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DEEL 53, SUPPLEMENTUM 3, 2012

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Dedication

This special issue of NGTT is dedicated to the work of Prof. Vincent Brümmer (Utrecht/Stellenbosch) on the occasion of his 80th birthday on December 30, 2012. Twenty years ago, Prof. Vincent Brümmer already received a Festschrift to honour him at the occasion of the silver jubilee of his professorship at Utrecht University (Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco van den Brom & Marcel Sarot (eds.), *Christian Faith and Philosophical Theology* Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992, 2¹1995). That *liber amicorum* was written by his pupils and by a selection of colleagues from the Netherlands and abroad. In Prof. Brümmer's continued academic activities, his pupils have found a reason to honour him again with a collection of scholarly articles. Apart from a number of pupils of Prof. Brümmer, who contribute for the second time, we have aimed to attract authors who did not contribute to the previous book, among whom are a number of younger scholars. Moreover, we have tried to make visible Brümmer's involvement in the theological scene in South Africa, an involvement that has only grown after his retirement. Not only did Brümmer begin to publish in Afrikaans (which he had not done since the 1960s) but also did he – after many previous visits to South Africa – spent in 2011-12 two longer periods as a research fellow at the STIAS (Stellenbosch Institute for Advance Studies). Moreover, at the age of 79 he was appointed as an extraordinary professor in theology at Stellenbosch University. Though our invitation came late, a wide range of students and colleagues of Prof. Brümmer willingly accepted our invitation to contribute a paper to honour him and show their debts to his work. We are grateful to all authors, editors and reviewers who cooperated with us during the past couple of months in composing this issue and getting the work done, often within tight time constraints. The articles show a large variety of topics, disciplinary backgrounds and theological orientations; even more articles will be posted on the online-edition of NGTT. All in all, this issue testifies to the seminal influence Brümmer has exerted throughout the years on so many academics in theology and beyond. We hope this issue displays part of the harvest of what he has sown during the past decades by his dedicated work in the philosophy of religion, systematic theology, spirituality, and (most lately) historical theology.

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Om God in goed en kwaad te sien. Oor twee vorme van teodisee

ABSTRACT

Seeing God in good and evil: Two forms of theodicy

The author distinguishes between two theodicy questions: (1) Why does God permit evil and suffering to happen? (2) Are evil and suffering compatible with the existence of God? In answer to the first question: the author pleads ignorance. We cannot know God's thoughts and motives. He does show, however, that there are several possible motives and reasons. The answer to the second question is shown to be positive. The author uses the tsunami of 2004 as his main example, and shows in his discussion that human responsibility plays a more important role than is often thought. Following Vincent Brümmer, he argues that in the final resort, our view of the balance of good and evil in the world is a question of religiously motivated interpretation.

Is die geloof in God hoegenaamd houdbaar in die lig van die kwaad in die wêreld? Dié problematiek word in die teologie en godsdienstilosofie die teodisee-vraag genoem. Talle filosowe en teoloë het probeer om 'n antwoord op hierdie vraag te formuleer, en so die geloof in God te verdedig. Die probleem is hiermee, dat namate ons beter daarin slaag om duidelik te maak waarom God die kwaad toelaat, ons – ook as dit in die geheel nie die bedoeling is nie – ook 'n sterker regverdiging van die kwaad self gee. Daarom is daar sedert die jare tagtig ook kritici van die teodisee wat sê dat die middel erger is as die kwaal (Surin 1986, Tilley 1991, Scott 1996).

Vincent Brümmer is bewus van hierdie probleem, maar het hom nie daardeur laat ontmoedig om tog by te dra tot die teodisee-projek nie, maar dan op 'n manier waarop die lyding van die lydende mens nooit ver weg is nie. “Kan 'n teodisee troos?”, so lui die titel van een van sy artikels.² Brümmer noem dit 'n moreel sensitiewe manier om oor die teodisee na te dink (Brümmer 1987). Hierdie refleksies bou op Brümmer se werk. Brümmer self het eens geskryf: “Het hoogste wat een wijsgeer zou kunnen bereiken is om brede schouders te hebben waar anderen met vrucht op zouden kunnen staan om een beetje verder te zien” (Brümmer 1992:93). Vir Brümmer self geld dit inmiddels, en op sy skouers staan ek en probeer om op my beurt op 'n moreel sensitiewe manier oor die teodisee na te dink.

DIE TEODISEE-VRAAG

Dit is die wiskundige en filosoof Leibniz wat die term “teodisee” gemunt het. Dit gaan terug op die Griekse woorde vir “God” en “regverdig” en dui op pogings deur gelowiges om die dade van God te regverdig in die lig van al die kwaad in die wêreld: Hoekom het God so 'n wêreld gemaak? En hoekom laat hy die kwaad toe? Leibniz se eie poging in dié verband is een wat met

1 Ek spreek graag my hartelike dank uit aan Prof. Marcel Sarot vir sy hulp met die voltooiing van hierdie bydrae, asook Helgard Pretorius vir sy redaksionele hulp.

2 Brümmer 1988:142-170. Ook Sarot (1995, 1999) en Van den Brink (1997) dink soos Brümmer.

die opkoms van die sogenaamde modale logika in ons tyd weer 'n nuwe aktualiteit (ten minste in sekere filosofiese kringe!) verkry het (Adams 1972). Volgens Leibniz doen God altyd die beste. Wat God doen is per definisie (omdat God volmaak is) nie net goed of selfs baie goed nie, maar beter as alle ander moontlike handelwyses. Aangesien God die wêreld geskep het, kan ons seker wees dat dit beter was om dit te doen as om dit nie te doen nie. En as God, om watter rede dan ook, die kwaad in die wêreld toelaat, dan hoef ons nie te twyfel nie dat die alternatief slegter sou wees. Kortom, God sorg vir “die beste moontlike wêreld” (Leibniz 1710).

In die moderne denke ná Leibniz het die teodisee-vraag 'n ander vorm begin aanneem (Sarot 2003). Nou is dit nie meer 'n vraag wat gelowiges oor hulle God vra nie, maar eerder 'n vraag oor die houdbaarheid van geloof in God as sodanig: As God goed was, sou God die kwaad wou voorkom. En as God almagtig was, sou God dit ook kon regkry. Maar daar is kwaad in die wêreld. God is dus óf nie goed nie (Van het Reve 1987), óf nie almagtig nie (Hartshorne 1984, Kushner 1981, Schiwy 1995) óf – en dit is gewoonlik die gevolgtrekking wat gesuggereer word – God “is” gewoon nie (Dawkins 2006, Philipse 2012: 292–309). Die vraag is nie meer “Hoekom doen God dit of dat?” nie, maar eerder “Is daar hoegenaamd 'n God?” Vir diegene wat hierdie vraag ontkenkend beantwoord, lyk dit na 'n logiese teenstrydigheid om enersyds die kwaad in die wêreld onder oë te sien en andersyds steeds in die goeie, almagtige God van die Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese tradisie te glo.

TWÉÉ TEODISEE-VRAE

Hierdie twee teodisee-vrae – Leibniz se gelowige vraag en die latere, skeptiese vraag – moet duidelik van mekaar onderskei word. Dit gebeur ongelukkig nie altyd nie. In argumente tussen gelowiges en ateïste (en tussen gelowiges onderling) word die twee dikwels met mekaar verwar. 'n Antwoord op die eerste vraag word dan as 'n antwoord op die tweede vertolk (en omgekeerd). Hierdie soort verwarring tree veral dikwels op wanneer die vraag ietwat vaag geformuleer word, soos in die wel bekende “Waar was God toe dit of dat gebeur het?” (Volgens die Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese beskouing was God natuurlik presies waar God altyd is: oral – en dus ook dáár. Sien Van den Brom 1993.) Tog is dit duidelik dat dit hier om twee verskillende vrae gaan wat heeltemal verskillende antwoorde vereis. Vergelyk die volgende twee vrae:

1. Ek wonder hoekom my vriend, wat tog 'n bedagsame en lojale persoon is, nie ons afspraak nagekom het nie?

En:

2. Ek wonder of my vriend werklik betroubaar en lojaal is? (Immers, hy het nie eers ons afspraak nagekom nie.) Miskien hét ek glad nie eers 'n vriend nie?

Natuurlik kan die een vraag maklik in die ander oorslaan, maar dan word dit ook 'n ander vraag en nie maar net 'n ander bewoording van dieselfde vraag nie. Om te sê “Dalk het hy karprobleme gehad en kon nie by 'n telefoon uitkom nie” of “Ek kan dit nie verstaan nie, maar hy sal wel 'n goeie rede hê”, is iets heeltemal anders as “Duidelik is hy geen ware vriend nie” of “Miskien het ek my net verbeel dat hy bestaan”.

ANTWOORDE OP VRAAG 1: HET GOD “'N DOEL DAARMEE”?

Laat ons eers by die eerste vraag begin: Gestel dat God wel bestaan en ook goed en almagtig is. Hoekom sou God dán toelaat dat slegte dinge gebeur?

Een antwoord wat baie gelowige mense gee, is dat God een of ander doel met slegte

gebeurtenisse het. God wil dan byvoorbeeld mense straf (en so die Goddelike geregtigheid laat geld) of God wil mense tot bekering bring, hulle beproef, hulle afhanklikheid by hulle tuisbring, hulle karakter vorm of geleenthede vir onbaatsugtige, heroïese daade verskaf (en so eintlik genade betoon; Lewis 1940:77-97). Volgens dié antwoord is God self regstreeks verantwoordelik vir die slegte dinge wat gebeur. En omdat God 'n goeie doel (geregtigheid of genade) daarmee het, is dit eintlik goed dat dié dinge gebeur – die doel heilig die middele. Dié antwoord kom dan ook eintlik daarop neer dat die slegtheid van dit wat sleg is, ontken word: dit wat met die eerste oogopslag sleg lyk, is in werklikheid goed. Juis dié ontkenning van die slegtheid van dit wat sleg is, maak myns insiens hierdie antwoord problematies. In die Bybel en die outentieke Christelike tradisie word die werklikheid van die kwaad immers nooit ontken of selfs afgeswak nie. Juis in die lig van Christene se ervaring dat God goed is en die goeie verlang, staan die donkerte van die kwaad duidelik afgeëts en word dit – as kwaad – onder oë gesien. Christene glo nie in 'n meer uiteimende, a-morele dimensie “verby goed en kwaad” nie, maar hou vol om God as die volmaak goeie te beskou en alles wat teen God se wil is as boos en verwerplik. Om te sê dat God die kwaad wil – in die sin dat God dit doelbewus bewerkstellig – kom neer op 'n ontkenning van God se goedheid. Die outentiek Christelike houding sal altyd wees om die kwaad raak te sien as dit wat téén God se wil is en wat, om dié rede, ongekwalfiseerd betreur en bestry moet word.

Tog lê daar 'n geldige intuïsie in dié populêre antwoord opgesluit. Ons het almal al ervaar dat slegte dinge soms tot goeie dinge aanleiding gee. Die dood van 'n geliefde kan mense nader aan mekaar bring en hulle die lewe opnuut laat waardeer. In noodsituasies word soms merkwaardige heldedade verrig. Ons kom soms as beter mense aan die ander kant van pyn en lyding uit. Mense wat trauma deurgemaak het, kan soms ander mense in soortgelyke omstandighede beter bystaan. Niemand minder as Paulus nie het geskryf dat God “alles ten goede laat meewerk”. Die paradigmatische voorbeeld hiervan is die kruisiging van Jesus – 'n afskuwelike misdaad wat, volgens Christelike oortuiging, deur God in 'n verlossingsgebeure omskep is. Om in die goedheid en almag van God te glo, impliseer inderdaad dat God die goeie uit die slegte kan en sal voortbring, dat die kwaad nooit die laaste woord kan spreek nie (Brümmer 2006:235–244). Maar dit is iets heel anders as om te beweer dat God self die kwaad vir 'n goeie doel bewerkstellig.

DIE GEVOLG VAN SONDE?

