

## FROM THE EDITOR

Theology on the edge. This was the theme of a conference held from 3-5 September 2014 at the Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University, honouring the South African Reformed theologian and Bonhoeffer scholar John de Gruchy on his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday. De Gruchy is Emeritus Professor of Christian Studies at the University of Cape Town and an Extraordinary Professor in the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. He is the author of fourteen books, including *The Church Struggle in South Africa* (1979, 1986, and 2005, with Steve de Gruchy), *Liberating Reformed Theology: A South African Contribution to an Ecumenical Debate* (1991), *Christianity, Art and Transformation: Theological Aesthetics in the Struggle for Justice* (2001), *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (2002), *Being Human: Confessions of a Christian Humanist* (2006), *John Calvin: Christian Humanist and Evangelical Reformer* (2009), and *Led into Mystery: Faith Seeking Answers in Life and Death* (2013). In addition, he has edited many books, including two volumes of the English edition of the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBWE series). He has received several prizes, including the Karl Barth Prize in 2000, and the Andrew Murray-Desmond Tutu Prize (three times). In 2009 he received an honorary doctorate from the University of Stellenbosch.

The theme of the conference, “Theology on the edge”, was chosen in light of a tension in doing theology. We reflect on Scripture but always in changing contexts and in response to new issues that challenge Christian faith and witness. In this way theology engages reality in transforming ways on the edge of the unfolding future as we enter unfamiliar territory. Therefore, to honour a theological legacy, is not to repeat what has already been said in the same way, but to make it possible for a new generation to do theology with integrity, passion and relevance. What is important is not simply the testimony of past years from which we may learn and which we may honour, but the testimony of today. This is lived theology, theology on the edge.

In this volume of *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif (NGTT)/ Dutch Reformed Theological Journal* we include seven articles that were initially read as plenary papers at this conference, as well as two articles that were presented at a three-day colloquium preceding the conference at the Volmoed retreat center near the coastal town of Hermanus – where de Gruchy lives and functions as the resident theologian. The life, work and legacy of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a strong focus at this colloquium, which was attended by a group of about 45 theologians and pastors, including a contingent of doctoral students from Stellenbosch University and the University of the Western Cape. This colloquium is an annual event that grew out of a Bonhoeffer circle (of doctoral students) started by De Gruchy already in the 1990s and has since then developed into a research group that meets regularly.

Three well-known Bonhoeffer scholars gave stimulating position papers at the colloquium. Clifford Green spoke on “Bonhoeffer’s contribution to a new Christian paradigm” (with a focus on what it means to read Bonhoeffer as theologian, and reading his corpus as a “whole”). Larry Rasmussen addressed the topic of “Bonhoeffer and the Anthropocene,” while Keith Clement’s paper focused on “Bonhoeffer and Ecumenism”. Each paper was followed by responses by South African theologians, with Robert Vosloo (Stellenbosch University), Ernst Conradie (University of Western Cape), and Janet Trisk (from Kwazulu-Natal, and the current editor of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*) responding to the papers of Green, Rasmussen and Clements respectively. Graham Ward (Oxford University) offered short responses to all three these papers. We are happy to include in this edition of *NGTT* the reworked papers by Clements and Rasmussen.

The “Theology on the Edge” conference at Stellenbosch that followed the colloquium consisted of five half-day sessions, all dealing with an aspect of De Gruchy’s work. Quite fittingly, the first session focused on Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The German Bonhoeffer scholar and former bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg Wolfgang Huber gave the opening lecture. He spoke on “Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Christian existence on the edge of the future,” and his paper set the tone for the conference. In the same session Nico Koopman, the Dean of the faculty of theology at Stellenbosch, spoke on “Bonhoeffer and the task of public theology”. In the rest of the session the panellist (Clifford Green, Karola Radler, Michael Phiri, and Frits de Lange) made valuable inputs, addressing questions such as how to read Bonhoeffer as theologian, the relationship between the thought of Bonhoeffer and Carl Schmitt on decision, the promise of reading Bonhoeffer on humanism in Malawi, and the relationship between Bonhoeffer’s theology and an ethics of care.

The rest of the conference focused on the themes associated with the multifaceted work of De Gruchy. There were sessions on theological aesthetics (with Graham Ward and Frank Burch Brown as the main speakers), on Christian humanism (with papers by Denise Ackermann and Jim Cochrane), on theology and science (with presentations by Iain McGilchrist and Wentzel van Huyssteen), and a closing session on reconciliation and justice (with Serene Jones and Allan Boesak making strong inputs that – like in the other stimulating sessions – was followed by thought-provoking comments from the panellists and led to lively general discussions). The conference was brought to a close with John de Gruchy making some powerful concluding remarks about the future challenges for theology. In this *NGTT* Supplementum we offer peer-reviewed articles from Huber, Koopman, Ward, Burch Brown, Ackermann, Van Huyssteen, and Boesak. De Gruchy’s concluding reflections is included as an afterword.

The conference – which was attended by about 200 people – was also the occasion for the launch of two important new publications by South African theologians, namely Denise Ackermann's *Surprised by the Man on the Borrowed Donkey: Ordinary Blessings* (published by Lux Verbi) and John de Gruchy's latest book *My Life in Writing: A Theological Odyssey* (published by Sun Press, Stellenbosch). We hope to offer reviews of these books in upcoming editions of the journal.

The Volmoed colloquium and the Stellenbosch conference in honour of John de Gruchy was experienced by many as a week of intense theological conversation and profound life together. The week showed something of the impact of De Gruchy's thought on theological discourse in South Africa and further afield, reminding us that theology on the edge, and at the edge, can open up surprising vistas.

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