Speaking God at a public university in South Africa: the challenge of epistemological transformation

Rian Venter
Department of Systematic Theology, Faculty of Theology,
University of the Free State. Bloemfontein, South Africa.

Abstract

Institutions of higher learning have not escaped the transformation of South African society. However, voices of concern are often heard that the knowledge produced does not reflect the ethos of the new political dispensation. This article addresses one specific challenge for theology at a public university, namely the question as to how the discourse on the divine should reflect the imperative of epistemological transformation and serve the common good. Formally, it is suggested that the nature of the theological activity, the function of the God-symbol and the impact of God-images be considered carefully. Materially, there is an argument that favours a discourse which is sensitive to religious inclusivity, a genealogical approach to notions of the divine, multidisciplinary conversation and the challenge of alterity. Finally, the article emphasises that these formal and material guidelines for a Christian theological discourse be explored along trinitarian avenues.

Introduction

The South African society has witnessed drastic changes since the dawn of inclusive democracy in 1994. Christian theology is the academic field of study which explicitly addresses the reality of God as part of its self-understanding and task. The question is: How have the social developments affected the theological discourse? The tentacles of apartheid reached far and wide, leaving no dimension of the South African landscape untouched. The academic world of universities shared deeply in the complicity of not only participating in this political ideology, but also subtly providing legitimation to the social vision. Christian theology was not only a treasured intellectual pursuit at historically privileged universities, but it also continues to maintain a significant presence, albeit small in student number, at some prominent institutions of higher learning. The following *specific question* needs to be addressed: In what way should the intellectual discourse about God be indicative of a new social reality with an entirely different set of sensibilities. This article will pursue some guidelines for responsible Christian speaking about God at the post-apartheid university. It forms part of a volume honouring the academic contribution of Cornel du Toit, who has become associated with courageous, creative and trailblazing theological investigation. It is hoped that this modest contribution will reflect some of the concerns found in Cornel's oeuvre.

The incomplete journey: universities, transformation and the common good

The research focus of this article – the post-apartheid university and the theological discourse on God – has a specific context and background; it forms part of a broader concern and discussion. Two volumes on higher education in South Africa, published in 2012, provide the explicit framework – *Transforming theological knowledge* (Venter & Tolmie) and *Higher education for the public good* (Liebowitz). Contributors to these books view the transformation of South African universities as incomplete and as posing an urgent intellectual task. Much has been accomplished in terms of redressing demographics and articulating a national qualification framework; however, the more sophisticated dynamics of the curriculum have, to a large extent, escaped in-depth scrutiny. These two collections of study emphasise two notions that are crucial for theological reflection: *epistemological transformation* and *common good*. Jansen uses an apt geological metaphor to explain the challenge of knowledge transformation:[1] the curriculum is like bedrock with various sedimentary layers of knowledge which have remained undisturbed by the waters of political erosion; yet they hold the same beliefs and values that were operative in the apartheid era. He advocates "a knowledge that is broader, more inclusive, more generous and more embracing than what we inherited from the past".[2] Theorising the challenge in terms of epistemological transformation gives prominence to questions such as: Whose knowledge? Knowledge to what effect? Knowledge for whom? At stake are the questions of epistemic justice and performativity. The second

---

[1] J D Jansen, "Can the theological leopard change its spots: on the transformation of university knowledge", in Venter, R & F Tolmie, (eds) . *Transforming theological knowledge: essays on theology and the university after apartheid*, 13 (Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA, 2012).