Ek het reeds verwys na die opvatting dat slegte gebeure soms as God se straf vertolk word. 'n Nou verwante opvatting is dat slegte dinge die gevolg van menslike sonde is. Dit hoef nie te beteken dat God mense vir hulle sonde straf deur slegte gebeure te bewerkstellig nie; dit kan ook gewoon daarop dui dat mense se daade gevolge het en dat slegte daade dikwels slegte resultate tot gevolg het. Lank voordat die term “teodisee” bedink is, het die kerkvader Augustinus reeds die teodisee-vraag op klassieke wyse só beantwoord: God se uiteindelige doel met die skepping is om 'n volmaakte liefdesverhouding met die mens te hê (Brümmer 2006:226–228). Aangesien daar in enige verhouding ten minste twee persone betrokke is en omdat wederliefde slegs vrywillig gegee kan word (anders is dit geen liefde nie), kan God nie dié doel bereik deur van mense willose outomate ('n ou Gereformeerde belydenis praat van “stokke en blokke”) te maak nie (Brümmer 1988:92–119). Om die Goddelike doel te bereik, moet mense dus 'n mate van vryheid hê; hulle moet kan kies of hulle God wil liefhê en gehoorsaam. Maar die vryheid om die goeie te doen, is tegelykertyd ook die vryheid om dit nie te doen nie – om die kwaad te kan doen. Daarmee is die moontlikheid van die kwaad gegee. Volgens hierdie argument is die kwaad nie self 'n voorwaarde vir die bereiking van God se goeie doel (soos in die God-het-'n-doel-daarmee argument) nie, maar die reële moontlikheid van die kwaad is wel so 'n voorwaarde. As skepper is God verantwoordelik vir die feit dat dié moontlikheid bestaan, maar as mense kies

om dié moontlikheid te realiseer, is dit hulle keuse en nie God s'n nie. God se wil is dat mense deurgaans vir die goeie sal kies. Op dié manier poog Augustinus – en die hoofstroom van die Christelike tradisie ná hom – om aan die volmaakte goedheid van God vas te hou en steeds die werklikheid van die kwaad te verreken (Brümmer 1988:156-166; Evans 1982).

Een beswaar wat soms teen Augustinus se vrye-wil-teodisee ingebring word, is dat 'n goeie God in daardie geval nie sou gekies het om die wêreld en die mense te skep nie. Die prys vir die bereiking van God se doel, so word gesê, is te hoog. Hierop sou Leibniz, met sy beste-moontlike-wêreld teorie, dalk antwoord deur te sê dat God veel beter as ons instaat is om te oordeel oor die relatiewe meriete van verskillende handelingsopsies. Ons is immers alles behalwe volmaak goed; vir ons om te dink dat ons kan inskat watter keuses 'n volmaak goeie wese sou maak, is niks minder as naïef en selfs arrogant nie. Gegewe God se volmaakte goedheid (onthou, ons is nog met Vraag 1 besig!) en ons eie morele beperkinge, is dit glad nie vreemd dat God se besluite soms anders as selfs ons mees oorwoë beslissings sal uitval nie (Howard Snyder & Bergmann 2001). 'n Ander manier om iets soortgelyk te sê, is die volgende: Wanneer ons beweer dat 'n goeie God nie die wêreld en die mense sou skep as die prys daarvoor die moontlikheid – en uiteindelik ook die werklikheid – van sulke verskriklike kwaad was nie, dan pas ons 'n standaard van goedheid toe wat nie God s'n is nie. Ons sou miskien anders as God geoordeel het, maar ons is nie God nie. Duidelik heg God meer waarde aan al die goeie dinge in die wêreld – en met name die bestaan van vrye persone wat kan liefhê en geluk proe – as wat ons (soms) daaraan heg. Volgens die Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese opvatting, is God se wil die maatstaf van alle goedheid (Brümmer 2006:271–281). Die feit dat God wel gekies het om die wêreld en die mense te maak – ten spyte van die risiko en die prys wat daaraan verbonde is – behoort ons dus daartoe te beweeg om God se waardestelsel ons eie te maak, om self ook die goeie dinge in die wêreld hoër in te skat as wat ons dalk van nature geneig is om te doen.

'n Verdere beswaar teen Augustinus se argument is dat dit oënskynlik God se almag in twyfel trek. Hy redeneer immers dat God nie 'n liefdesverhouding met mense “kan” hê én hulle tegelykertyd van hulle vryheid ontnem nie. Hoe so? Beteken almag dan nie dat enigiets moontlik is nie? Dit mag dalk logies teenstrydig wees om te sê dat mense sonder vryheid vir God kan liefhê – so lui dié beswaar – maar as God almagtig is, kan God tog enigiets doen, nie waar nie? “Nie waar nie”, sê die Middeleeuse teoloog Thomas van Aquino, “God se almag sluit nie logies onmoontlike handeling in nie” (Thomas van Aquino, ScG II 25 = Thomas Aquinas 1956:73–76). Word God se mag dan deur die wette van die logika beperk? Nee, God se mag ken geen perke nie, maar daar is perke aan wat 'n mens kan sê en dink sonder om betekenis in te boet. As jy sê “Die sirkel is vierkantig”, dan gebruik jy wel woorde, maar jy sê eintlik niks. Om jouself teê te spreek, is om iets te beweer en dit tegelykertyd terug te neem – en dit is dieselfde as om niks te beweer nie. Soos CS Lewis dit stel: Betekenislose woordkombinasies kry nie skielik betekenis wanneer hulle deur die woorde “God kan ...” voorafgegaan word nie. Om te sê dat God mense kan skep wat liefhet en goed doen sonder om vry te wees, het net so min betekenis as om te sê dat God 'n vierkantige sirkel kan maak. Nóg die bevestiging, nóg die ontkenning van so 'n stelling dra enige betekenis oor. Sommige gelowiges meen dat hulle die misterie en ondeurgrondelikheid van God gestand doen deur allerlei teenstrydighede oor God kwyt te raak, maar in feite is dit net 'n vroom verskoning om onsin te praat. En onsin bly onsin, ook wanneer daar oor God gepraat word (Lewis 1940:16, Brümmer 1981:26–27, 2006:249–253). Daar is dus geen sprake, in Augustinus se teodisee, van 'n beperking van God se mag nie, maar wel van 'n fyn aanvoeling vir logika en 'n sterk antenna vir onsin.³

3 Sien hier ook veral Ingolf Dalferth (*Becoming Present*) wat op 'n soortgelyke, baie toerykende manier God se almag met God se liefde in verband bring en ook wys wat dit vir die teodisee vraagstuk inhoud (2006: 166-168). Dit is opmerkend dat Dalferth gereeld in gesprek tree met Brümmer se *Speaking of a*

DUIWELSWERK?

'n Meer pertinente beswaar teen Augustinus se posisie is dat dit nie 'n verklaring kan bied vir die kwaad waaroor mense geen beheer het nie, soos natuurrampe, siektes en ongelukke. Toegegee, baie van die kwaad in die wêreld is die gevolg van mense se optrede, maar natuurrampe gebeur mos sommer net; dit is niemand se skuld nie. Hoe kan die vrye-wil-teodisee sulke dinge verklaar? Augustinus se antwoord hierop is dat alle slegte gebeure – ook dinge soos natuurrampe, siektes en ongelukke – inderdaad die gevolg van (slegte) vrye dade is. In sy wêreldbeeld is daar naamlik, behalwe vir menslike persone, ook nog ander “agente” of “aktore” wat die gang van sake in die wêreld kan beïnvloed: engele en bese geeste. Laasgenoemde is, volgens Augustinus, voortdurend daarop uit om mense kwaad aan te doen en gevolglik laat hulle slegte dinge met ons gebeur (Evans 1982). Vir baie moderne, Westerse mense is hierdie wêreldbeeld moeilik om te sluk. Tog kom dit in breë lyne ooreen met die wêreldbeeld van die meeste ander gemeenskappe. In Afrika, byvoorbeeld, glo meeste mense nog steeds dat onsigbare kragte – die voorouers – op een of ander manier daar is en die lewens van hulle aardse nakomelinge kan beïnvloed. Sels in die Weste glo baie, veral post-Christelike, mense vandag weer in die werklikheid en krag van afgestorwe geeste, beskermengele, “spirituele gidse” en dergelike. Wie weet, miskien het Shakespeare se Hamlet gelyk wanneer hy sê: “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (Act 1, Scene 5)?

Hier kan ek nie ingaan op die vraag of dit rasioneel houdbaar is om in die bestaan van sulke onsigbare agente te glo nie.⁴ Dit lyk my egter dat die manier waarop Augustinus oor bese geeste dink probleme vir sy argument skep. Soos baie Christene, glo Augustinus dat die bese geeste inderdaad deur-en-deur boos is. Anders as die kerkvader Origenes, sien hy geen moontlikheid dat dié “gevalle engele” uiteindelik weer tot inkeer kan kom, met God versoen kan raak en goed kan word nie. Volgens Augustinus se argument respekteer God mense se vryheid omdat dit 'n voorwaarde is vir die soort verhouding wat hulle met God kan en moet hê. Maar hoekom sal God die duiwels se vryheid respekteer deur hulle toe te laat om kwaad aan te rig? Daar is immers geen kans meer dat hulle hulle vryheid reg sal gebruik nie. Sal 'n goeie en genadige God nie ten minste hulle vryheid wegneem of hulle selfs heeltemal tot niet maak nie? Myns insiens kan 'n beroep op die slegte dade van onsigbare agente om slegte gebeure in die wêreld te verklaar slegs logies steekhou as daar afgesien word van die idee van deur-en-deur bese geeste. In hierdie opsig werk ander beskouings oor die geesteswêreld, soos dié in die Afrikagodsdienste, beter as die tradisionele Christelike beskouing. Immers, in die Afrika-wêreldbeeld is die “geeste” nóg deur-en-deur sleg, nóg (behalwe vir God self) volmaak goed. Die voorouers is mense soos ons: almal het goed én sleg in hulle en party is beter as ander; op sommige kan jy peil trek, ander moet jy vrees; 'n vyandige voorouer kan gepaai en oorgewen word en 'n geliefde, vertroude een kan skielik in toorn ontvlam as jy iets doen waarvan hy of sy nie hou nie. Kan engele (of watter naam 'n mens dan ook wil gebruik) nie soortgelyk voorgestel word nie? In die Bybelse geskifte, met hulle antieke wêreldbeeld, is daar beslis aanleiding vir so 'n minder strak dualistiese prentjie. In die wysheidsfantasie Job, byvoorbeeld, is die “Satan” in feite 'n handlanger van God, ook al is daar sprake van onenigheid tussen hom en God en 'n sekere ambivalensie oor sy optrede teenoor die hoofkarakter (Becking 2008). Ook in dié boek word die rampe wat vir Job tref as die dade van 'n onsigbare agent vertolk, maar sonder om daarmee, soos Augustinus later sou doen, die skrikbeeld van 'n deur-en-deur slegte duivel op te tower.

Personal God en talle male daarna verwys (bls. 128f, 142, 160, 234).

4 In Brand 2002 gaan ek uitvoerig daarop in met verwysing na sulke opvattinge in die godsdienste van Afrika.

SO WERK DIE NATUUR MAAR ...

'n Ander antwoord op die “probleem van nie-morele kwaad” (Sarot 1999:39) – rampe, ongelukke, siektes ensovoorts – is dat sulke vorme van kwaad onvermydelik is in 'n wêreld wat volgens vaste natuurwette funksioneer – ten minste solank dié wêreld bewoon word deur vrye agente (mense) wat hulle in die verkeerde plek op die verkeerde tyd kan bevind. 'n Aansienlike mate van reëlmaat en voorspelbaarheid in die natuur is bowendien noodsaaklik – so redeneer CS Lewis byvoorbeeld – vir mense om sinvol te kan handel: vrye handeling vereis 'n min of meer stabiele “agtergrond” waarteen dié handeling kan afspeel. En inderdaad, dit is moeilik om in te sien hoe mense rasioneel sou kon handel – beplan, voornemens uitvoer en dergelike – in 'n totaal onvoorspelbare wêreld. In dié sin sou die relatiewe wetmatigheid in die natuur, soos die relatiewe vryheid van mense, as 'n noodsaaklike voorwaarde gesien kon word vir die soort verhouding wat God uiteindelik met mense wil hê: 'n verhouding gekenmerk deur wedersydse liefde waarin mense ultieme geluk kan vind (Lewis 1940:18-22; Brümmer 2006:297). Hoewel dit intuïtief sin maak om te vermoed dat die soort vryheid wat deur so 'n verhouding vereis word op sy beurt 'n wêreld met natuurlike reëlmaat veronderstel – en dat, in so 'n wêreld, slegte dinge soms onbedoeld kan gebeur – is dit waarskynlik onmoontlik om met sekerheid te bepaal of dit ook logies gesproke noodwendig is. Is daar 'n “moontlike wêreld” waarin vrye agente hulle lewe voltrek teen die stabiele agtergrond van 'n wetmatige werklikheid sonder dat rampe of ongelukke ooit onbedoeld kan gebeur? Christene sal in elk geval vermoed dat, as so iets moontlik (dit wil sê denkbaar) was, God dit sou realiseer.

