



The crown of the Regina Scientiarum in South Africa



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The early notion of European Universities that developed on a Christian foundation where Theology occupied a special place got lost in the chaos of change brought about by the fourth revolutions world. In addition to these pressures, Theology in South Africa is further constrained by internal demands for transformation at various levels. This research focuses on determining if the education of Theology is still relevant within the current context, how Theological education can and should link to the current eras' demands, and finally how and why Theology should keep informing and speaking to the three 'publics' (Tracy) and the six 'inters' (Richardson) to adapt to the *new normal* of chaotic change – however, at the same time to also stay true to her unique Christian calling. Despite the weight of the demands made from both outside and inside academic circles on Theology as a discipline, it is the responsibility of theological educators to keep the crown intact by letting the light of Christ shine both inside and outside academia.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: *Regina Scientiarum* is a title for Theology in academia from Aquinas' time. The question is if Faculties of Theology still have or deserve that title in a democratic South Africa within the metamodern era filled with ecumenism. In this article, suggestions are given as to assure that Theology keeps her title, at least in South Africa.

Keywords: Aquinas; three 'publics' of Tracy; *Regina Scientiarum*; theological faculty; Seminary; metamodern era; Richardson's inters.

Introduction

Many scholars allege that Thomas Aquinas has described Theology as the 'queen of science' in his great work *Summa Theologica* (ST) written between 1265 and 1274 (cf. Oliver 2016; Zakai 2007:126). Although he did not use the term *Regina Scientiarum*, he referred to Theology in this way (Aquinas ST 1.1.5):

On the contrary, other sciences are called the handmaidens of this one [sacred doctrine]: 'Wisdom sent her maids to invite to the tower' (Prov. 9:3) ... Hence it is clear that from every standpoint, it [sacred doctrine] is nobler than other sciences (Aquinas n.d.:5).¹

Aquinas provided a well-considered reason for this claim (Aquinas ST 1.1.5):

This science can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation. Therefore it does not depend upon other sciences as upon the higher, but makes use of them as of the lesser, and as handmaidens (Aquinas n.d.:6)²

In this way, Aquinas regarded Theology as the 'most noble of both the speculative and the practical sciences' (Van den Brink 2019:446).

Aquinas made this statement in a turbulent world that was filled with 'unexpected changes' (Oliver 2016:3 of 7), such as the world view change from Platonic to Aristotelean (cf. Armstrong 2013) that happened during the High Middle Ages (between the 11th and 14th centuries). During that time, Theology was the yardstick for scholarship (cf. Armstrong 2013), leading Aquinas to reach his abovementioned verdict. In a chaotic and fast changing world, this can also provide guidance to educators at Faculties of Theology in South Africa.

In the days after the Reformation, many universities all over the world were or became 'reformed', in line with their Faculties of Theology. However, in the modern era and specifically after 1994 in

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1. *Sed contra est quod aliae scientiae dicuntur ancillae huius [sacra doctrina], Prov. IX, misit ancillas suas vocare ad arcem ... Unde manifestum est, secundum omnem modum, eam digniorem esse aliis* (S. Thomae Aquinatis 1998:3).

2. *Quod haec scientia accipere potest aliquid a philosophicis disciplinis, non quod ex necessitate eis indigeat, sed ad maiorem manifestationem eorum quae in hac scientia traduntur. Non enim accipit sua principia ab aliis scientiis, sed immediate a Deo per revelationem. Et ideo non accipit ab aliis scientiis tanquam a superioribus, sed utitur eis tanquam inferioribus et ancillis* (S. Thomae Aquinatis 1998:3).

South Africa, Universities (including their Faculties of Theology or religion) started to become more secular by nature. According to Macdonald (2017:4), the term 'secular' refers to being 'inclusive of a variety of perspectives'. Contrary to most of the old universities that were dominated by the Christian perspective, the modern university has freed itself from these 'chains'. In line with most universities in South Africa that have also become secular, the (Reformed) Faculties of Theology therefore also changed.

This article is a follow-up of an article written by Erna Oliver in 2016, where she has referred to Theology as a 'queen of science'. Now, almost a decade later, the statement made in that article (that Theology was 'still a queen of science') is something to ponder upon. One might ask the academics or educators at the Faculties of Theology at Universities in South Africa if Theology still clings on to her crown in the three 'publics' (Tracy 2002) and what that actually means for their Universities and students.