[2] Jansen, 10.

volume of reflections complements this line of questioning with its notion of "public good". Leibowitz emphasises that this is obviously broad and may include a variety of positions. Minimally, it refers to participatory parity and equality, and human flourishing.[3]

The implications of these two broad approaches to transformation – *epistemology* and *common good* – and their potential benefit for theological introspection speak for themselves. In South Africa, academic theology has been deeply compromised with an orientation to one specific religion – Christianity, one public – the church, and one denominational tradition – confessional Calvinism. This provocative and sweeping statement can obviously be contested. There are commendable examples at specific universities and specific departments of more multi-religious, public and ecumenical practices. A history of theology at the public university, which cannot be undertaken in this brief article, will reveal this ambiguous situation in South Africa. My concern is obviously directed to practices that perpetuate an attitude of "business as usual", where the very doing of theology is still in the grip of conventional control by denominational oversight committees. It is difficult to deny the continued exclusionary character of theology – to a large degree at prominent faculties of theology.

The specific direction: discourse on God, transformation and the common good

The focus of this article finds its rationale in a second discourse as background – the international interest in theological education and the university. Not only is the literature on this topic vast, but it also has a variety of avenues. At least three sets of questions can be identified: Should theology be accommodated at a public university at all? What is the relationship of Christian theology to the study of other world religions? What is the relationship of confessional theology to that of an ecumenical and non-denominational approach? These three interests are typical of a debate linked to the public university. Theology in the space of an ecclesial seminary need not struggle with these issues. A myriad of other concerns are raised regarding theological education.[4] However, situating Christian theology within the confines of the public university, especially in South Africa, generates a number of very complex questions; for example, of rationality as such; the plurality of faith and convictional traditions; the demographic constitution of the country; a specific sociopolitical past of discrimination and the task of establishing a new future of justice and solidarity. Theologians and ecclesial stakeholders often ignore such constituent dynamics associated with a public university.

The formulation of the research problem harbours a specific interest and concern: not theology as field of study as such in relation to the three major questions mentioned, but specifically *the question of God*. Specifying the question in this manner in no way depreciates the issue why a secular society should finance theology at a public university. This dilemma warrants treatment in a separate article. This article is premised on the assumption that fairly persuasive arguments could be developed for the inclusion of theology at a public university. At least four such reasons could be mentioned. Historically, the emergence of universities was intimately linked to theology, especially Christian theology.[5] Demographically, religion still is a major phenomenon in the South African context, and could potentially play a constructive role in a post-apartheid era. Hermeneutically, religion and theology are human attempts to offer comprehensive interpretative frameworks for life and exclusion from the university will impoverish the quest for understanding the so-called great questions of human civilisation. Philosophically, the "turn to religion" in Continental thinking underlines the perennial fascination and resources of religion to contribute to public discourse.[6] Arguing for the inclusion of religion and theology in the official university curriculum in no way implies that distorted historical practices, like the favouring of one religion and one confessional tradition with Christianity, should be perpetuated. Creative new models should be designed which honours the diversity of religious traditions. Formulating the research question as has been done in this article in a sense raises the stakes. The central symbol of the Christian faith is situated within two primary contexts, namely the South African higher education and theological reflection. Focusing on the fundamental reality of the Christian faith intensifies the challenge of the historical moment: In what sense is this articulation in need of transformation and how does it relate to the imperative of the common good? Another way to describe this may be to confront present practices with criteria such as *inclusion, justice* and *performativity;* but this anticipates merely what will follow.

---

3   B Leibowitz, Introduction: Reflections on higher education and the public good, in Leibowitz, B, ed., *Higher education for the public good: Views from the South*, xxii (Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 2012).

4   The work by D Werner, D Esterline, N Kang & J Raja, eds., *Handbook of theological education in world Christianity* (Dorpspruit: Cluster, 2010) is arguably the most informative and comprehensive available. Especially the challenge of contextuality is prominently found in this work. The specific challenge of theology in the space of the public university is not addressed.

5   The place of Christian theology is no longer taken for granted, and the relationship between the university and theology has become the object of serious reflection. For an overview of recent discussions, see D H Kelsey's "Theology in the university: Once more, with feeling," *Modern Theology* 25 (2009): 315–327.

6   For one recent and intriguing example see the Critchley-Bernstein conversation – RJ Bernstein. "Is politics 'practicable' without religion?," *Social Research* 80 (2013): 33–56.