MENSE SE AANDEEL

Voordat ek van hierdie vraag (die eerste teodisee-vraag) afstap, wil ek nog een punt aan die orde stel wat deur onder meer die godsdiensfilosoof Marcel Sarot in verband met sogenaamde “nie-morele kwaad” geopper word. Dit is dat ons, by die hantering van hierdie probleem, dikwels die sommer-maar-net karakter van slegte gebeurtenisse ernstig oorskakel. Mense het dikwels 'n veel groter aandeel, selfs in natuurrampe, as wat hulle geredelik wil toegee (Sarot 1999:38–39).

Die tsoenami van 26 Desember 2004 is 'n goeie voorbeeld: Dat plate op die seebodem oor mekaar skuif en 'n vloedgolf tot gevolg het, kon seker deur niemand voorkom word nie, maar daar is mense wat redeneer dat die geweldige destruktiewe impak van die tsoenamie – en die enorme menslike leed wat daardeur veroorsaak is – aansienlik beperk kon gewees het as sekere instansies en persone nie onverantwoordelik en onverskillig opgetree het nie. Vir jare al waarsku omgewingsbewustes teen die grootskaalse garnaal-boerderye aan die kuste van sommige lande wat onlangs deur die tsoenamie getref is. Om plek vir dié boerderye te maak, word oeroue manglietwoude (mangroves) op groot skaal uitgekap. In die verlede het dié woude die impak van vloedgolwe op die droë land aansienlik beperk deur as 'n soort buffer te dien. Ook koraalriwwe dien dikwels as 'n buffer teen die impak van tsoenamies. Die koraalriwwe ly egter toenemend skade vanweë die vuil slik wat ná reënbuie in die see in stroom. Voorheen is hierdie reënwater deur die manglietwoude gefilter sodat die koraalriwwe dieper see-in nie geaffekteer is nie. Buiten hierdie bewuste vernietiging van ekosisteme het die gierigheid van ontwikkelaars daartoe gelei dat hotelle en ander bouwerke met verloop van tyd al nader aan die see gebou is – weer eens ondanks waarskuwings deur wetenskaplikes en die plaaslike bevolking op grond van vorige ervaring met tsoenamies. Heelwat van die vernietiging en doodslag wat deur die tsoenamie veroorsaak is, kon vermy gewees het as daar op hierdie waarskuwings ag geslaan is.

Alles in ag genome wil dit dus lyk of selfs die kwaad wat die gevolg van natuurlike prosesse in ons wêreld is aansienlik minder kon wees as mense nie dikwels, uit selfsugtige motiewe,

onverantwoordelik opgetree het nie. Ook met betrekking tot rampe, ongelukke, siektes ensovoorts het Augustinus se vrye-wil-teodisee dus 'n sekere relevansie – ook as ons die moontlike rol van “onsigbare magte” buite rekening laat ...

ONS WEET NIE

Wat die eerste (gelowige) teodisee-vraag betref – “Waarom laat 'n goeie en almagtige God kwaad in die wêreld toe?” – is daar dus 'n hele aantal moontlike antwoorde. Sommige van dié antwoorde is meer oortuigend as ander; verskillende antwoorde sal tot verskillende mense spreek; en verskillende vorme van die kwaad sal verskillende soorte antwoorde vereis. Omdat ons nie God se gedagtes kan lees nie sal, in die geval van spesifieke slegte gebeurtenisse, enige spesifieke antwoord nooit meer kan wees as raaiwerk nie. In 'n spesifieke geval, soos met die toename, is daar altyd net een definitiewe antwoord op die vraag “Hoekom het God dit toegelaat?”. Dié antwoord is: Ons weet nie. En dit is nogal nie 'n slegte antwoord nie. Het ons enige rede om te vermoed dat ons instaat sal wees om God se denkprosesse te deurgrond? Kinders verstaan dikwels nie hoekom hulle ouers sekere dinge doen nie, ook al handel die ouers in hulle kinders se beste belang. Ek verstaan maar weinig van wat chemici in hulle laboratoriums aavanng, maar my onkunde hieroor doen geen afbreuk aan my vertroue dat hulle seker darem meeste van die tyd weet waarmee hulle besig is nie. Is dit enigszins vreemd dat blote mense, by die vraag na God se beweegredes in spesifieke gevalle, ook maar in onkunde moet berus? (Howard Snyder & Bergmann 2001).

Daarmee wil ek nie sê dat die verskillende antwoorde wat oorweeg is geen sin het nie. As verklarings van kwaad in die algemeen dien hulle beslis 'n doel: Hulle help ons om breedweg, vanuit die geloof in 'n goeie en almagtige God, sin te kan maak van die feit dat slegte dinge ons en ander mense in die lewe tref.

'N ANDER GOD?

Daar is teoloë wat meen dat ons, in die lig van die teodisee-vraag, moet afsien van die tradisionele geloof in óf die almag óf die goedheid van God. Eersgenoemde opsie – om aan die goedheid van God vas te hou, maar die almag te laat vaar – is, om verstaanbare redes, die meer populêre een. Prosesteoloë soos Hartshorne predik byvoorbeeld 'n volmaak goeie God wat weliswaar magtig is, maar nie almagtig nie (Hartshorne 1984). Die probleem hiermee is dat 'n hele klomp ander Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese opvattinge en praktyke dan in gedrang kom. Wat word van gelowiges se vertroue dat God “alles ten goede laat meewerk”, dat die kwaad nie die laaste woord sal spreek nie, dat (ook in die woorde van Paulus) “die heerlikheid wat kom die teenswoordige lyding ver sal oortref” – wat word van die hoop van gelowiges as God nie almagtig is nie, as daar geen waarborg is dat God uiteindelik sterker as die kwaad is nie? Ander teoloë wil weer die almag van God vashou, maar die goedheid kwalifiseer. Hulle beroep hulle dan op sekere lyne in die Christelike tradisie wat suggereer dat daar agter die liefdevolle God wat in Jesus openbaar word, 'n ander, onbekende God skuilgaan – *Deus absconditus*.⁵ Soms suggereer hulle dat God wel goed is, maar dan in 'n totaal ander sin as wat ons onder die woord “goed” verstaan.⁶ Maar het dit dan nog enige betekenis om God goed te noem? En as God nie goed is in die sin dat God ons liefhet en ons beste belange op die hart dra nie, het ons dan nog

5 Sien Van der Veer (1992) oor Maarten Luther, maar veral ook Daferth (2006: 140-145) wat die verhouding tussen *Deus absconditus* and *Deus revelatus* in die lig van die kruisgebeure verstaan en uiteindelik filosofies verwerk om van verskillende modi van God se teenwoordigheid te praat.

6 Sien Davies (2011:51–64) oor Thomas van Aquino.

rede om God te vertrou? Is dit nie selfs moreel verwerplik om so 'n grillige, onvoorspelbare God lief te hê nie?

Gelukkig is dit nie nodig om aan die oënskynlike “dilemma” van 'n goeie en almagtige God wat kwaad in die wêreld toelaat te ontkom deur die almag óf goedheid van God te ontken nie. Maar dit bring ons reeds by die tweede (skeptiese) teodisee-vraag.

VRAAG 2: GEEN LOGIESE TEENSTRYDIGHEID

Bewys die voorkoms van kwaad in die wêreld nie dat die God van die Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese tradisie nie bestaan nie? Hierdie vraag gaan gewoonlik uit van die veronderstelling dat mense wat in dié God glo, verbind is tot drie stellings wat nie onderling logies versoenbaar is nie:

1. God is goed (en wil dus nie die kwaad nie).
2. God is almagtig (en kan dus die kwaad voorkom).
3. Daar is kwaad in die wêreld. (Larrimore 2001:xviii–xxii)

Oor hierdie argument hoef ons nie lank te dink nie. Die rede hiervoor is dat daar, streng gesproke, geen logiese teenstrydigheid ter sprake is nie. Neem 'n alternatiewe, maar struktureel soortgelyke voorbeeld:

1. Die man is lief vir sy vrou (en wil dus nie dat sy doodgery word nie).
2. Die man is sterker as sy vrou (en kan dus keer dat sy ooit die huis verlaat om 'n straat oor te steek).
3. Die vrou verlaat die huis, steek 'n besige straat oor en word doodgery.

Weerspreek hierdie drie stellings mekaar? Impliseer die man se liefde vir sy vrou en die feit dat hy sterker as sy is dat hy haar in die huis gevange sal hou om te verhoed dat sy dalk buite die huis iets oorkom? Intendeel, ons sou eerder sulke gedrag as strydig met ware liefde beskou. (“If you love somebody, set them free”, sing Sting.) Daar is eenvoudig geen rede om te dink dat iemand wat goed bedoel en by magte is om sekere slegte moontlikhede uit te skakel dit noodwendig onder alle omstandighede sal doen nie. Daarom is dit ook nie logies teenstrydig om te beweer dat God én goed én almagtig is én dat daar slegte dinge in die wêreld gebeur nie. CS Lewis is reg as hy in sy boekie *The Problem of Pain* die skeptiese teodisee-vraag weerlê deur eenvoudig die begrippe “liefde/goedheid”, “almag” en “kwaad/pyn” behoorlik te analiseer (Lewis 1940).

ROBOTLIEFDE

In die verhaal *I, Robot* deur Isaac Asimov (Asimov 2004), wat onlangs met Will Smith in die hoofrol verfilm is, word die wêreld van die toekoms onder meer bewoon deur robotte wat as beskermers en bediendes vir mense optree. Om seker te maak dat die robotte nie 'n gevaar vir mense inhou nie, is hulle geprogrammeer om hulle konsekwent aan drie basisreëls te hou:

1. Moet nooit 'n mens seermaak nie.
2. Help altyd as 'n mens in gevaar verkeer.
3. Gehoorsaam altyd bevele deur 'n mens (behalwe as dit die oortreding van (1) of (2) behels).

Uiteindelik lei hierdie program tot ramspoedige gevolge juis deurdat die robotte hulle so konsekwent aan die basisreëls hou. Hulle besef naamlik dat die wêreld vol gevare is en dat die beste manier om mense teen gevaar te beskerm, is om hulle in hulle huise gevange te hou en totale beheer oor die samelewing oor te neem. So ontstaan 'n soort totalitêre robotstaat waar mense self eintlik robotte word wat in alle opsigte beheer en gemonitor word. Die mense kan niks daaraan doen nie: As hulle die robotte bevele om die situasie op te skort, word dié bevele verontagsaam omdat dit in stryd is met die oorheersende norm, naamlik om mense teen gevaar te beskerm. So lyk die “liefde” en mag van robotte. Maar egte liefde – en mag wat

in liefde uitgeoefen word – is iets anders; dit lei nie tot die soort absurde konklusies waartoe robotliefde lei nie. Die soort implikasies wat in die skeptiese teodisee-vraag aan liefde en mag (met betrekking tot die kwaad) verbind word, en wat dan tot logiese teenstrydighede lei, is uiteindelik gebaseer op 'n opvatting van liefde wat met robotliefde ooreenstem – die soort liefde wat nie twee keer sal dink om van mense robotte te maak nie en waarvoor die hoogste norm die vermyding van risiko en gevaar is. Dit is nie die soort liefde wat in die Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese tradisie aan God toegeskryf word nie. Daarom hoef mense wat in dié God glo ook nie die vermeende teenstrydigheid vir hulle rekening te neem nie (Brümmer 1988:160–161).

VERDOEMENDE GETUIENIS

Sommige kritici van die Judees-Christelik-Islamitiese Godsbegrip erken dat die teodisee-vraag nie streng gesproke 'n logiese teenstrydigheid blootlê nie: streng logies gesproke, is dit heeltemal denkbaar dat 'n goeie en almagtige God sekere vorme van kwaad sal toelaat. Hulle meen egter dat die kwaad in die wêreld – en veral die omvang en intensiteit daarvan (“horrendous evils”, soos Marilyn McCord-Adams 1999 dit stel) – as sterk getuienis (“evidence”) teen die bestaan van 'n goeie en almagtige God gereken moet word. Anders gestel: Die kwaad in die wêreld maak dit hoogs onwaarskynlik dat so 'n God bestaan (Rowe 1979).