As the term 'university' appears many times in this article, it would be good to take a fresh look at a definition of 'university'. Kugai (2023) supplies a recent viable definition:

A university is an ancient and at the same time modern form of the highest quality educational institution, which gives a person a high level of education, practical skills and skills in a mastered specialty. At the same time, the university is a creative spirit, the spirit of humanism, education and culture. It is innovation, combining pedagogics with scientific achievements of the modern level ... teaching means 'teaching good'. (p. 127)

Phrases and terms that are used here of which cognisance should be taken, are 'modern form of the highest quality educational institution', 'practical skills', 'creative spirit', 'innovation', 'combining pedagogics with scientific achievements' and 'teaching good'. These phrases and terms stress the fact that education on a tertiary level is 'high level, "good" education combined with modern, innovative technologies'. Students should also be trained with 'practical' (not mostly with theoretical) 'skills' and a 'creative spirit' to prepare them for their coming careers. This article should be read against this background. It also puts Theology within the space of (some of) the eras in which we live, links it to the three 'publics' of Tracy (2002) and the 'inters' of Richardson (2005) and encourages the academics and educators in the Faculties of Theology to adapt to the 'new normal' – if they have not done so already.

Looking at Theology in Europe, Volf and Croasmun (2019:43) argue that Theology there has lost its vision in terms of its 'proper vocation and purpose' and refer to it as an 'internal crisis'. We need to ask whether Theology in South Africa is also suffering from an 'inner crisis'? Or put in the words of people who are denigrating Theology in Universities,³ 'Is Theology still relevant enough to society to retain her position at universities at tertiary level?' Already in 1998, Stephen Hawking argued that physics was supplying answers to

important issues and therefore has taken over the crown from Theology (Hawking 1998). In 2016, Macdonald (2016:n.p.) states that the secular university would not allow Theology to act as the "queen of sciences" to govern and guide its intellectual life' anymore.

A cursory European background

The term 'theologica' became official with the founding of the University of Paris in 1252 (cf. Kugai 2023:127) including a 'facultas theologica' as part of the university (Van den Brink 2019:444). This Faculty was regarded as the best Faculty at the University because of:

[T]he proper progression in the order of study, beginning with the material and mutable (natural philosophy), proceeding then to the immutable things that were associated with material objects (mathematics), before moving on to elevated divine things that were immutable and completely divorced from matter. (Harrison 2015:31)

Many students who studied Theology aimed to enhance themselves in a genuinely spiritual environment. They were not interested in becoming clergy (Van den Brink 2019:444). The three 'higher faculties' at the university were Law, Medicine and Theology, being the smallest of the three. However, Theology was regarded as the true philosophy as its aim was to lead people to live a good life and not only to acquire knowledge (Van den Brink 2019:445).

In both Europe and the US, Theology was soon downgraded and moved out of universities to ecclesial seminaries (Van den Brink 2019:450). However, in 1810, the 'famous philosopher and educationist', Wilhelm von Humboldt founded a university in Berlin on two pillars: 'Wissenschaft' (science and research) and 'Bildung' (formation) (Van den Brink 2019:450). Whereas the natural sciences derived from 'Wissenschaft' in the Humboldt University, 'Bildung' secured a place for the humanities, adding a Faculty of Theology to this university (Howard 2006:155–197; Van den Brink 2019:450). Then Friedrich Schleiermacher appeared and aligned Theology to 'Wissenschaft' at the newly founded university. He did this by subsuming the different subjects of Theology to Historical Theology (Dogmatics included), Philosophical Theology and Practical Theology (Van den Brink 2019:450). Schleiermacher (1850:27) regarded the latter as the crown of theological studies. With this, he focused more on Theology as a pragmatic discipline than being focused on the truth. However, during the last part of the 19th century, Theology was again marginalised to denominational seminaries. This tendency is ongoing, especially in (Western) Europe, due to secularisation (Van den Brink 2020:1 of 9). Notwithstanding the degraded space that Theology has in Europe (and the US), it is still alive and well in South Africa and should be kept that way and even be improved (Williams 1998:27–41). Whereas many universities in Europe (and the US) function without Faculties of Theology (cf. Van den Brink 2020), the scenario in South Africa is a little different.

3. As early as 1770, Baron d'Holback, a French revolution atheist, already wanted Theology out of academia (cf. Wilkinson 2007).

