within a Trinitarian theology as a resource (Hadebe 2016). Relationships within the Trinity lead them to conclude that there is neither hierarchy nor inequality, but love, mutuality, freedom and communion. A trinitarian theology is a source for liberating, equitable and just relationships and the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians used this theological perspective as a commitment to justice and liberation. They viewed the Trinity as a reference point for a dialogue with oppressed groups and to promote solidarity and interdependence within these oppressed groups. Hadebe (2016) highlights:

By creating liberation theologies that reflect unity-in-diversity among oppressed groups, the Circle could pioneer inclusive theologies which not only give voice to multiple forms of oppression but also promote a prophetic model of communities where difference as is in the case of the Trinity is constructed in relationships characterised by equality, interdependence and unity. (n.p.)

A trinitarian theology, as the Circle indicated, promotes a more hospitable congregation and community.

Thirdly, it may be of value to reflect on the merit of a trinitarian perspective for lived religion and everyday life. The focus of practical theology has broadened from church practices to include the daily life and practices of ordinary members and people (Ganzevoort & Roeland 2014:93). The focus should be to listen to what people are saying, their 'God talk' and how they act and embody their faith (Ward 2017:59, 61). Bitrus (2018:169) argues that the Triune God could salvage the African community from its systemic problems, and African Christians may contribute towards this restoration by the power of the Spirit. Christian everyday life is more than the ministerial projects of a congregation.

A denomination may have a confessional or doctrinal understanding of God and the Trinity. However, congregational

studies indicate that the understanding of 'God' differs from congregation to congregation and among the members in the same congregation (Healy 2012:185):

Differences between congregations and between the members of any one congregation – together with much they have in common – reflect attitudes and experiences that come from living with nonecclesial people and their products, within non-Christian groups and societies. These shape their understanding of doctrine, their reading of Scripture, and their practices. (p. 187)

The challenge would be to describe and interpret life as lived in relation to God in the community. Christian life in society is 'a life of communion with God and with one another, will seek to incarnate that reality day by day in the ordinary spheres of existence' (Purves 1998:239). This may also include public practices and rituals of cleansing and healing (Lartey 2011). It would be worthwhile to trace experiences and followership of the Trinity in everyday life as lived religion.

## Conclusion – Tracing the Trinity in practical theology

Venter (2019) motivates the need to re-centre the Christian vision:

If the Christian God is identified as Trinitarian, one major implication [*that*] crystallises from this is that the entire Christian vision – from creation to the eschaton – should be Trinitarianly envisioned. (p. 3)

An authentic African tradition of community lives the just, egalitarian and inclusive life of the triune God, 'a community that promotes individuality without individualism, communality without patriarchy, and multi-ethnic and religious communion and diversity in unity without nepotism and discrimination' (Bitrus 2018:187). Practical theology could benefit by tracing the Trinity, thus developing and enhancing the theological character of the discipline. The last word is definitely not spoken, but by following a hermeneutical process, it could listen more.

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote the Clavierübung Part III as a personal confession of his faith, using the choral texts of Martin Luther on the basic beliefs of the Reformation. This includes the doctrine of the Trinity and the Prelude and Fugue (BWV 552), which may be viewed as an interpretation, using the medium of music, to express his understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity:

The key is E-flat (three flats), the Prelude consists of nine (3x3) subsections and the Fugue of three fugal subsections, each of which is a representation of one of the three Persons of the Trinity. The total number of works included in the collection is 27 (3x3x3).<sup>3</sup> (p. 2)

Conradie (2019) concludes:

The Christian naming of God as Triune is best regarded not as a point of departure or even as a framework for theological

3. See Dr L. van der Watt's programme notes of the organ recital of J.S. Bach Prelude and Fugue, BWV 552 performed on Friday, 06 May 2022 in the Odeion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein.

debates, but as a doxological conclusion ... a word where words dry up, where only music can take us further, to be followed by the sound of sheer silence. (p. 10)

The music of Bach traces through different 'voices' one Triune God that we may only worship ...

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