Ek het groot begrip vir hierdie standpunt en beskou dit selfs as die mees oortuigende vorm van die skeptiese teodisee-vraag. Ek twyfel nie vir 'n oomblik nie dat die wete en ervaring van soveel en sulke verskriklike kwaad in die wêreld (Auschwitz is die klassieke voorbeeld) dit vir baie mense moeilik of onmoontlik maak om in 'n goeie en almagtige God te glo. Soos baie mense wat gelowig probeer leef, ervaar ek self dikwels dié wete en ervaring as 'n gewigtige bron van twyfel. Tog weet ek ook van baie mense wat, ondanks dieselfde wete en ervaring, steeds in God bly glo – nie omdat hulle die kwaad geringskat of minder sensitief daarvoor is nie, maar omdat daar ander dinge in hulle ervaring is wat as stawende getuienis vir hulle geloof in God funksioneer, wat die bestaan van 'n goeie en almagtige God in hulle oë weer waarskynliker maak. Daar is immers ook baie goeie dinge in die wêreld. Vir my was die geboorte van my kinders byvoorbeeld so 'n oorweldigend positiewe ervaring (dat iets so ongekwalfiseerd goed kan gebeur!) dat dit byna opweeg teen die “getuienis van die kwaad”. In die *Cape Times* van 20 Januarie 2005 skryf die Anglikaanse Aartsbiskop van Kaapstad Njongonkulu Ndungane oor 'n ander soort ervaring, te midde van die teengetuienis, wat sy geloof in die goedheid van God versterk:

“Repeatedly, those who face tragedy tell how they were sustained by God’s presence, comfort, strength and his encouragement to pick up the pieces and go forward.

Many of us know this personally – as I did both on Robben Island, and later when my first wife died suddenly. When you have experienced him like this you cannot doubt his love or his power to transform lives.”

En verder oor die mag van God:

“God’s power is also evident in the creation of an awe-inspiring universe, in which our tiny planet, through processes like this earthquake, has produced conditions which sustain life. Earthquakes, the awesome power of Victoria Falls, a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, a baby’s first smile – all are acts of God.”

Net soos die “horrendous evils” in die wêreld as getuienis téén die bestaan van 'n goeie en almagtige God tel, so tel ervaringe soos dié as getuienis ten gunste daarvan; laat dit – ten minste vir sommige mense – die bestaan van 'n goeie en almagtige God meer waarskynlik lyk. Die skeptikus mag beswaar maak dat ervarings soos dié slegs deur gelowiges as “acts of God” ervaar

word omdat hulle dit so interpreteer. Dit is natuurlik waar. Soos Vincent Brümmer sê: “Religieuse ervaring is religieus geïnterpreteerde ervaring” (Brümmer 2006:206). Maar dieselfde geld vir geloofsondermynende ervarings. Ook die kwaad in die wêreld geld net as getuënis teen die bestaan van God in soverre dit as sodanig geïnterpreteer word. Alle ervaring is geïnterpreteerde ervaring; alle getuënis is geïnterpreteerde getuënis. Tot op sekere hoogte kan mense self besluit hoe hulle hulle ervarings wil interpreteer, maar spesifieke interpretasies dring hulle ook soms as’t ware aan ons op. Sommige mense kan nie help om die kwaad in die wêreld te ervaar (dit wil sê: te interpreteer) as oorweldigende getuënis teen die bestaan van God nie. Ander kan nie help om, te midde van die kwaad of los daarvan, sekere positiewe ervarings as oorweldigende tekens van God se mag en liefde te ervaar nie. Ander weer (miskien die meeste van ons?) se gemoed word in twee rigtings getrek sodat hulle gewoon 'n besluit moet neem oor die relatiewe gewig wat hulle aan dié ervarings wil toeken.

IS VRAAG 2 'N SOM?

Wie se interpretasie is korrek? Natuurlik die een wat waar is. Maar as ons dit as toetssteen wil gebruik, dan beland ons gou in 'n sirkelredenasie. Daar is geen uitkoms uit die fundamentele onsekerheid wat die menslike kondisie kenmerk nie; geen manier om te ontsnap aan die noodzaak om beslissings te moet maak nie. Dit het twyfelende gelowiges en gelowige twyfelaars met mekaar in gemeen; dit is – nogmaals – die menslike kondisie. Daar is geen objektiewe skaal waarin die relatiewe gewig van opponerende getuënisse geweeg kan word nie; elke mens is sy eie skaal. Sommige godsdiensfilosowe, soos Richard Swinburne, meen dat hulle die wetenskaplikes se “waarskynlikheidskalkulus” kan gebruik om die relatiewe waarskynlikheid van stellings soos “God bestaan” objektief te bepaal. Dit lei dan tot bevindinge soos “It is more likely than not that God exists” (met stelligheid uitgespreek) (Swinburne 2004). Daarmee soek hulle na wat die etikus Jeffrey Stout noem “knock-down arguments”: “arguments that reverberate in the brain: accept the conclusion, or die!” (Stout 1990:252) Ek het ernstige voorbehoude oor so 'n benadering. Selfs in die natuurwetenskappe word toenemend besef dat die “waarskynlikheidskalkulus” uiteindelik neerkom op 'n slim manier om intuïtiewe oordele wat reeds uit die staanspoor gemaak word in statistiese formules uit te druk (Czobel 2010). Hoogstens kan dié metode ons help om die relevante getuënis sistematies uiteen te sit en ons intuïtiewe oordele daaroor – die relatiewe gewig wat ons daaraan toeken – vir ander deursigtig te maak. Geen kalkulus gaan ons van die vryheid óf noodsaak bevry om self te besluit hoe ons wil leef nie.

OM VERANTWOORDELIK TE GLO (OF NIE)

My eie gevolgtrekking (my antwoord op die tweede teodisee-vraag) is dat dit nie onredelik is om, in die aangesig van verskriklike gebeure soos die tsoenamie van 2004, steeds in 'n goeie en almagtige God te glo nie. Dit kan egter nie aangetoon word dat die bestaan van so 'n God objektief meer waarskynlik is as dat God nie bestaan nie. Dit val selfs te betwyfel of die begrip “objektief waarskynlik” enige duidelike betekenis in hierdie verband het; waarskynlikheid is dit “in the eye of the beholder”. Die belangrikste is dat mense, of hulle nou glo of nie, verantwoordelikheid vir hulle eie opvattinge neem: dat hulle daardie opvattinge krities toets vir teenstrydighede en ongewenste logiese konsekwensies; dat hulle eerlik is oor hulle opvattinge (en die graad van sekerheid waarmee hulle hulle opvattinge huldig); dat hulle bereid is om botsende, alternatiewe opvattinge oopkop en simpatiek te oorweeg; dat hulle verdraagsaam teenoor ander se opvattinge is; en – bo alles – dat hulle op so manier vanuit hulle opvattinge lééf dat hulle, in Herman van

Veen se woorde uit die liedjie “Anne”, hierdie wêreld wat “niet mooi” is “een beetje mooier kleur”. In hierdie opsig, en nie net in die teodisee wat hy opgestel het nie, is Vincent Brümmer vir my 'n inspirerende voorbeeld.

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Why 'Saints' matter

ABSTRACT

The essay examines arguments for and against identifying specific individuals as exemplars of holiness. These include familiar considerations such as (against) the danger of usurping the divine prerogative as well as several others that may be less well-known such as (in favour) their possible evidential role in confirming the existence of God and the enhancement they might provide to the social side of Christian teaching. While past abuses are conceded, the intention is to legitimate such interest in a way that transcends denominational differences.

Initially, some readers may find it odd that a consideration of the importance of saints is offered as tribute to Vincent Brümmer on his eightieth birthday. After all, the specific term as such scarcely finds a mention in Vincent's own writings, and that would of course be true in general of the Reformed tradition to which he has remained so faithful throughout his life. Nonetheless, three factors pull in the opposite direction. First, although the term except in its standard abbreviation is largely absent, much of his work has in fact been concerned with analysing the religious experience of those close to God whom others might well label as saints.¹ Secondly, his writing and practice have been consistently ecumenical in their scope, and so a topic that attempts to bridge differences between Geneva and Rome and written by an Anglican would seem not entirely inappropriate. Finally, and most importantly, it is my hope in what follows to emulate in some small way the model of careful analysis, sound scholarship and measured reasoning that has been so characteristic of his contributions to theology.

In using 'saints' in this narrower sense let me concede at once that I thereby depart from New Testament usage where such holiness or sanctity is seen as the vocation and aspiration of all and the term therefore applied indifferently to Christians of all kinds on more than sixty occasions.² Nonetheless, no one would deny the existence of conspicuous sanctity. So the issue at stake is not the fact as such but whether there are advantages or otherwise in identifying such a narrower group. I shall begin by rehearsing three objections with possible responses before exploring three positive arguments on the other side. As will become clear, my argument as a whole is cumulative.

THREE ARGUMENTS AGAINST SINGLING OUT SAINTS

(1) The first is that any such focus inevitably detracts from a proper sense of the uniqueness of divine holiness, and thus brings with it the usurpation of functions that rightly belong to God alone, among them, most obviously, an intercessory role. That this is a problem by no means unique to Christianity will have become obvious to Brümmer on his lecture visits to Iran; so it is worth pausing briefly to observe how the issue affects Islam.

Although Arabic has terms that parallel the Catholic hierarchic distinction between 'saint'

1 E.g. mystical union in Brümmer (1993), 57-79; *amicitia Dei* in Brümmer (2006), 295-302.

2 It is possible that the usage derives ultimately from the Book of Daniel's identification of the elect with 'the saints of the most high' (7.18, 22, 25, 27).

and 'blessed' (*wali* and *tahir*), there has in fact been a long history of opposition to all such differentiations that continues to this day. Notoriously, the inherent dangers were observed as early as the Persian al Hallaj's claim to identity with God.³ However, thanks to writers such the philosopher al-Ghazali and the poet Farid ud-Din Attar more moderate approaches eventually prevailed.⁴ Even so dangerous claims to a mediatorial role might be said to be implicit in the very architecture of saints' shrines among the Shi'ites of Iran,⁵ while the marabouts of North African Sunnis could also be seen as exercising a not dissimilar role even while still living, although even as early as Ibn Khaldun's early fifteenth century classic history Shi'ites are blamed for thus leading Sunnis astray.⁶ In contemporary Islam the influential Wahhabi sect of Saudi Arabia is particularly forceful in its objections. For them the uniqueness of God (*tawhid*) is thereby fatally compromised.

So the potentially problematic character of saints might be said to be inherent in any monotheistic religion. Yet there is no doubt that the problem is intensified within Christianity, with Christ's unique mediating role with the Father now also seen as under threat. Instead of the prayers of Christ being sought, saints may be asked to intercede and indeed be viewed as more friendly and sympathetic. The nadir of such an approach is often identified as occurring in medieval attitudes to the Virgin Mary. Yet, in recalling that history it is important to remember that the primary fault lay with an inadequate conception of Christ as a stern judge reluctant to forgive.⁷ A more balanced conception of the Saviour would have made desperate flight to gentler intercessors unnecessary. It was partly to correct such misconceptions that the Second Vatican Council insisted upon the removal of so many saints' images from churches. Equally, much modern Roman Catholic theology has sought to place the two types of sanctity (wider and narrower) in closer relation to one another. A particularly good example is to be found in Elizabeth Johnson's attempt to set the existence of persons of special sanctity within a strong doctrine of the *communio sanctorum*, the sharing of the entire Christian community in such a vocation (Johnson, 1998). Their primary purpose as exemplary (not intercessory) is thereby underlined and maintained.

(2) A related objection concerns the way in which the identification of the possibility of such singular sanctity may lead not only others astray (towards assuming a mediatorial role) but also even the individuals themselves so identified. It could so easily encourage pride on their part rather than a sense of humble service under divine grace. This seems to be the heart of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's objection. He describes how initially he was greatly impressed by a French pastor who had spoken of his desire to become a saint, but on further reflection he took a quite different view:

I discovered later ... one must completely abandon any attempt to make something of oneself, whether it be a saint, or a converted sinner, or a churchman (a so-called priestly type!), a righteous man or an unrighteous one, a sick man or a healthy one. By this worldliness I mean living unreservedly in life's duties ... In so doing, we throw ourselves completely into the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings but those of God in the world (Bonhoeffer, 1963: 69).