Theology and religion at South African universities

The focus is on the presentation of Christian Reformed (traditional) Theology in Faculties of Theology at Universities in South Africa where many of the students are trained to become (1) a pastor in a reformed congregation, (2) a missionary somewhere inside South Africa's borders or beyond, (3) an academic and (4) a witness for God in their communities. Christian Reformed Theology was officially presented in four universities in South Africa, of which the Faculty at the University of Stellenbosch boasts with the oldest *Theological Seminary* – 1859 (Stellenbosch University 2024a). The Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (currently Northwest University) arose from the Theological School of the Reformed Churches in South Africa being founded in Burgersdorp on 29 November 1869 (WikiSpooks 2021). At the University of Pretoria, the Faculty of Theology (Section A) was established when the university was founded in 1917 (while Section B was added in 1938 – Van der Merwe & Vos 2009:1 of 9), being the first *Theological Faculty* in South Africa (Faculty of Theology and Religion 2024). The Bloemfontein Faculty of Theology (1980) was founded long after the university was established (in 1904) (UFS 2024a). The Faculties of Theology of Stellenbosch, Potchefstroom and Pretoria thus formed part of the origins of these universities. In these institutions, Theology occupied a specific place and status inside the universities, which also reflected in the communities around them and in their societies at large (cf. Knoetze 2020:2 of 8).

Besides the four universities mentioned, the University of Cape Town has a Department for the Study of Religions (UCT 2024); both the Universities of Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg have Departments of Religion Studies (UJ 2024; Wits 2024); UKZN has a School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (UKZN n.d.); the University of Fort Hare had a Department of Theology in which many different global religions were compared with each other (UFH 2024) – this Faculty closed down in 2000 (RU 2019); the University of South Africa has presented Theology from 1960 onwards, without any 'confessional or ecclesiastical protection' (Botha 1990:23). During 1994, the Faculty of Theology was renamed to the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies. During 2003/2004, the Faculty dissolved into a Cluster of three theological departments (Kgatlé 2024:3 of 7), being part of the College of Human Sciences that also houses a Department of Religious Studies and Arabic (UNISA 2024).

Currently these Faculties and Departments of Theology or religion find themselves in a pluralistic society, which differs much from the societies in which they were established. Contrary to the theological Faculties in Europe, which are much older than ours and which are 'considered as quixotic vestiges of times gone by' (Van den Brink 2019:442), our faculties still form part of the universities although not with as much influence as in the past. Reasons given for the

shrinking faculties are a shrinking job market, a shrinking audience and a shrinking (intellectual) reputation (Volf & Croasmun 2019:36–42).

Denominational vs Ecumenical

The brochures of the four abovementioned 'Reformed' Faculties of Theology indicate that they are not only focused on 'reformed' anymore although they are still educating within the Christian environment from a Christian perspective and catering within a broader scope for specific denominations. In 2018, the Faculty of Theology at UP was renamed to the Faculty of Theology and Religion in 'an attempt to be more inclusive and to welcome people of other faiths' (UP Brochure 2021), resulting in a more open and ecumenical type of Theology.

The University of Stellenbosch does not only cater for traditional (Reformed) students anymore but also for the 'Uniting Reformed Church, the Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa' (Stellenbosch University 2024b). The theological education and training this university presents is also from a Christian perspective (Stellenbosch University 2024b).

According to the brochure of the University of the Free State (UFS 2024b), students:

may enrol with us for a variety of programmes and courses, irrespective of your denomination. Here, the Word of God, as well as its interpretation and use (in history and today), is studied. We equip you with the correct knowledge, skills, and attitude to serve people with humility and to lead with confidence. (p. 3)

This is clearly an ecumenical faculty, catering for all Christian denominations. Reformed Theology is therefore not the focus of this faculty, as they indicate: 'For us, it is about Theology without boundaries' (UFS 2024b:3; *original emphasis*).

The Northwest University is explicit in presenting themselves as '[i]nspirational theology on a *reformational* foundation' (NWU n.d.; *author's own emphasis*). They explain:

The Faculty of Theology practises the science of theology on a reformational foundation. This foundation recognises that the Word of God – the Bible – originated through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is therefore authoritative and the guiding light for believers – no ecumenism, no inclusive Theology.

One may ask, 'What would be the reason for the Faculties (except at NWU) to "opt out" of their traditional conservative Reformed mode?' Maybe the recent definition of Theology by the University of Fort Hare (2024) summarises the shift in perspective well:

Theology is the study of religion. It examines the human experience of faith, and how different people and cultures express it. Theologians examine the many different religions of the world and their impact on society.

This is in contrast to definitions of Theology and Christian religious education of some 60–70 years ago. In 1953, Miller defines Theology as ‘the truth-about God-in-relation-to-man’ (Miller 1953:411). Jackson (1958:387) adds to that by stating that Christian religious education is a ‘practice of redemption or of learning to be a servant of the redemptive God’. In the 1960s, Hunter claims that the purpose of Christian education is an ‘encounter with the Almighty’ (Hunter 1963:6). The focus has seemingly therefore shifted from a personal relationship with God to a broader and more open focus on religion in general.