Possible signposts: navigating the public discourse on God

Having briefly described the background and context of the challenge, I shall now proceed to develop the argument and suggest some routes which the speaking of God at a university could take. *Three general* and formal features will be pointed out, followed by *four specific* material guidelines. All of these are in some way or other embedded in broader discussions and discourses taking place in theology and the philosophy of religion.

a.   The activity of speaking God, of articulating ultimate mystery in human words is understandably difficult and complex. This is nothing new. In the Christian tradition, the early insistence of an apophatic intuition is currently being reappreciated. To speak radical otherness brings the quality of human interpretation and knowledge to the fore. Insights from hermeneutics, the philosophy of science and epistemology, especially since the nineteenth century, have some bearing on the quality of humans speaking about the divine. These complex developments can obviously not be recounted in this instance. Suffice it to point out that the various "turns" – whether to history, to language, to power and to the other – have decisive implications for any theology. One keyword that gained some currency, namely *representation,* may be helpful to convey recent sensibilities.[7] The movement from God as reality to human language is fraught with complex obstacles. Theology has been aware of this: all kinds of mediations have been posited in the space between the divine reality and human words, such as revelation, scripture, tradition or experience. Yet these mediations require hermeneutical activity and the very articulation is a rhetorical one. Both reading and speaking are drastically determined by interests, power, and values. No speaking of God can take place without some form of decision and intention. One could label the *nature of the theological activity* as "imaginative construction". To point this out as the first signpost is to destabilise a widespread *naiveté*: there is only one correct way to speak about God. Various contemporary voices objecting to the domestication of God and to onto-theological idolatry all point to this fact. To highlight the nature of the theological practice is to raise consciousness and to encourage theologians to account intentionally for their choices and positions, but also for their values and interests.

b.   Thinking about God in the context of university discourse cannot avoid one basic question: Why God at all? The *function* of *the God-symbol* should be confronted. This crucial dimension of God-talk is usually neglected. Gordon Kaufman's work is particularly helpful in this regard. He attends to three related notions which are most relevant to this article: theology as construction, the functions of the symbol of God and the need for reconstructing the concept of God.[8] A large number of such "functions" can obviously be identified in the course of history. For example, "God" has provided orientation to the lives of people, explanation for the vagaries of life, and legitimisation to courses of action. One could compile all kinds of typologies to classify the "uses" of God by human beings.[9] In this context, one specific insight should be stressed: the need to identify and account for the *public nature* of the function of the God-symbol. To explore the significance of God merely in privatised and ecclesio-centric terms is inadequate to justify the introduction of this symbol in the curriculum. It is difficult to limit this symbol of ultimacy to such confines. A scholar such as David Tracy correctly emphasised the universality of the divine reality, and that all speaking about God should be public: "To speak and mean God-language is to speak publicly and mean it".[10] In a South African context, this public speaking has a particular social poignancy: to speak with a specific memory and a specific hope. Speaking God cannot be divorced from the suffering of the past and the vision of a new community of justice and reconciliation. The danger is that public discourse, in light of disillusionment with the role of religion in the past, can be reduced to mere secular reasoning. The God-symbol intimates something of the "ultimate meaning of human life",[11] but should be hermeneutically reimagined in light of prominent social exigencies in the present South African context. The challenge facing theologians at a public university is the specific question: What does God-talk epistemically contribute to the disciplinary round table on human flourishing?

---

[7]   Edward Said, the post-colonial thinker, writes perceptively about this in his little volume *Representations of the intellectual* (London: Vintage, 1994).

[8]   See especially his major work *In face of mystery: A constructive theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[9]   For example, D Brown in his article "Four Gods of Christian faith", in Shults, F L (ed), *The evolution of rationality: Interdisciplinary essays in honor of J Wentzel van Huyssteen, 294-305* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) identifies four views of God: God as source, God the agent, God the incarnate, and God the goal. See also R Venter's proposal of three discursive functions of God: agency, modelling and heuristics in "Doing Trinitarian theology: Primary references to God and imagination", *In die Skriflig* 44/3&4 (2010): 565–579.