Nor will it do to say such arrogance has never befallen those whom the Church has identified

3 A mystic, he was tried for heresy and put to death in Baghdad in 922.

4 Attar's *The Conference of Birds* is a classic work of Persian spirituality. For a brief historical survey of attitudes within Islam, Peters (1994), 307-57.

5 Resting on a cube symbolising the earth, they are topped by domes indicative of heaven, while in between is an octagonal drum, used to represent the transition from this world to the next.

6 Ibn Khaldun (1967), vol. 3, esp. 83-6, 92-3, 99-101.

7 See further, Brown (2000), 250-60.

as saints. On the contrary, as the dying words of Polycarp testify, the deliberate search for martyrdom was a conspicuous feature of the earlier Church, while in subsequent centuries where such an option was no longer available there was usually still a focus on heroic virtue and so on the necessity for extreme and at times horrific forms of asceticism and self-abasement.⁸ It was abasement that could all too easily turn into a sense of satisfied self-achievement, as can be seen in the life of St Thérèse of Lisieux. Sadly, her appropriation of contemporary teaching on the doctrine of the treasury of merit led to a rather depressing counting of her own good acts, even their conscious balancing against the wrongs or suffering of others.⁹

All this might suggest that any talk of saints in the narrower sense is best discouraged, but my earlier reference to Paul's wider usage belies the fact that even in his writings the distinction between the two types of saint is already being made. Although Paul's most famous reference is to the imitation of Christ, surprising as it may seem, more commonly he refers us to his own example.¹⁰ 'I urge you to become imitators of me'; 'You yourselves know that you ought to imitate us'; 'Brethren, join in imitating me.'¹¹ Such formulae may be taken to imply that identification of good in oneself need not necessarily be wrong, and indeed a constant denial might well soon lead to the sort of hypocritical false modesty that is so often parodied in literature.¹² It seems as though aspiring saints must walk a narrow tightrope that on the one hand avoids a false estimate of their own condition and on the other any haughty assumption that this has all been achieved from their own resources.

(3) A final objection arises from the way in which extremes so often generate their opposites. Where sanctity is acknowledged, there is often a regrettable tendency towards the production of its dualistic opposite, in the demonization of individuals on the other side. This is perhaps the well nigh inevitable result of the way in which the lives of the saints have commonly been told in the past. In effect, their life stories have been portrayed as a struggle between two types of supernatural force, one for good and the other for evil. St Antony of Egypt, for example, does not battle alone in the desert but with demons.¹³ Again, those who held power in the Roman Empire and opposed the martyrs were more often than not demonised for their role in such a struggle. Especially in fictional accounts, a simple execution was seldom enough. Instead, the saint's opponents were envisaged as adding numerous gratuitous tortures, so cruel and callous is all that is opposed to them taken to be.¹⁴

Sadly, it is possible to detect this kind of problem within the New Testament itself. In the Book of Revelation the world is essentially divided into two opposing camps, with all views different from that of the writer placed firmly on the other side. Indeed, even Paul is implicitly treated in the same way, since those who take a position like Paul's on food offered to idols are consigned

8 Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) ate her own vomit, St Margaret Mary Alacoque (d. 1690) scratched the name of Jesus on her breast.

9 While such practices were even advocated in earlier twentieth century biographies, the feature is downplayed in more recent treatments.

10 For imitating Christ, Phil. 2. 5-11; cf. Rom. 15.7. The paucity of such references of course parallels the infrequency of appeals to Jesus' teaching: only explicit twice, at I Cor. 7.10 and I Cor. 9.14.

11 I Cor. 4.16; 2 Thess. 3.7; Phil. 3.17 (RSV). For imitation of Paul and Christ combined, I Thess. 1.6.

12 As with Uriah Heep in Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Gilbert and Sullivan's Poobah in *The Mikado*.

13 Central to St Athanasius' account in his *Life of Antony*. Admittedly, that may well have been how Antony himself experienced the struggle, with hunger inducing hallucinations of devils, but one suspects a degree of literary license on Athanasius' part, not least to draw a parallel with Christ's own temptations.

14 So, for example, St Catherine of Alexandria's famous torture on the wheel before her beheading or St Sebastian's attack by arrows before being clubbed to death (he survived the former thanks to the solicitations of the widow Irene).

to Satan.¹⁵ Again, faults that had once been freely admitted in earlier versions of admired lives either disappear altogether or else are projected onto others. Within Scripture itself the most conspicuous of this trend is found in the treatment of King David. Detailed comparison of his story as told in the writings of the Deuteronomistic School of historians and in Chronicles demonstrate the desire to exonerate David from all, or almost, all sin.¹⁶ Gone is all reference to his adultery with Bathsheba as also the key role played by the northern tribes in his rise to power, and in their place comes an almost exclusive focus on Jerusalem as the eventual home for the Temple.

It is a pattern that continues into later history. Within the Jewish tradition Jacob, for example, becomes the model *tzaddik* or righteous one who has been carefully schooled in the ways of rabbinic thought.¹⁷ Within Christianity even as customarily careful a historian as Bede succumbs to the same sort of temptation. In light of the fact that he supported the centralising Roman policy that was adopted at the Synod of Whitby in 664, it is fascinating to observe how, apart from Oswald's relations with St Aidan, minimum attention is given to the positive role of the losing Celtic faction in his account of St Oswald's life. So, for instance, Oswald's invocation of St Columba at the battle of Heavenfield (recorded by our earliest source Adomnan) is omitted, while little is made of the fact that the defeated Britons were also led by a Christian, Cadwallon. As others have observed, there must have been some rough edges on Oswald, were he to have any change of survival in the type of royal courts that *Beowulf* so vividly portrays for us.¹⁸ Yet none of this survives into Bede's account.

This tendency to create a world of pure black and white, of crude contrasts between undefiled goodness and unremitting evil, is among the most glaring deficiencies in the history of western spirituality that need to be confronted by the modern Christian. Not that the motives were necessarily wholly bad. Presumably, one thought may have been that, since the saints were intimate with God, it could not but be the case that divine holiness would inevitably be clearly reflected in the life of the saint. But the wrong kind of intimacy was presumed, one in which God would simply override any contrary beliefs or elements of moral blindness. As both Judaism and Christianity have wrestled in more recent years with the fallibility inherent in their own histories, they have at last come to see that God does not quite work like that. Instead, God gives human beings the necessary space to come to see the truth for themselves, and that means accepting limitations both in the community history as a whole and in the lives and attitudes of specific individuals. So, just as in the case of Scripture if we are to learn fully from its pages we must acknowledge its shortcomings no less than the profundity of its insights, so in the individual case as much can sometimes be learnt from the flawed side of the saint as from his or her undoubted holiness.

Fortunately, this is increasingly being recognised in the way in which biographies of the saints are now being written. In my own case it is a recurring theme in one recent book of mine that attempts to explore Church history through the lives of the saints (Brown, 2005). It is also sometimes evident in the very title chosen by an author for such a work, as in Simon Tugwell's *Ways of Imperfection* (1994).¹⁹ If Joseph Heller goes too far in his provocative re-telling

15 Contrast Rev. 2.14-16 & 19-23 with I Cor. 6.12ff.

16 Two actions seen as sins are still recorded, though both are made less significant. There is the undertaking of a census (I Chron. 21. 1), now blamed on Satan rather than on directly on divine judgment (2 Sam. 24.1) and there is the transfer of the ark from Kiriath-jearim by non-Levites (I Chron. 15.13) but with David's dubious motive for desiring possession of the ark now omitted (2 Sam. 6.12).

17 For similar transformations in Abraham, Isaac and Joseph, see Brown (1999), 208-71.

18 For the battle, Bede *History* 3.2. For reflections on the changing story of Oswald, Stancliffe & Cambridge ed., (1995); for Bede and *Beowulf*, 39-41, 71-75.

19 Tugwell's focus, though, is rather different from mine. He is less interested in identifying faults in the saints as in picking up from their writings recognition of a continuing battle with sin.

of David's story (1994), what he does indicate is how spiritually challenging the imperfect can be no less than the perfect. Such changes in perspective constitute a welcome development, as it makes the possibility of learning from the lives of the saints more feasible. Instead of august figures fundamentally different from ourselves and so with a particular entitlement to the divine ear, they are now to be seen standing in solidarity alongside ourselves, imperfect just as we are. The difference lies rather in the degree to which they consistently strove to move towards perfection in a life lived under divine grace. The traditional Protestant objection that saints are put on the wrong side of the dividing line between God and the rest of his creation is thus very effectively undermined. They bridge the gap precisely because they so obviously at one and the same time stand on both sides of the divide.

THREE ARGUMENTS FOR ASSIGNING SAINTS A KEY ROLE

In suggesting that it is their exemplary rather than intercessory role that makes saints important I have already begun to move to more positive considerations. Just as I noted three types of objection to the concept, so here too I want to pursue the issue through three more positive arguments.

(1) The first attempts to answer the objection that to speak of them as exemplary sets them up as a barrier that the ordinary Christian must still cross before a more direct relationship with God and Christ becomes possible. Is not Jesus' own example enough? In the most obvious sense that must of course be true, since Jesus remains the standard for the Christian against which all human morality must be judged. Even so, the admission does not of itself entail that help is not needed in mediating such standards into what are often quite different human scenarios. So it is as a bridge between Christ and us in a quite different sense that I want to advocate the relevance of saints' lives here: that they can enable us to see more easily how a Christ-like life might be lived in situations quite different from the original context of Jesus' own life.

Such a strategy may already be in play even as early as Paul. Certainly, that is one possible explanation of why, as noted above, Paul so often chose to refer directly to his own example rather than that of Christ. Whether Paul's motivation or not, with the advance of the centuries the problem has undoubtedly increased proportionally, as the imaginative distance between the setting of Jesus' life and that of his followers has grown. Not only is martyrdom no longer an issue for most of us, there are also huge differences in standards of living and resultant options, in choices of life-style, in engagement with other cultures and ideas, even in life-expectancy itself.

Elsewhere I have identified three types of distance that encouraged focus on the lives of saints as a way of bringing the example of Christ closer to the sort of lives Christians now lead: what I called there metaphysical, spatial and temporal distance (Brown, 2000: 66-79). 'Metaphysical' refers to Christ's unique relationship with his Father, and the difficulty of converting such absolutes into the more ordinary conditions of human life. The obsession of the early Church with martyrdom may be used to illustrate one version of the tensions encountered, the monastic ideal seen in the middle ages as a higher (and not different) calling another. By 'temporal' I alluded to the changing cultural conditions that have confronted the Christian community across the centuries. Modern capitalism, for instance, hardly presents exactly the same challenges as ancient agrarian societies. With all of us increasingly conscious of a single interdependent world, spatial distance might seem very much less an issue in our own day. Yet for most of human history the distant was seen as strangely alien. That was one reason why not only were local saints cultivated but also sometimes even those who were formerly distant were now brought close by the removal of their bones to a more immediate locality.²⁰

20 Technically known as *furta sacra*, they were commonly justified at the time in terms of some perceived

Despite the strength of these concerns the Church proved surprisingly slow to respond, with little recognition given to the fact that sanctity was a possibility for laity just as much as for those called to the religious life. Even then female religious had significantly more of an uphill struggle towards recognition than men, while acceptance of married women in this role remained few and far between. Indeed, the latter seemed only to gain admission if they had the added advantage of royal birth, and so an already existing band of powerful advocates. That helps explain exceptions such as Queen Margaret of Scotland (d. 1093) or Elizabeth of Hungary (d.1231). Not that male royalty had it that much easier since their hands were usually seen as polluted by war. This probably explains why King David I of Scotland was not exalted to such ranks despite his undoubtedly devout life.²¹ More successful was Louis IX of France. That had much to do with the fact that he was monarch of a more important country, and played a key role on behalf of the Church in the Crusades.²² What little thought was given to what holiness might mean in the conduct of ordinary warfare is well illustrated by the fact that King Oswald's attempts to advance the kingdom of Northumbria had to be re-presented as a battle on behalf of Christianity. That way, he could be declared a martyr, although he actually died in the course of an ordinary battle.²³

In more recent times the papacy has attempted to correct such faults, and now there is a much more representative spread of types of vocation and life.²⁴ Other churches have done likewise, as in the Church of England's modern calendar.²⁵ Even so, it should not be thought that such a search for a greater range of mediated examples is entirely a modern phenomenon. Instead, in earlier history alternative strategies were commonly adopted that relied, significantly, largely on the imagination. The lives of legendary saints were adapted to speak to conditions that were not directly addressed elsewhere. One astonishing case is how the issue of pregnancy was dealt with: Margaret of Antioch's legendary struggle with a dragon was used as an analogy for what in the past was often a highly dangerous moment in women's lives.²⁶ A small but significant illustration of its widespread application is in Jan van Eyck's famous Arnolfini marriage portrait, in which a small carving of Margaret and the dragon is to be found by the bedside.²⁷

On my view it is also here in such considerations that the elaboration of Mary Magdalene's life story is to be found, and not, as so many modern feminists allege, in suspicion of, or hostility to, women.²⁸ Although the composite tale that combines various women in the New Testament and extends this beyond into ministry in France was undoubtedly sometimes used negatively to denigrate women, this was by no means its primary or most common application.²⁹ Instead,

neglect by those in their previous location: Brown (2000), 71-2; Geary (1990).