The metamodern era in which we are living, together with dropping student numbers, reduced income from tuition fees, and pressure from (neoliberalism⁴ influenced) university managements probably necessitated these changes.

The eras in which we live

Today, more than eight centuries after Aquinas, we are living in the metamodern era, also called the post-postmodern era or the neo-modern era⁵ (Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu 2020:493), which either developed during the last part of the previous century (Victoria and Albert Museum 2024), at the beginning of this century (Preceden 2024), or in the second decade of this century (Jeffries 2011).

According to Kılıçoğlu and Kılıçoğlu (2020:495; original emphasis), ‘[m]etamodernism is a perspective situated epistemologically *with* (post)modernism, ontologically *between* [postmodernism and modernism,] and historically *beyond* (post)modernism’. This means that metamodernism still operates in the same vein as modernism and postmodernism, but from a new point of view (cf. Table 1), i.e., presenting a realistic, rational and pragmatic idealism. Pragmatic idealism specifically refers to a philosophical and moral way of finding one’s direction in e.g., research, and combined with a critical realism (also called a ‘constructive-critical realism’ – cf. Losch 2022:1 of 6) and rationality, it presents a viable ergonomics for a subject like Theology and for theological education and training. Metamodernism is therefore both the philosophy and view of life corresponding to the mechanised and digitalised era. The metamodern era, mostly based on Kant’s ‘negative’ idealism (Vermeulen & Van den Akker 2010:5 of 14), marks a ‘return to romantic cultural sensibilities’ (Watson 2023) in literature, philosophy, aesthetics, arts and culture – all of which Theology forms an integral part of or is linked to. Friis (2024c) summarises the difference between the three ‘moderns’ with emphasis on the inquiring nature of metamodernity and highlighting the opportunities provided for Theology (cf. Table 1).

4. ‘Despite the emergence of the #FeesMustFall, #RhodesMustFall, and more recently the #Asinamali student protests, South African higher education continues to adopt neoliberal and colonial conceptions of institutional reforms, seen through the emergence and enactment of performance management instruments, demographic understandings of transformation, incoherent/illogical policy prescriptions, and the use of technology as pedagogic replacement’ (Hlatshwayo 2022:1 of 21).

5. Scholars, philosophers, and theorists have different names for this era: Lipovetski (2005) calls it hypermodernism, Kirby (2009) digimodernism, Samuels (2008) automodernism, and Bourriaud (2009) altermodernism.

TABLE 1: Development from modernity, through postmodernity, to metamodernity.

Modernity	Postmodernity	Metamodernity
Faith in science.	Critical questioning of all knowledge and science.	How can we reap the best parts of the other two?
Development and progress.	Suspicion towards all grand narratives about ‘progress’.	Can we create better processes for personal development?
Pro-democracy.	A multicultural order where the weak people are included. Reveals injustice in ‘democratic’ societies.	Can we recreate the processes by which society is governed, locally and globally? How can politics be adjusted to an increasingly complex world?
The individual has relevance.	Ironic distance. Relations create the individual.	Can the inner dimensions of life gain a more central role in society?
A meritocratic social order.	Cultures have been oppressed and ruined by modern society.	How can modern, postmodern and premodern people live together productively?
Humanity can recreate nature by virtue of her reason.	Humanity has destroyed the biosphere.	What is the unique role of humanity in the ecosystems of nature?

Complicating life even more, we are experiencing, among others, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) (Lee & Lee 2021), Education 4.0 (Ryan & Tilbury 2013) and Learning 3.0 (Wheeler 2012a, 2012b). Being contemporary-focused, all the mentioned eras should influence the content and context in which theological education and training is presented at universities.

The 4IR focuses on and is represented by technological advancements – phenomena like the smart industry and big data (Mokofe 2024:7), artificial intelligence (AI),⁶ robotics and the Internet of Things (IoT) (Ivaldi 2022:2). This era opens up a myriad of technological possibilities with the ‘potential to amplify productivity [and] improve efficiency’ (Mokofe 2024:8) that can be utilised and implemented specifically within higher and therefore theological education.

Education 4.0 is focused on student-centredness, concentrating on flexible learning and a flexible pedagogy (Ryan & Tilbury 2013:8). Flexible learning means that students are free to study whenever and wherever they want to, therefore not being demarcated by space, time, media or activity. Flexible pedagogy implies that educators are building their students’ capacities by providing them with innovative ways to navigate through their research and studies. Students are given freedom of choice regarding resources and assessment options (Ryan & Tilbury 2013).