[10] For one apt exposition of his views in this regard see, for example, his article - "Defending the public character of theology", *The Christian Century* (1 April 1981): esp. 354.

[11] See G Grisez's discussion of this in her article – "The doctrine of God and the ultimate meaning of human life", in Torrance, A J & M Banner, (eds), *The doctrine of God and theological ethics*, 125–137 (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

c. The symbol of God functions; it has a lasting impact on human consciousness and cultural practices. Researchers from various backgrounds and interests have investigated this; for example, theories of the state,[12] human development,[13] and patriarchal attitudes[14] have all been related to specific conceptualisations of the divine. A comprehensive development in reflection on God is operative in these studies; one could even refer to a decisive "turn" in God-reflection – a *turn to the performative*. The way in which God-images function and their impacts has acquired a great deal of attention. Once one combines the insistence on the constructive nature of the theological activity with the function of the God-symbol and its potential human impact, one ventures into the terrain of the *ethical*. If God-images can demonstrably be described in terms of psychological and social destructive influence, the opposite challenge crystallises: the quest of God-images for the good. One road between an image and its potential ramification is no simplistic linear movement; it is complex and even ambiguous. For example, the impact of the emergence of monotheism has been divergently described – from supporting intolerance and violence, to birthing the Western scientific method. In the South African context, two tasks can easily be identified: one is archaeological, that is, what operating images lend support to a system of discrimination; the other is reconstructive, that is, what images may further community, life, justice, hope and integrity. To speak God at a public university means being aware of the ethical consequences of one's discourse. It means accepting responsibility for one's intellectual endeavours. This awareness may even stimulate fundamental probing into the very nature of the divine as such. Historically, in Christian theology, the attribute of tradition played a major role to glimpse the nature of God and offered a kaleidoscopic range of options to describe God. A theology with an antenna for her constructive task and her ethical responsibility may be critical of prominent attributes such as aseity, immutability and impassibility and receptive to sensibilities such as pathos, beauty, and fecundity. If God is associated with ultimate goodness and perfection, human imagining should ethically manifest just that.

d. Epistemological transformation basically implies *inclusion*. Apartheid, with its Hydra character, excluded others from various knowledges and privileges. In terms of religion, non-Christian religions were either ignored or studied in light of Christian mission. Transformation should redress this, by not only giving space to neglected traditions, but also respecting the integrity of each religious tradition. From a curricular point of view, the implication of this for the study of the divine could be complex and may require more in-depth investigation. May it suffice to identify two perspectives. The notion of "God" could be problematic from the outset. Various religions hold different views of the supreme spiritual reality.[15] One should perhaps broadly refer to transcendence, ultimacy, the Holy, and the divine, before one speaks of God; this carries some connotation with personhood. The referent to the God-symbol should be an issue from the beginning. Secondly, in terms of the curriculum, some form of inter-religious dialogue on ultimacy should be put in place. Fortunately, significant work has been done on the so-called *global theology* which may provide productive resources.[16] Some form of recognition should be given not only to the various religions and their own uniqueness, but also to the possibilities of dialogue and even comparative study. The demographic reality of the South African context renders a dialogue between African religions, Islam and Christianity imperative. An inter-religious dialogue on ultimacy by various practitioners could lead not only to greater respect for one another, but also to an enhanced self-reflexivity on identity and each religion's potential to deal with otherness. Such a global antenna could contribute to a greater understanding of the character of the ultimate mystery as such.

e. A selected methodology is often an expression of an ideological position. For example, static representations of God, pretending "this is how God is", often couple resistance to reimagination with maintenance of the social status quo. Classical theism and conservative social visions are often encountered in tandem. Conceptualisation of the divine paused in time is fundamentally exclusionary; it is dismissive of social formative processes, and of competing and contesting traditions. The disruptive potential inherent in the God-symbol is neutralised by sheer synchronicity. An intellectually more responsible methodology would embrace the emergence of a historical consciousness since the nineteenth century and acknowledge the evolutionary character of cognitive ideas as well as the interaction between beliefs and social dynamics. One may conveniently label such an approach

---

[12] See the work by D Nicholls – *Deity and domination: Images of God and the state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (London: Routledge, 1989).