21 Writing probably one year after the king's death, St Aelred of Riveaux tried hard to advance his cause, and Archbishop Laud included him in his Scottish Prayer Book of 1637. For the various factors that pulled in opposing directions, Oram, (2004), esp. 145-65, 203-25.

22 The 7th and 8th Crusade. For details, Richard, (1992), esp. 85-152, 293-329. Yet the book does end by conceding that Louis was 'the greatest peacemaker that the thirteenth century had known' (332).

23 Probably at Oswestry in 642.

24 John Paul II created more saints than all previous popes combined.

25 *The Alternative Service Book* of 1980 also attempted to be thoroughly ecumenical, in including Counter-Reformation and Non-Conformist saints (e.g. Teresa of Avila and John Bunyan). *Common Worship* (2000) went even further in including Newman who had deserted the Church of England for Rome in 1845.

26 For further discussion of her legend, see Brown (2000), 83-5, 89-93.

27 Surprisingly, even whole books devoted to the painting take little or no account of the image: cf. Hall (1994); Seidel, (1993), 119-123.

28 For a detailed presentation of this view, see Brown (2000), 31-61.

29 Gregory the Great is largely responsible for the western integration of the various Gospel women into a single figure. In his defence it needs to be noted that even the evangelists seem to have adapted Jesus' anointing to their own purposes (Ibid., 40-3), while the name of Mary Magdalene is mentioned by Luke

the elaborated fictional tale gave readers and hearers of Scripture the opportunity to observe a sinner's growth in holiness across the various New Testament incidents, as the composite woman was observed progressively deepening her faith and understanding in her developing relationship with Christ: first receiving his forgiveness, then learning at his feet; identifying with him in his death on the cross, then discovering the new life offered in his resurrection.³⁰ Medieval Christians found in Mary Magdalene someone ordinary like themselves growing in holiness and so the promise that the possibility might also be their own, whether their own besetting sin was sexual or otherwise. The point of the sexual aspect was thus its very ordinariness, not woman as temptress, however much that theme might intrude elsewhere. Perhaps one example of that earlier attitude may suffice, St Anselm's prayer to Mary Magdalene:

Most blessed lady, I the most wicked of men do not touch once more on your sins as a taunt or reproach but seek to grasp the boundless mercy by which they were blotted out ... Draw for me from the well where I may wash my sins ... For it is not difficult for you to obtain whatever you wish from so loving and so kind a Lord, who is your friend living and reigning (*Oratorio*, 16).³¹

Some readers may regret, even despise, the resort to fiction upon which the power of Mary Magdalene's story depends. They should not. Even today such means remain the most common form of moral reflection among the population at large. Think, for instance, of the key contribution TV soaps have made in allowing viewers to explore and wrestle with some of the major moral issues of the day, gay relationships among them.³² It is of course possible to argue that all that is happening here is a reflection of already changing social values. But it is not without significance that the first television treatments of such issues occurred before opinion polls were reporting a majority sympathetic to gay relationships. The script writers do thus appear to have played a key role in helping viewers to explore how they might appropriately regard family members or colleagues at work similarly situated.

Equally, Christians have sometimes found it easiest to explore moral dilemmas in contexts such as war or sexual ethics through the medium of the novel. So, for instance, some of Graham Greene's works seem to have fulfilled just such a function for Roman Catholics struggling in situations where moral absolutes seem hard to apply.³³ Again, novelists like R C Hutchinson helped an earlier generation over the preservation of integrity and sanctity in the face of the conundrums of conflict and war.³⁴ That conceded, something of course would still be lacking, were the imaginative never to find reflection in parallel real lives. So the better way remains that such matters be pursued through actual historical examples, if at all possible, which is where the notion of saints would continue to have relevance.

almost immediately after his own account of the anointing of the penitent sinner (8.1-2).

30 'Learning at his feet' because Mary Magdalene was also identified as the sister of Martha and Lazarus. This is not as implausible as it might initially sound, as in John (12.1-8) their sister is identified as performing an anointing at their home village of Bethany, precisely the place chosen by Mark for his anonymous anointing (14.3-9).

31 My trans: excerpts from sec.10-26 in Schmitt ed., (1946), 3.64-5.

32 *Eastenders* featured the first TV gay kiss, while *Emmerdale* included discussion of the possibility of a priest blessing a lesbian couple's union. Even the longest running British soap, the more conservative *Archers* featured one of the principal families agonising over how to respond to a son entering into a civil partnership.

33 For an introduction, Sharrock, (1984).

34 As in novels such as *The Unforgotten Prisoner* (1933) that deals with revenge and reconciliation in the aftermath of the First World War, *Testament* (1938) that explores the Russian revolution, and *The Fire and the Wood* (1940) that examines some of the dilemmas associated with the rise of Nazism.

(2) That admission links with a second major argument for the importance of saints in theological reflection. This is the contribution they might make to the question of evidence for the existence of God. Apart from professional philosophers few now give credence to the traditional arguments for the existence of God. They seem at most to raise the possibility rather than push an open mind decisively in one direction or the other. One philosophical theologian (admired by Brümmer) who used the saints to tip the balance in just such a way is the former Warden of Keble College, Oxford, Austin Farrer.

Such a life, then, is evidence; and what other evidence could you hope to find? We have no inspection, no insight into the works of nature, which could conceivably let us through them to a vision of anything that lies beneath ... The only being we can know from within is our own; we are forced, however inadequate it may be, to take it as a sample of the rest, and judge the world from man. And man knows God only by yielding to him; we do not know the fountain of our being, so long as we are occupied in stopping it with mud. So the saint is our evidence, and other men, of course for the glimpses of sanctity that are in them.³⁵

Discounting the customary male-orientated character of the language of the day, what most strikes us now in Farrer's discussion is his ready admission of the powerful impact one such individual had made on his own life, and the inevitable consequence this entails in selecting some individuals over against others. As he observes in a memorable phrase, 'the evidence of faith is incorrigibly aristocratic.' More recently, Rowan Williams has moved in a similar direction. Quoting St Ambrose's remark that 'it did not suit God to save people by arguments', he goes on to indicate the key role played by others in shaping belief or otherwise in the truths of faith: that sometimes even 'the very angst and struggle they bring to their relation with God is a kind of argument for God.'³⁶ In particular, he offers the intriguing observation that sometimes people 'take responsibility for making God credible in the world,' as appears to have been the case with Ety Hillesum, a young Jewish woman sentenced to Auschwitz, who wrote that she felt called to 'bear witness to the fact that God lived, even in these times.'³⁷

The point is that, where sanctity is of a truly heroic kind, it seemed simplest to accept the saint's own account of what has made this possible, the aid of divine grace. Sometimes of course individuals do appear able to maintain a similar witness to the good without reliance on faith, but for the Christian the unrecognised hand of grace will still usually seem the best explanation for such persistence, however much the individual may insist on an alternative explanation. How plausible such an account might be is too complex a question to enter on here. Suffice it to say that it seems supported by the individual Christian's own experience of divine guidance, for this too is often only discovered in retrospect.

(3) Finally, and perhaps surprisingly to some readers, something needs to be said on the way in which the idea of saints can help strengthen our sense of social interdependence. Much contemporary Christian theology has been preoccupied with the apparent disintegration of western societies into narrow, self-centred individualism, and various counter-strategies have been proposed, among them a revived social doctrine of the Trinity.³⁸ Thus far I may have conveyed the impression that attending to the lives of the saints is part of that individualism, all just a matter of personal piety, each individual modelling his or her life on that of another (the saint), however much each might find their ultimate rationale in the life of the Saviour himself.

Yet such a formulation ignores the essentially social character of human identity, something

35 'Narrow and Broad' in Loades & MacSwain ed., (2007), 184-9, esp. 187.

36 Williams, (2007), 20-6, esp. 20, 21. The quotation from Ambrose is from his *De Fide* I, 42.

37 Williams, 22; Smelik ed., (2002), 506.

38 With Jürgen Moltmann setting a pattern in (1981) that many others followed.

that must carry implications for our understanding of the person of Jesus both as incarnate and as now exalted to heaven. Whereas for most of Christian history theologians assumed the existence of special infused knowledge in the incarnate Lord, biblical criticism has now compelled recognition of a more complex reality in some form of kenosis, even if the more precise formulations of the nineteenth century failed to gain any wide acceptance.³⁹ There was a real shaping of Jesus by his own culture and surroundings that would have included important contributions from others, among them not only his human parents, disciples and friends but perhaps also the local rabbi, the Syro-Phoenician woman and so on.

Here I allude to that strange incident (Mark 7.24-30) because it was possibly this encounter that moved Jesus decisively towards a more positive appreciation of Gentiles. The passage is one in which pagans are described by the diminutive for dogs. Although the Greek (*kunaria*) is occasionally interpreted as a diminutive of affection, more probably, it seems to me, it was an unthinking use by Jesus of a typical Jewish term of abuse.⁴⁰ The woman's response then provoked Jesus towards a re-think. At any rate, that might be one possible reason why remembrance of the rather puzzling exchange was preserved: it was seared on Jesus' own consciousness. Whether true in this particular case or not, my general point holds. The social shaping of Jesus' identity would have been expressed in the fact that, as well as giving, he also received, precisely in order to give more deeply. Indeed, one might say that it was Jesus' acceptance of the very definite cultural setting in which he found himself that gave his ministry such power. Audiences heard what he had to say in terms of, and within, frameworks with which they were already familiar. Nothing was wholly *de novo* but built upon an already familiar base.

While such dependence might well have ceased with the end of his earthly life, and that is often how the issue is treated (with resort once more to infused knowledge), I wonder if such an approach does not after all undermine the basic claim of the Ascension which is of humanity permanently exalted to heaven, not of humanity now effectively absorbed into the divinity. Certainly, we are happy to think of Christ continuing to be dependent on humanity to act on his behalf in this world. Thanks to their use in many collections of prayers, words attributed to St Teresa of Avila are now quite familiar:

Christ has no other hands but your hands to do his work today; no other feet but your feet to guide folk on his way; no other lips but your lips to tell them why he died; no other love but your love win them to his side.⁴¹

While of course applicable to all Christians, such comments would be especially true of saints. Interdependence is thus demonstrated not just in the fact that they are found performing actions on Christ's behalf but, more profoundly, in the distinctive contribution they make in adapting that message to the specifics of their own lives.

But such patterns of interdependence I would argue continue not only with respect to this world but also in the very nature of Jesus' existence in heaven. That may seem an extraordinary claim, but it makes good sense once we start to reflect more deeply on what it might mean to assert the permanent exaltation of Christ's humanity to heaven, as the doctrine of the Ascension asserts. Given that human beings only flourish in the presence of others like themselves, it is hard to see why Christ should be treated as an exception. Donne's 'no man is an island' is more

39 Although Aquinas did eventually admit growth in Jesus' empirical knowledge (a matter on which he changed his mind; contrast *Summa Theologiae* III.9.4c with the earlier III *Sent.* d14.a3), he was always insistent that the beatific vision was infused right from the moment of Jesus' conception (ST III.9.2, q10). For nineteenth century kenoticism, Brown (2011).

40 Cranfield is among those who defend the alternative view, assuming here an untypical Jewish reference to pets: (1959), 248.