Learning 3.0 takes place within a ‘meta-web ... a semantic based architecture of webs’ (Wheeler 2012b). This links with large language models like ChatGPT,⁷ where the information, uploaded by users, is making the web more intelligent. Web 3 assists users with searches. Here students can also use more sophisticated web tools (Wheeler 2012b).

6. For a more general perspective on how AI will revolutionise education, cf. Khan (2024).

7. For a comprehensive discussion on the use of ChatGPT linked to critical thinking in a theological environment, cf. Marbun 2023 (although written in mutilated English).

The metamodern era in confluence with the other mentioned eras thus causes the Faculties of Theology to adapt to ever-changing situations and demands. This also applies to the institutions of higher education as a whole and to church institutions. They have to adapt (not twist) the good news in an applicable way for people (society and students) of the metamodern world to accept it. Already Oliver (2016) has stated the following, and it still rings true:

Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that faith as a concept is ... ambivalent and that this aspect of our lives needs constant development and adjustment to stay relevant and in touch with the world we inhabit to be able to have a formative influence in our lives. This is also applicable to theology as an academic discipline within the changing and challenging environment of the 21st century. (p. 2 of 7)

Faith presented by the metamodern era

Having just referred to what Oliver stated in 2016, it is also imperative to take a look at faith as presented by the metamodern era. Although there are many directions in which scholars are arguing with relation to faith in the metamodern era, Friis (2024a, 2024b, 2024d, 2024e) gives an elaborate argument on the kind of faith that this era presents. According to Friis (2024a), a 'new Metamodern Religion [also called "religion of tomorrow" or "post-metaphysical religion"] is already emerging'. The reason why there will always be a religion is because 'we are inherently religious and that our reaching for a unifying mythos is non-negotiable, even automatic' (Friis 2024a). He refers to traditional religions like Christianity and Hinduism as *religions that are not religions [anymore]* (Friis 2024a) and 'religious systems of the past' (Friis 2024b), therefore concurring with Nietzsche that 'God is dead' (Friis 2024a).

Figure 1 is a summary of Friis' depiction of metamodern religion, using the Jewish kabbalistic tree of life with its 10 *sefirot* (spheres or emanations) arranged under the crown (*keter*).⁸ On top of the *sefirot* is the 'Ineffable' (a post-metaphysical god – a 'headless god') and at the bottom is metamodern spirituality (Friis 2024b). The first or top part of this kabbalistic tree is a philosophical framework consisting of the Ineffable ('REALITY beyond description') (Friis 2024b). The second or middle part of the tree contains 'both principles for global coherence and ways that they can manifest in a plurality of contexts' (Friis 2024d). The third part comprises transforming cultures and selves (Friis 2024b).

This approach shows little reverence and respect towards God, as Friis has created a framework founded upon everyday life and behaviour of people, therefore a human-centred structure. For him, 'religion is less about what you believe and more about what you practise' (Friis 2024b), thus with less attention to a deity, resulting in statements like: 'Now that we've created God, it's time to kill her again' (Friis 2024b).

8. For a more elaborate discussion on the Kabbalah and the Tree of Life, cf. the book by Hermes Astrology (2024).

Theology as a Christian way to learn more about God could find and express herself within and in line with all the mentioned eras but definitely not within the faith mode of the metamodern era as Friis has depicted it. Therefore, theological education and training should take care not to become human-centred or syncretistic.

Theology within the three 'Publics'

In 2002, David Tracy constructed the three 'publics', that is, church (faith communities), society and academy, in which Theology has to fulfil a significant role (Tracy 2002:14). This triad could be interpreted and divided into three separate scenarios or positions of 'doing public theology' (Massingale 2016:352), portraying the role that Theology could and should fulfil in these three spheres. With reference to the first scenario, Figure 2 depicts Theology as the intersection between the different spheres. The contact point between the three publics is therefore a contextual Theology, acting as 'the conscience of society, state, Church and individuals' (Oliver 2016:6 of 7; cf. Kealotswe 2013). However, in this figure, with the three publics as individual entities, Theology does not play that big a role, although they could be influenced by Theology. Figure 2 portrays the second scenario where Theology forms part of the inner working and activities of every public, not only of their mutual intersections, acting almost as an umbrella covering the whole sphere of living and operation on earth. This figure depicts the recommended space that Theology should occupy. The third scenario, Figure 2, portrays Theology as an individual and separate entity without any intersection with one of the publics, clearly estranged from them, even with a different or archaic 'shape' or point of view.