[13] For a study from a psychoanalytic perspective, see A Rizzuto – *The birth of the living God: a psychoanalytic study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[14] See the well-known study by E Johnson – *She who is: the mystery of God in feminist theological discourse* (New York: Crossroads, 1992).

[15] For a helpful discussion of this, see K Ward - The idea of 'God' in global theology, in Hintersteiner, N, *Naming and thinking God in Europe today: theology in global dialogue*, 377–388 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

[16] See the following important studies by N Hintersteiner: *Thinking the divine in interreligious encounter* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012) and *Naming and thinking God in Europe today: theology in global dialogue* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007) as well as W G Jeanrond & A Lande, eds., *The concept of God in global dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005.

genealogical. This conveys the notion that God has a history; in various historical eras, the divine was conceptualised differently. Applied to the Christian God, such an approach will study the shifts from family and clan religion to monolatry in early Israel, the emergence of monotheism in the late exilic period, and the formulation, first, of substantial trinitarianism, and currently the various manifestations of relational trinitarianism. Such a genealogical approach will highlight not only the epochal shifts, but also the presence of competing voices. A genealogical approach resonates with the intellectual ethos of a public university. It celebrates the emergence of intellectual traditions and the plurality of contesting positions. For Christian theology, a genealogical approach may also promise some other *benefits*. Attention to various social conditions and interactions stresses the importance of and the need for conceptual categories and even metaphysical frames of reference. It brings the great variety of theologies and traditions, even within the biblical canon,[17] to the fore. Simultaneously, a rich variety of associations with the divine in each period emerges. Such a kaleidoscopic vision establishes a reservoir of motifs and connotations which could serve present-day reflection. An additional benefit of a genealogical approach is the promotion of a conversation among theological subject areas: disciplines such as Old Testament, Church History and Systematic Theology are often practised in isolation. Finally, a genealogical approach paves the way for further reconstructions under new social conditions. It carries with it the mandate and urgency for contemporary re-imaginings. A genealogical methodology not only studies shifts, plurality of traditions and the possibility of new conceptualisations, but is also sensitive to some form of continued identity which functions as centripetal force in a particular religion. A Christian study of God will balance these different sentiments: emerging trajectories and recurring motifs.[18] Such an emphasis will also further conversation between, for example, approaches in Old Testament which were practised in discursive compartments namely, that between Biblical Theology and History of Religion.

f. Doing theology at a public university inescapably raises the question of the relation of the God discourse to other disciplines and complicates the speaking to a great extent. A self-referential discourse with its own peculiar rationality is easy to pursue; to relate it to a wider context than merely the church generates an additional set of challenges. If theology insists in participating in a public space of intellectual endeavour, it cannot immunise itself from this broader world of enquiry. The knowledge being generated, for example, by astrophysics, molecular biology and continental philosophy cannot be dismissed. These fields of study have irretrievably remapped our world of understanding of origins, biodiversity and metaphysics. Fortunately, there are commendable examples of scholars who have opted for *a dialogical approach* to the divine. In the religion-science dialogue there are attempts to think God after Darwin,[19] to explore divine agency[20] and the relation between the divine and nature.[21] The turn to religion in philosophy of religion has stimulated exciting possibilities to think God after onto-theology, or anatheistically.[22] These studies fundamentally question traditional functions of the symbol of God and especially the dynamics of causality. To raise the God question at a public university is to accept the challenge of *an interdisciplinary approach*, to engage in a conversation of critical mutuality. Such a conversation may imply the task of reconstruction, that is, speak about the divine with a grammar of consonance to wider states of knowledge. It will most likely also bring a crucial disruptive task to the fore: to question secular rationality and its affinity to reductionist naturalism. Pursuing knowledge about life, the human and the universe cannot dismiss the reality of ultimate mystery and absolute otherness. This is the unique task of theology and her speaking of the divine. The horizon of meaning should be guarded against any attempt to close it off.