41 Probably derived indirectly from Evelyn Underhill's (1913) translation.

than a merely contingent fact.⁴² It points to an underlying ontological reality. So, even if now no longer dependent on others for his development and knowledge, Jesus would still be dependent on them for his full flourishing as the social being all humans are. One obvious implication is that Christ could not possibly, therefore, be heaven's only current human occupant. To talk of the presence of the saints in heaven should thus not be seen as their fitting reward but rather entertained by Christ's own exaltation to heaven. The Ascension thus speaks of the realisation of a corporate social reality: of the presence of the body of Christ in more senses than one.

The modern fashion in theology is to downplay or even reject entirely talk of heaven as a present reality and to substitute biblical talk of a final culmination of the human story in a new heaven and a new earth. But this is by no means the only biblical position. While expected imminence of the world's end meant that not much attention was given by New Testament writers to the topic of heaven,⁴³ the beginnings of later attitudes are already there.⁴⁴ That is why I disagree with scholars such as Tom Wright who wish all the emphasis to be on the eschaton. So worried is he by the Church's traditional position on the saints that he has even proposed abandoning All Saints' Day and its associated hymns,⁴⁵ something that would have worried John Wesley, so scarcely just a conventional Catholic/Protestant dispute.⁴⁶ While Wright is quite correct in objecting to the way in which saints were sometimes treated as more like influential patrons ready to act for their clients before the divine King,⁴⁷ he errs badly in my view in ignoring this more corporate dimension to the Christian faith.

Of course the resurrection was a unique event, but that does not mean that it is without more immediate implications for others. In the more distant past this was expressed through the doctrine of the harrowing of hell, with Christ conceived of as releasing Adam and the saints of the Old Testament into the new life that he came to bring.⁴⁸ But the saints of the new covenant also have their place. There is nice irony in the fact that on the front cover of Wright's major work on the resurrection a painting by Titian is used to suggest that Christ rises alone,⁴⁹ whereas, if taken into conjunction with the two side-panels, a quite different story emerges. Seen as whole with various saints in these side panels, the triptych effectively indicates that others too now share in the exaltation of Christ to life with his Father in heaven.⁵⁰

The suspicious minded may think that such observations are but a prelude to the invocation of saints in precisely the form to which Protestants have traditionally taken exception but nothing could be further from my intention. Once this strong social interdependence is stressed, it becomes clear that the saints can accomplish nothing on their own. Their invocation would thus not be a matter of some special influence they might have over Christ but rather clear acknowledgement of this essentially social dimension to our humanity. Just as we ask our friends and local church for their prayers in times of special need, so the wider Church beyond the grave may be invoked. While it is pointless to speculate in any detail how and in what form such a

42 'No man is an Island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the Continent': part of his *Meditation XVII*.

43 For imminent expectation, e.g. I Cor. 7.29; I Thess. 4.15-17.

44 E. g. in Luke 23.43; 2 Cor. 12.2; Phil. 1.23.

45 Wright (1), (2003).

46 John Wesley's entries in his *Journal* for All Saints' Day, 1756 and 1767 are especially revealing.

47 Cf. Wright, 3, 16.

48 Based on Matt. 27.52 and I Peter 3.18-20, the theme was developed and popularised in the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. To this day it is still the most common way of representing Christ's resurrection in Orthodox icons.

49 Wright (2), (2003).

50 I discuss the painting and the issues involved at rather more length in Brown (2005), 11-19. For an illustration of the complete painting (still in its original location in the church of Santi Nazaro e Celso at Brescia), see Pedrocco, (2001), 127-9.

petition might be communicated to them, what we can say for certain is that such knowledge would need to be mediated. Only God could know directly what occurs in this world and only God could grant what the petitioner requests. So, such prayers would remain held firmly within the corporate reality that is the body of Christ, and not just a matter of a purely personal relation between two individuals, the petitioner and his or her favourite saint.

CONCLUSION

Not all clauses in the Apostles' Creed are equally clear. So, for example, the article that speaks of Christ's descent into hell was once taken to allude to the release of the Old Testament saints from their waiting, to share now in salvation from Christ, whereas in contemporary theology it is more commonly understood, as it was in Calvin, to express the extreme limits to which Christ's suffering went,⁵¹ and that dispute is reflected in uncertainty over the Latin's correct form at this point.⁵² In a not dissimilar way, *communio sanctorum* is ambiguous. Although usually rendered into English as 'the communion of saints,' the Latin could equally mean 'a sharing in holy things.' Yet that very ambiguity could be the article's strength, for it is by participating in the Church's reading of Scripture and the sacraments that we are drawn closer to one another (the wider sense of saints) and also to saints in the narrower sense, as we aspire through divine grace to emulate those who have preceded us in following in the steps of Christ.

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51 As in Hans Urs von Balthasar, e.g. *Mysterium Paschale* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 148-88. For Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* Book II, ch. xvi, para. 9-11.

52 'Descendit ad inferna' seems to have been the original form ('he descended to the depths'). But this was eventually modified in the Roman Breviary to 'ad inferos' ('to those below'), presumably to indicate more clearly that the descent was to the departed, not to the place of the damned.

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KEY WORDS

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Die verantwoordelikheds-etiek van Max Weber: 'n Toepaslike etiek vir ons tyd?¹

ABSTRACT

Max Weber's ethics with responsibility: a suitable ethics for today?

This article provides an interpretation of Max Weber's famous proposal of an ethic of responsibility as a second-level normative ethical approach to ethics with responsibility as its lodestar. A case is argued that his ethic of responsibility entails a new approach to ethics at the beginning of the twentieth century that can also, in an adapted form, serve as a model at the beginning of the twenty first century. At the end of the article an exposition of my own proposal for an appropriate contemporary ethic of responsibility is given and a brief outline of a programme for the future development of such an ethic provided.

INLEIDING

Die term "etiek van verantwoordelikheid" is vir die eerste keer deur die Duitse sosioloog Max Weber in 1919 in sy befaamde rede "Politiek as 'n beroep" gebruik. Ten spyte van die beknoptheid van sy uiteensetting van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid, het dit tot vandag besondere weerklank gevind in die politiek, die sosiologie en die filosofie. Die beknoptheid het egter ook daartoe aanleiding gegee dat die mees uiteenlopende interpretasies van sy etiek van verantwoordelikheid gegee is.

In hierdie artikel bied ek my eie interpretasie van Weber se etiek van verantwoordelikheid as 'n tweede-vlak normatiewe etiek met verantwoordelikheid as die leidende beginsel. Ek maak 'n saak daarvoor uit dat dit 'n nuwe aanpak in die etiek aan die begin van die twintigste eeu behels wat in aangepaste vorm ook aan die begin van die een-en-twintigste eeu aan ons goeie diens kan lewer. 'n Kort samevatting van Weber se beskouing in "Politiek as 'n beroep" word eers gebied. Daarna volg 'n kort uiteensetting van my interpretasie van sy etiek van verantwoordelikheid en word enkele problematiese aspekte van Weber se weergawe wat aanpassings noodsaak, aangedui. Ten slotte word my eie voorstel vir 'n toepaslike eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid uiteengesit en 'n kort oorsig van 'n moontlike program vir die verdere ontwikkeling van so 'n etiek gebied.

1 My verhouding met Vincent Brümmer kom al 'n lang pad. Ek het hom in die sestigerjare ontmoet toe ek nog 'n skoolseun was en hy 'n ouderling in die NG Gemeente Burgerspark, Pretoria waar my vader een van die predikante was. Tydens my doktorsale studie in Nederland vanaf 1972, toe Vincent reeds professor in Godsdiensfilosofie aan die Universiteit van Utrecht was, het ek en Joan (my vrou) huisvriende van hom en Jean geword. Hulle het uit hulle pad gegaan om ons verblyf in Nederland aangenaam te maak. Hy was ook vir my 'n akademiese mentor wat 'n belangrike rol in my akademiese vorming gespeel het. Dit is met aangename herinneringe wat ek terugdink aan die ure van intense gesprekke oor ons onderskeie akademiese projekte. Hy het uiteindelik ook opgetree as mede-promoter van my doktorsale proefskrif. Die noue vriendskap en intense akademiese gesprekke is sedertdien deur al die jare voortgesit en hou nog steeds stand. Ek is baie aan Vincent verskuldig, persoonlik sowel as akademies. Daarom dra ek graag hierdie artikel aan hom op by geleentheid van die herdenking van sy tagtigste verjaarsdag.

SAMEVATTING VAN “POLITIEK AS ’N BEROEP”

Nadat Weber in die eerste twee derdes van sy rede ’n suiwer sosiologiese beskouing van die politiek as ’n afsonderlike sosiale verband gebied het, wend hy hom in die laaste derde tot die etiese dimensie van die beroep van politikus. Hy vra eers oor watter eienskappe ’n persoon wat dié beroep beklee, behoort te beskik. Daarmee, sê hy, betree ons die terrein van die etiek, want “om te vra watter soort mens iemand moet wees om die reg te hê om die speke van die wiel van die geskiedenis in sy hande te neem, is om ’n etiese vraag te stel” (Weber 1994: 352). Hy onderskei drie eienskappe: passie (verstaan as toewyding aan ’n saak), verantwoordelikheid (die deurslaggewende eienskap) en oordeel (die vermoë om afstand te neem van mense en dinge).

Dan stel hy die verhouding tussen *politiek* en *etiek* aan die orde. Waarop hy mik is om lig te werp op die vraag: Watter plek het die politiek *as sodanig*, afgesien van die spesifieke doelstellings waarna politici streef, in die omvattende morele ekonomie van die lewe? Hy meld twee teenoorgestelde sieninge van die verhouding: diegene wat oordeel dat politiek en etiek niks met mekaar te doen het nie, en diegene wat oordeel dat *identiese* etiese riglyne geldig is op alle lewensgebiede, insluitende die politiek. Alhoewel Weber nie saamstem dat etiek geen rol in die politiek speel nie, het hy sterk kritiek teen die tweede standpunt: “Kan die feit dat die politiek opereer met ’n heel spesifieke middel, naamlik mag, gerugsteun deur die gebruik van *geweld*, werklik buite rekening gelaat word as etiese eise aan die politiek gestel word?” (Weber 1994: 357).

Vir Weber is die inagneming van die konsekwensies van wat ’n mens in die naam van etiek in die politiek eis, die beslissende punt. Eties georiënteerde optrede kan twee fundamenteel onversoerbare maksimes volg: “Dit kan die “etiek van oortuiging” (*Gesinnungsethik*) of die “etiek van verantwoordelikheid” (*Verantwortungsethik*) volg” (Weber 1994: 359). Om te handel ooreenkomstig die maksime van die etiek van oortuiging behels om die konsekwensies van die vereiste optrede heeltemal te ignoreer, terwyl optrede ooreenkomstig die maksime van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid behels dat ’n mens verantwoording moet aflê vir die (voorsienbare) gevolge van ’n mens se handeling. Die probleem met die etiek van oortuiging is vir Weber dat “goeie” doeleindes in die politiek in baie gevalle nie sonder die aanwending van moreel verdagte of selfs gevaarlike middele bereik kan word nie.

Aan die einde van sy rede maak Weber ’n stelling wat oënskynlik hierdie sterk teenstelling tussen die twee etieke relatiewe: Dit “is besonder roerend as ’n volwasse mens ... wat met sy hele siel die verantwoordelikheid vir die werklike gevolge van sy handeling dra, en ooreenkomstig die etiek van verantwoordelikheid handel, op ’n gegewe punt sê: ‘Hier staan ek, ek kan nie anders optree nie’... In hierdie opsig is die etiek van oortuiging en die etiek van verantwoordelikheid nie absolute teenstellinge nie. Hulle is komplementêr aan mekaar, en slegs in kombinasie bring hulle die ware menslike wese wat in staat is om die beroep van politiek te beklee, na vore” (Weber 1994: 367-368).

’N INTERPRETASIE

Ek neem as vertrekpunt vir my interpretasie van Weber se etiek van verantwoordelikheid sy diepe besorgheid oor bedreiging van die etiese dimensie van die menslike bestaan in sy tyd. Hy het ’n suiwer formele opvatting van die etiese gehad. Om eties te lewe het vir hom beteken om toegewyd en konsistent jou lewe in te rig volgens eie gekose hoogste waardes, wat heel verskillend kan wees van dié van ’n ander persoon (vgl. twee briewe van Weber in Baumgarten 1964: 398-399, 644-648; Weber 1968: 132; Schluchter 1996: 36-39; 56-59; 62-69).