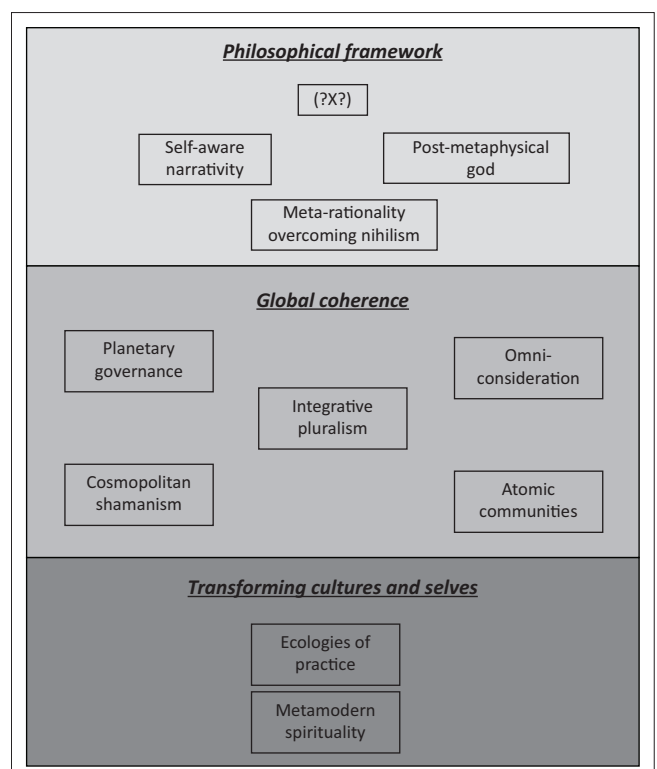


FIGURE 1: The Kabbalistic tree of metamodernity.

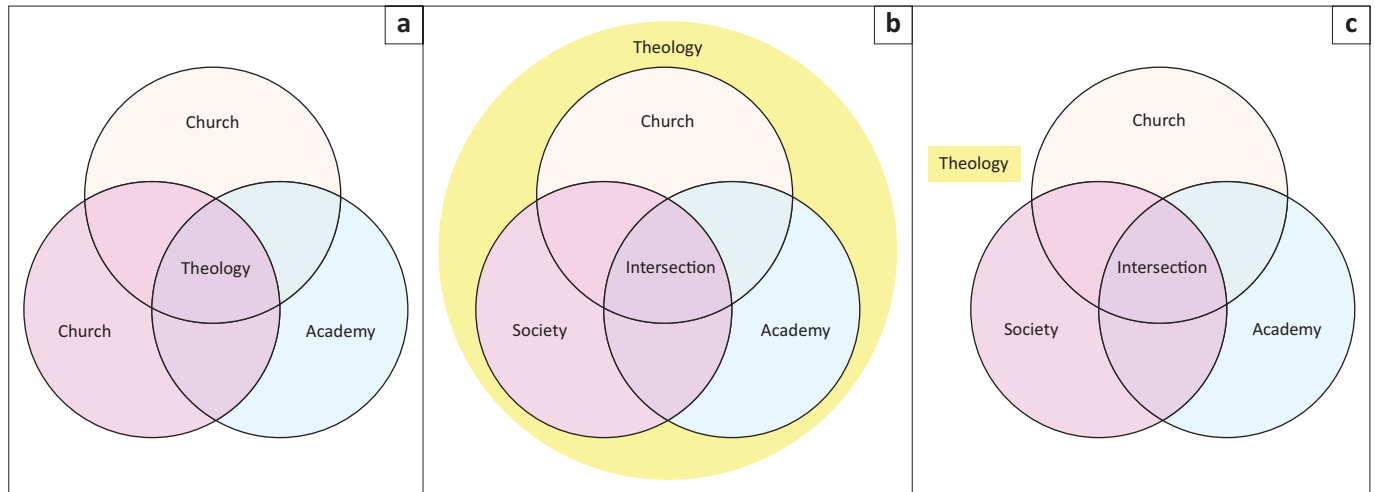


FIGURE 2: (a–c) Different shapes of Tracy's 'Publics'.

The presentation of Theology in academia acts as the major determinant for the position of Theology in the three publics – specifically with reference to church institutions (faith communities) because it is the fresh out of university Theology graduate who will pastor a congregation. This aligns with Tracy's argument that the 'community of inquiry' (the academic institution where the students are educated) should have a definite link and interaction with faith communities and society (Tracy 2002:15; cf. Tollison 2023:47) by means of 'action and thought ... faith and reason'. This depicts a move 'beyond *intra*-disciplinary ... to *inter*-disciplinary conversation and cooperation' (Mouton 2008:438). The questions that we should answer is, 'Where does Theology find herself nowadays?' 'Is Theology really the basis of all the publics' actions (Figure 2) or is Theology reduced to the intersection between the three publics (Figure 2) or, worst case scenario, has Theology become a stranger for the three publics – a *persona non grata* (Figure 2)?'