g. In the South African context, a specific reality confronts all intellectual discourses: the face of the other. Knowledge cannot be transmitted and generated with amnesia, a loss of memory of the suffering caused by apartheid. In this instance, the ethical dimension of God-talk, mentioned earlier, receives a specific referent: *alterity*. The divine should be treated in terms of propensities to legitimise or disrupt discrimination. An ethic of God-talk explicitly addresses *suffering and exclusion*, and seeks liberative resources in each religious tradition in order to redress situations affected by race, gender, class, sexuality and physical ability. During the last part of the twentieth century, various reconstructive theologies have been formulated by, for example, black and feminist theologians. In his proposal for "reforming the

---

[17] This is the contribution of more recent Old Testament scholarship; for example, the relevant work by W Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997) and E S Gerstenberger, *Theologies in the Old Testament* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

[18] This is the advantage of the biblical theological study by R Feldmeier & H Spieckermann - *God of the living* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011). It highlights recurring and dominant themes.

[19] For one example, see the work by J F Haught - *God after Darwin: A theology of evolution.* 2nd ed. Boulder: Westview, 2008.

[20] The important and well-known project on *Divine Action* by the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences comes to mind.

[21] The recent proposals for panentheism are relevant. For one good volume of essays, see P Clayton & A Peacocke, eds., *In whom we live and move and have our being: Panentheistic reflections on God's presence in a scientific world* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

[22] For an excellent overview, see the study by C M Gschwandtner - *Postmodern apologetics: Arguments for God in contemporary philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

doctrine of God", Shults refers to three "anxieties" which have determined contemporary thinking about God – a Cartesian, an Ockhamist and a Newtonian anxiety.[23] What is conspicuously absent in his "reforming" project is a Foucaultian anxiety – an anxiety to acknowledge the undeniable marriage between knowledge and power. God has been expressed in human speech by those in social positions of power and privilege. The experiences of those who suffered should provide the grammar of contemporary God-talk. It is a moment of introspection for religious traditions to examine how otherness with all its many faces has been dealt with. An interesting case in point is the Belhar Confession, which exemplifies how one Christian tradition retrieved a Biblical resource with its insistence "that God … is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged".[24] Speaking about God cannot assume a naïve objective stance; speaking means opting for solidarity with those who suffered historically. This very choice may accompany thinking to the heart of the divine.

The Christian vehicle: the public possibilities of the trinitarian symbol

This article has thus far assumed that epistemological transformation neither abolishes the integrity of a specific religious tradition, nor uncritically accepts ossified convictions which escape the historical imperative of the context. Such transformation encourages the broadening of the conversation, the inclusion of religious voices that have been excluded and challenges traditions to explore their resources and reimagine their central symbols, such as the divine. The identity of the Christian faith is inextricably linked to a trinitarian construct of God. One of the surprising developments in the twentieth century was the "rediscovery" of this traditional doctrine. The wide ecumenical interest affirmed both the trinity as grammar for Christian speaking of God, and its "practical" significance. Thinking about God and the public university can greatly benefit from these developments. The suggestion that such a discourse should be globally sensitive, genealogical, multidisciplinary and prioritising alterity should, in a Christian sense, be developed in a trinitarian manner. It is most encouraging to note that this is not a task to be assumed without any precedent in the state of scholarship. Most exciting research has been done over the past three decades and the volume of literature continues to grow. Only a few examples can be given in this instance. Several studies have developed the trinitarian confession in relation to religious plurality,[25] to natural sciences[26] and to alterity.[27] Revisionist historical overviews have also been published.[28]

It should be pointed out that these developments in the Christian understanding of God have not been met with unanimous enthusiasm. Several voices have raised serious misgivings about social trinitarianism and the use of trinitarian resources to address social problems. For example, Holmes[29] emphatically deems these trinitarian developments to be a questionable deviation of patristic, medieval and reformational thought. The debate in all its nuances cannot be discussed in this article. There are two approaches to doing theology. These detractors do not share the suggestion of this article that speaking about God is inherently constructivist, ethical and expansive. Speaking about God becomes sterile, divorced from contextual imperatives, and a mere repetition of traditional positions. The challenge for Christian theology at a public university is to reaffirm this traditional doctrine and simultaneously explore imaginatively its potential for the common good.

Conclusion

The position of Christian theology at South African public universities has often been subjected to critical discussion. It is an open question whether the specific problem of speaking about the divine in such a space has received adequate attention. The discourse on God cannot escape the imperative of epistemological transformation. This short article suggested that the nature of the theological activity is inherently constructivist, opening possibilities for new imaginings of the divine. The God-symbol functions and new constructions should

---

[23] For a full discussion, see F L Shults - *Reforming the doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 15-94.

[24] For a discussion, see D J Smit - "… op 'n besondere wyse die God van die noodlydende, die arme en die veronregte…", in Cloete, G D & D J Smit, (eds), *'n Oomblik van waarheid*, 60–73. (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1994).

[25] The work by V-M Kärkkäinen - *Trinity and religious pluralism* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004) provides an excellent overview of the major proposals in this regard. For a specific discussion from an African perspective, see the article by J Kombo - "The trinity in Africa", *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3 (2009): 125-143.

[26] The recent volume edited by J Polkinghorne - *The trinity and the entangled world: Relationality in physical science and theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010) is an interesting example of how a specific understanding of God can be related to quantum cosmology.

[27] The re-appreciation of social trinitarianism encouraged numerous examples to 'apply' a relational notion of God to the political sphere. The work by, for example, L Boff & J Moltmann, is well known. Feminist theologians engaged in the conversation, and major proposals resulted. For a recent good overview, see H Bacon - *What's right with the trinity? Conversations in feminist theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

[28] Arguably, the best single source available on the entire range of debates in Trinitarian theology is G Emery & M Levering - *The Oxford handbook of the trinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). The book extensively discusses the emergence of the Trinitarian faith. What is still absent in the discourse is to account for counter-traditions and how these affect the Trinitarian conceptualisation.

[29] See, for example, S R Holmes - *The quest for the living God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2012). For Holmes, one of the great culprits, who derailed Trinitarian reflection, is Hegel with his connection between God and history.

carefully consider their ethical impact and relation to wider social realities. A specific new kind of discourse is required at a South African public university, one which honours various religious traditions, the historical development of competing theological traditions and one which engages with the insights of non-theological disciplines. Such a global, genealogical and multidisciplinary approach should, however, never forget her responsibility to those who have been excluded and who suffer. The task for Christian theological discourse would be to confront these challenges in a trinitarian manner.

Works consulted

Bacon, H. 2009. *What's right with the trinity? Conversations in feminist theology*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Bernstein, R.J. 2013. Is politics 'practicable' without religion? *Social Research* 80, 33–56.

Brown, D. 2006. Four Gods of Christian faith, in Shults, FL. (ed), *The evolution of rationality: Interdisciplinary essays in honor of J Wentzel van Huyssteen*, 294-305. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 294–305.

Brueggemann, W. 1997. *Theology of the Old Testament*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Clayton, P. & Peacocke, A. (eds.) 2004. *In whom we live and move and have our being: Panentheistic reflections on God's presence in a scientific world*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Emery, G. & Levering, M. (eds) 2011. *The Oxford handbook to the Trinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Feldmeier, R. & Spieckermann, H. 2011. *God of the living: a biblical theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press.