In light of these three figures, Richardson's 'inters' – inter-denominational, inter-faith, inter-cultural, international, interdisciplinary and inter-active (not discussed in this article) – come to mind as a viable method to implement Theology in every sphere of life, in every 'public' (Richardson 2005) in line with Figure 2. Within society, 'inter-cultural' and 'international' could be implemented successfully, within the faith communities, 'inter-denominational' and 'inter-faith' (debates, workshops, and activities – no syncretism, cf. Buitendag 2019:3 of 7) would operate well, while academia could be 'interdisciplinary' and 'inter-active'.

The way in which academics at faculties of theology adapted (or should adapt)

After 1994, South Africa became a democracy, depicted by Smit (2003:308) as a 'secular, plural, democratic, fragmented' society. This did not change the mission of the church and Faculties of Theology but required a new context and content with reference to, *inter alia*, technology, accreditation, commodification and ecumenism (Womack, Duncan & Pillay

2020:2 of 8). Technology has added online education as a viable alternative to the classroom. The new dispensation has also produced a new accreditation body called SAQA (South African Qualification Authority) taking care of the accreditation of all academic modules (SAQA 2023). With reference to commodification, the faculties had to make sure that they present academic material that would interest and develop their 'customers'.

What some scholars or theologians may regard as the negative side to this is that the knowledge production required priority over personal formation (Womack et al. 2020:4 of 8). Within the new secular society, the Faculties of Theology had to focus more on ecumenism (sometimes to the detriment of being reformed). Added to these, terms like 'decolonisation', 'contextualisation' and 'Africanisation' started to become focal areas in the new South Africa, also in the Faculties of Theology. By implementing these notions, the focus was on changing the content and context of the presentation of Theology. People using these terms are finding some of the current curricula to be a 'source of alienation' (Naidoo 2016:2 of 8), as it still perpetuates 'the old colonial system' (Womack et al. 2020:7 of 8).

The 21st century saw a number of calls for radical change and transformation in the Faculties of Theology, fanning out in different directions with diverse focus points and demands.⁹ Not only the content and spectrum of the curricula had to change (as discussed above) but also the way in which these curricula are presented (cf. Oliver 2024a, 2024b). It is therefore the educators that will first have to change their inner luddite – their natural resistance towards 21st-century technologies and innovative ways of educating students, if necessary (MacGregor 2023). Together with Buitendag's

9. Examples of scholars who argue that change or transformation is necessary, are David Kelsey (1992) who refers to Theology as an 'equivocal notion that urgently needs revision and contestation' (Buitendag 2019:2 of 7); Rian Venter (2016:5 of 6) who argues for transformation in Theology – that a 'new way of doing Theology is required'; Jerry Pillay (2018:179) who claims that theological education in South Africa needs to transform; Johannes Knoetze (2020:1 of 8) who opts for the transformation of theological education through contextual consciousness ('not the accumulation of knowledge'); Willem Oliver (2024a, 2024b) who refers to the use of gaming and rhizomatic learning at the Faculties of Theology, and Mookgo Kgatle (2024) who opts for an interdisciplinary Faculty, accommodating other faiths together with Christianity.

question, '[W]hat is so theological about theological education?' (Buitendag 2019:1 of 7), which he answers in his article in a philosophical way, one could also ask, 'What is so 21st-century about our theological education?'

Wm. Taylor Tollison (2023:45, 49) writes from a practical point of view to equip students 'to respond capably in a rapidly changing world'. He argues that each student should study Theology with a specific 'place' (congregation and community) in mind. The curricula should be designed to sharpen the students' 'real-world critical thinking skills in the service of actual needs in [that] place' complemented by a specific skills set. Competency-based education should be stimulated by creating 'intentional internships in the local community' to develop specific skills and tasks (Tollison 2023:45). According to him, 'the goal of Christian higher education is human flourishing, or, in Biblical terms, "shalom"' (Tollison 2023:52).

Mouton (2008) states that Theology has to earn her rightful position by adhering to the following three modes with emphasis on the content of theological education and training: Firstly, Christian Theology must be based on the Bible ('biblical documents') and on the 'resurrecting power of Jesus' (Mouton 2008:433), responding positively and interactively to the following question: 'What would the educational, formative, and therefore scientific importance of Christian Theology be in a pluralistic, multi-religious society?' Educators must have their approach and teaching 'rooted in and inspired by [their] own faith perspective, commitments, and beliefs' (Massingale 2016:354).

Secondly, Christian Theology must (Mouton 2008 *original emphasis*; cf. Tracy 2002):

[A]ccount for the dynamic [and] complex interface between the church (and its foundational texts), *society* (where those texts are appropriated or ignored), and the *academy* (which explores a universum of knowledge). (p. 437)

It is at this intersection between the three 'publics' that 'the primary function' of Theology has to be defined and activated (Mouton 2008:437–438).

Thirdly, Theology must establish a lively link with the life stories and needs of the people (Mouton 2008:438), therefore including conversations with people from other faith groups. Mouton (2008) rightfully states:

The narratives of people from within multicultural church and (secular) societal contexts represent and invite new forms of theological education to which the new century [21st century] will increasingly introduce us. (p. 438)

This is the ecumenical side of theological education and training.

It is therefore an important determinant for Faculties of Theology to stay current and relevant within the times and eras in which we are living and to speak to the hearts of our students and people in the three publics, without any form of syncretism or twist of truth. As already indicated, the

academic education of students forms the quintessence of the way in which Theology will find herself in the three publics. It is thus imperative to make sure that the education process at universities is current and vibrant. Living within the metamodern era requires from academia to maintain a realistic, rational and pragmatic idealism when presenting Theology at the Faculties. This should be done with Education 4.0 in mind, being student-centredness and not educator-centred anymore. The focus should be on flexible learning and a flexible pedagogy, making the brick and mortar classroom almost redundant. Whereas the 4IR and Learning 3.0 open up a myriad of technological possibilities, our faculties should make ample use of it, to their own advantage.

Theology: University or Seminary?¹⁰

At present, Faculties of Theology in South Africa have made the choice to stay part of the universities and to become ecumenical faculties (except for the Faculty at NWU) instead of faculties for selected denominations. The exclusivity of the curricula is replaced by a general inclusivity. This does not *per se* indicate that the presentation of Theology *qua* Theology at South African Universities is changed or transformed or 'diluted' to a more inclusive and general presentation of the Word and mission of God, totally away from a denominational specific focus. Seemingly, denominations served by these universities are satisfied with the change and currently do not opt for theological seminaries where they can fully present their specific interpretation and dogma to their students at smaller and more exclusive institutions of higher education.

Venter (2016:2–3) also opts for the university, narrating that the faculties should develop a new contextual Theology in line with our post-apartheid context with 'an orientation that discerns the myriad of social changes, seizes the deep cynicism in the present South African mind, and speaks to the heart of Africa'. This would exclude 'narrow nationalist purposes', 'confessional Theology' and 'traditional approaches' (Venter 2016:3). Venter further avers that it is problematic for Theology to provide religious sanction as it was in the past because we currently live in a democracy with 'inclusive democratic public universities in South Africa' (Venter 2016:3). The 'narrow community interest' must make space for a 'broader social implication' (Venter 2016:3). Theology should 'rethink its basic nature, task and function' (Venter 2016:3). The implication, according to Venter (2016:4), is that 'all religions should be equally respected and valued, [and that] Islam and African religion' need greater attention. Venter (2016) concludes:

The benefits of greater inclusion should not be missed: the study field will be expanded from a narrow ecclesial focus to one that prioritises human quests for transcendence, meaning-making and planetary flourishing. (p. 4)

10. In the US and Europe seminaries are already, as mentioned above, part and parcel of most of the (Reformed) Theological education (cf. Wang et al. 2023). In their article, mention is made of the Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena), George W. Truett Theological Seminary at the Baylor University (Waco), the Talbot School of Theology at the Biola University (La Mirada), and the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield) in the US.

Read against the argument under this section, Venter is promoting an ecumenical approach of theological education and training in order to keep the Faculties of Theology part of universities and to be more inclusive. The question is if Theology will lose her crown if she departs from university, or will she in fact be able to cling on to her crown by being ecumenical?

A last word

This article contains many points on which theological educators should ponder. It was not the intension of the authors to be prescriptive or critical about anything but rather to awaken an urge under (specifically) the educators at the Faculties of Theology in South Africa to adapt to the 'new normal'. Firstly, the way in which the classes were presented 30-odd years ago, does not look viable anymore, not with all the new technologies at hand. Secondly, the content and context of theological education and training have changed together with the different eras in which we live and should therefore be adapted as indicated above. Thirdly, theological education and training should stay pure and absolutely connected to the Bible in these times – no twists, no syncretism and no mixes with other religions or traditions or whims of the people.

How will the presentation of Theology look within the next decade? What will the content and context of our curricula be? What will the influence of Theology be on the three publics? These things will determine whether Theology will still be a queen of science in order to keep the crown.

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