Gerstenberger, E.S. 2002. *Theologies in the Old Testament*. London: T&T Clark.

Grisez, G. 2006. The doctrine of God and the ultimate meaning of human life, in Torrance, AJ. & M. Banner (eds), *The doctrine of God and theological ethics*. London: T & T Clark, 125–137.

Gschwandtner, C.M. 2013. *Postmodern apologetics: arguments for God in contemporary philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Haught, J.F. 2008. *God after Darwin: a theology of evolution.* 2nd edition. Boulder: Westview.

Hintersteiner, N. 2012. *Thinking the divine in interreligious encounter*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Hintersteiner, N. 2007 *Naming and thinking God in Europe today: theology in global dialogue*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Holmes, S.R. 2012. *The quest for the trinity: The doctrine of God in scripture, history and modernity*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity.

Jansen, J.D. 2012. Can the theological leopard change its spots: on the transformation of university knowledge, in Venter, R. & F. Tolmie, (eds), *Transforming theological knowledge: Essays on theology and the university after apartheid*, 9–19. Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA, 9–19.

Jeanrond, W.G. & Lande, A. (eds.) 2005. *The concept of God in global dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis,

Johnson, E.A. 1992. *SHE WHO IS: The mystery of God in feminist theological discourse*. New York: Crossroads.

Kärkkäinen, V.M. 2004. *Trinity and religious pluralism*. Burlington: Ashgate.

Kaufman, G.D. 1993. *In face of mystery: a constructive theology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Kelsey, D.H. 2009. Theology in the university: once more, with feeling. *Modern Theology* 25, 315–327.

Kombo, J. 2009. The trinity in Africa. *Journal of Reformed Theology* 3, 125–143.

Leibowitz, B. (ed) 2012. *Higher education for the public good: views from the South*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.

Leibowitz, B. 2012. Introduction: reflections on higher education and the public good, in Leibowitz, B. (ed), *Higher education for the public good: views from the South*, xvii-xxvii. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.

Nicholls, D. 1989. *Deity and dominion: images of God and the state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*. London: Routledge.

Polkinghorne, J. (ed) 2010. The *trinity and an entangled world: relationality in physical science and theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Power, D.N. & Downey, M. 2012. *Living the justice of the triune God*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press.

Rizzuto, A.M. 1979. *The birth of the living God: a psychoanalytic study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Russell, R.J., Murphy, M. & Stoeger, W.R. (eds.) 2008. *Scientific perspectives on divine action: Twenty years of challenge and progress*. Vatican City: Vatican Observatory Publ & Berkeley: CTNS.

Said, E.W. 1994. *Representations of the intellectual: The 1993 Reith lectures*. London: Vintage.

Shults, F.R. 2005. *Reforming the doctrine of God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Smit, D.J. 1994. … op 'n besondere wyse die God van die noodlydende, die arme en die verontregte ..., in Cloete, GD. & DJ. Smit (eds.), *'n Oomblik van waarheid*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 60–73.

Tracy, D. 1981. Defending the public character of theology. *The Christian Century,* 1 April, 350-356.

Venter, R. 2010. Doing trinitarian theology: Primary references to God and imagination. *In die Skriflig* 44(3&4), 565-579.

Venter, R. & Tolmie, F. (eds.) 2012. *Transforming theological knowledge: Essays on theology and the university after apartheid.* Bloemfontein: SUN MeDIA.

Ward, K. 2007. The idea of 'God' in global theology, in Hintersteiner, N. (ed.), *Naming and thinking God in Europe today: Theology in global dialogue*, 377-388. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 377-388.

Werner, D., Esterline, D., Kang, N. & Raja, J. (eds.) 2010. *Handbook of theological education in world Christianity*. Dorpspruit: Cluster.