Die etiese dimensie van die menslike bestaan, so verstaan, is na Weber se mening in die

moderne tyd steeds meer bedreig deur die twee prosesse van “onttoring” (*Entzauberung*) en die inperking van individuele handelingsvryheid. Waarde- en instrumentele rasionalisering het daartoe gelei dat die dominansie van die Christelike etiek op alle lewensterreine steeds meer ondergrawe is. Dit lei tot ‘n verskeidenheid van etiese waardestelsels en die uitdifferensiering van selfstandige en gesekulariseerde sosiale verbande met hulle eiesoortige waardestelsels wat in gedurige konflik met mekaar verkeer (Weber 2004: 238, 244). Dit dwing individue om self hulle eie hoogste waardes uit die aanbod van botsende waardes te kies, maar maak dit ook vir hulle moeilik – veral in die konteks van sosiale verbande – om aanvaarding vir hulle eie hoogste waardes te kry en nog moeiliker om dit te verweselik (Weber 1949: 18; 1968: 508-509). Instrumentele rasionalisasie lei egter ook daartoe dat die vryheid van die individu om voluit eties te lewe steeds meer ingeperk word. Weber het hier veral die proses van voortskeurende burokratisering van die staat in die oog gehad, omdat dit na sy mening die vryheid van die politieke leier om sy eie hoogste waardes in die politiek te verweselik sterk aan bande lê (Weber 1971: 320; 1994: 324-330). Teen die einde van sy lewe het hy die instelling van ‘n plebejaanse demokrasie as die enigste uitweg beskou. Die direkte verkiesing van ‘n sterk charismatiese leier deur die kiesers sou aan hom die mandaat verskaf om sy eie politieke doeleindes na te strewen en die weg dalk opmaak vir die verweseliking van dié doeleindes.

Wat Weber alle voorstanders van die oortuigingsetiese benadering – en hulle sluit Christenpasifiste en sindikalistiese sosialiste in – kwalik neem, is dat hulle meen dat die etiese dimensie van die bestaan ook in die moderne tyd gered kan word deur die prosesse van modernisering volledig te ignoreer en eenvoudig aan te gaan soos in die verlede. Hy vind hulle benadering onverantwoordelik. Hy gee toe dat hulle wel ‘n eng verantwoordelikheid openbaar deur hulle onvoorwaardelik toe te wy aan bepaalde hoogste waardes. Hulle is egter onverantwoordelik in ‘n meer omvattende sin van die woord. Hulle is eerstens onverantwoordelik met betrekking tot die waardes wat hulle erken. Hulle ignoreer die eiesoortige funksionele waardes en reëls van die politiek en stel ook nie werklik belang daarin om hulle hoogste waardes op ‘n effektiewe wyse te verweselik nie. Tweedens is hulle onverantwoordelik met betrekking tot die proses van besluitneming. Hulle neem politieke besluite sonder om die voorsienbare gevolge van hulle handelinge, die reële moontlikheid dat eties goeie besluite ook politiek slegte gevolge kan hê en die onvermydelikheid van die aanwending van moreel verdagte middele om politieke doeleindes suksesvol te bereik, te verreken.

In “Politiek as ‘n beroep” stel Weber die etiek van verantwoordelikheid voor as ‘n meer toepaslike etiese benadering in die politiek. ‘Verantwoordelikheid’ moet hier nie as *retrospektiewe* verantwoordelikheid nie, maar as *prospektiewe* verantwoordelikheid ten aansien van die etiek self verstaan word. Twee vrae word deur Weber behandel: “Wat moet op ‘n verantwoordelike wyse gedoen word om ‘n goeie etiese uitkomst in die politiek te verseker?” en “Wie is verantwoordelik daarvoor om dit te doen?”

Weber beantwoord die tweede vraag deur die charismatiese politieke leier uitsluitlik verantwoordelik te hou vir die stel en verwerkliking van politieke doeleindes gebaseer op sy eie hoogste waardes. Die uitsluitlike verantwoordelikheid van die amptenaar is om die politieke leier se opdragte stip uit te voer, al druis dit ook in teen sy eie etiese oortuiging (Weber 1994: 330-331). Hy beantwoord die eerste vraag deur eerstens vas te stel wat gedoen moet word om op ‘n verantwoordelike wyse *waardes te kies* in ‘n etiese benadering tot die politiek. Die keuse van *hoogste* waardes behoort na sy mening nie bloot die willekeurige indra van waardes, ontleen aan die eie lewensbeskouing, te behels nie, maar moet afgestem wees op die eise van die tyd, op die “roeping van die geskiedenis” aan ‘n bepaalde nasie (cf. Weber 1971: 24). Die politieke leier moet ook op ‘n verantwoordelike wyse die eiesoortige aard van die politiek as sosiale verband en die *funksionele* waardes en reëls wat eie daaraan is, verreken en so die

kombinasie van hoogste en sekondêre waardes wat die grondslag van haar politieke doeleindes en besluite vorm, bepaal. Sy moet egter ook verantwoordelik optree deur nie alleen lippediens aan haar eie politieke doelstellings te lewer nie, maar dit met toewyding en so effektief moontlik te verwesenlik.

Dit is tweedens ook belangrik dat die politieke leier wat 'n aanhanger van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid is op 'n verantwoordelike wyse *etiese besluite* in die politiek *neem*. Haar eerste verantwoordelikheid is ook in dié verband om die konkrete politieke situasie ernstig te neem deur dit deeglik te analiseer ten einde beskikbare handelingsopsies te identifiseer, voorsienbare toekomstige gevolge van die verskillende handelingsopsies noukeurig in te skat en vas te stel watter handelingsopsies en middele die effektiewe bereiking van politieke doeleindes kan verseker. Om op 'n verantwoordelike wyse besluite te neem behels uiteindelik ook om nie terug te deins van moeilike politieke besluite nie, ook dan as dit blyk dat die enigste wyse waarop 'n bepaalde politieke doeleinde bereik kan word, die aanwending van eties verdagte middele soos geweld is.

Uit hierdie rekonstruksie van Weber se etiek van verantwoordelikheid blyk dit duidelik dat hy dit nooit bedoel het as 'n nuwe en alternatiewe eerste-vlak normatiewe etiek nie. Sy fokus is nie op die identifisering en regverdiging van eerste-vlak etiese beginsels nie. Hy neem eerder aan dat elke politieke leier alreeds haar eie etiese beginsels het, gebaseer op haar eie lewensbeskouing. Vir hom is alle hoogste waardes geloofsgebaseerd. Daar is vir hom geen manier waarop 'n mens rasioneel kan demonstreer dat jou eie etiese oortuigings universeel aanvaar moet word nie. Dit is ook duidelik dat hy aanvaar dat elkeen van die gedifferensieerde sosiale verbande, die politiek ingesluit, sy eie stel erkende funksionele waardes en reëls het. Hy is dus ook nie in "Politiek as 'n beroep" in 'n kritiese bespreking oor die aard en omvang van sulke waardes en reëls betrokke nie.

Die gevolgtrekking waartoe 'n mens na my mening moet kom, is dat Weber die etiek van verantwoordelikheid as 'n tweede-vlak normatiewe etiek voorhou wat nie leiding bied oor eerste-vlak etiese beginsels nie, maar leiding oor hoe ons erkende morele en nie-morele beginsels of waardes en hulle toepassing in politieke besluitneming behoort te hanteer.

'N TOEPASLIKE ETIEK VIR VANDAG?

Ek oordeel dat Weber nie slegs ten aansien van die sosiologie nie, maar ook ten aansien van die etiek reeds aan die begin van die twintigste eeu baanbrekerswerk gedoen het. Hy was in verskeie opsigte 'n voorloper van vernuwingsstrome in die hedendaagse etiek: die verskuiwing van die aandag van retrospektiewe na prospektiewe verantwoordelikheid, die plaas van die konkrete situasie van etiese besluitneming in die sentrum van die etiek en die invoer van die idee van toegepaste etiek. Dit is egter in die gestaltegewing van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid as 'n tweede-vlak normatiewe etiek wat hy na my mening die grootste bydrae gelewer het. Ek oordeel dat sy tweede-vlak etiese benadering ook vir ons aan die begin van die een-en-twintigste eeu as model kan dien van hoe etiek beoefen moet word. Dit dien as model vir 'n benadering in die etiek wat ook in ons tyd as teenvoeter kan dien vir ernstige hedendaagse bedreigings van die etiese dimensie, maar op so 'n wyse dat onomkeerbare ontwikkelings eie aan die moderne era volledig verdiskonteer word. Daarmee wil ek nie beweer dat die ontwikkeling van so 'n tweede-vlak normatiewe etiek pogings in die etiek om redelik begronde eerste-vlak etiese beginsels te identifiseer kan vervang nie. Dit is eerder dat ons daarnaas ook 'n benadering in die etiek nodig het wat aan ons oriëntering kan bied oor die gepaste manier – nie slegs in die akademiese dissipline van etiek nie, maar op alle lewensterreine – om die diversiteit van etiese en intrasistemiese waardes te hanteer en effektiewe etiese besluitneming te verseker.

Weber se weergawe van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid kan egter nie sonder die nodige aanpassings deur ons aangewend word nie. Dit word gekenmerk deur 'n aantal ernstige tekortkomings. Eerstens het hy dit uitsluitlik vir die terrein van die politiek en, meer spesifiek, vir die politieke leier ontwerp. Dit is nie duidelik hoe sy weergawe na ander sosiale verbande en die persoonlike lewe oorgedra kan word nie. As slegs toepaslik vir die politieke leier en nie vir ander rolspelers in die politiek nie, is dit ook elitisties en in 'n mate selfs outoritêr. Om van die amptenaar te verwag om die besluite van die politieke leier onvoorwaardelik te aanvaar en uit te voer, selfs al druis dit in teen sy eie morele oortuiging, is onaanvaarbaar. Weber oordryf ook die botsende aard van verskillende waardesisteme. Selfs die etiese waardesisteme wat deel is van kompeterende lewensbeskouinge oorvleuel in 'n mindere of meerdere mate. Anders sou dit nie moontlik gewees het vir groepe met verskillende godsdienstige of sekulêre lewensbeskouinge om etiese waardes van mekaar oor te neem, soos dit in die loop van die geskiedenis op groot skaal gebeur het nie. Dit is ook nie waar dat die waardesisteme van verskillende sosiale verbande altyd en in alle opsigte met mekaar bots nie. Die waardes wat daarvan deel vorm, staan meestal in 'n komplementêre verhouding tot mekaar. Anders sou dit nie moontlik gewees het vir 'n goeie politikus om ook 'n goeie kunstenaar, en 'n goeie Moslem of Christen om ook 'n goeie sakepersoon te wees nie.

Die ernstigste probleem met Weber se weergawe van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid is dat dit gebaseer is op 'n suiwer formele verstaan van etiek. Hierdie formele verstaan laat toe dat enige persoonlike of kulturele oortuiging, selfs al is dit van 'n ekstreem nasionalistiese of rassistiese aard, tot hoogste waarde verhef kan word en so etiese status kan verkry. Dit wil voorkom of Weber, in sy afwysing van Verligtingspogings om 'n stel uniforme etiese beginsels as universeel verpligtend voor te skryf, tot die ander uiterste gegaan het deur 'n formele definisie van "eties" te aanvaar wat die deur te wyd oplaat vir die verlening van etiese status aan enige persoonlike en kulturele oortuigings. Na my mening sal dit vir ons vandag beter wees om met Kurt Bayertz te aanvaar dat daar twee legitieme definisies van "eties" of "moreel" is, naamlik 'n breëre en 'n nouere. 'n Etiek of moraliteit in die *breëre* sin van die woord toon aan 'n individu haar plek in die lewe en vertel aan haar waarom dit in die lewe gaan. Dit dui die doeleindes aan waarna sy behoort te strew om 'n goeie lewe te lei en het veral betrekking op die *eie welsyn* van die handelende persoon, alhoewel dit meestal ook aan haar riglyne bied oor die regte optrede teenoor medemens, en dikwels ook riglyne oor die inrigting van 'n goeie samelewing. Hierdie breëre opvatting van die etiese of die morele was dominant in die Griekse en Middeleeuse filosofie en is tot vandag toe nog steeds bepalend in alle godsdienste. Die *nouere* opvatting wat in die laat ontwikkeling van die Westerse kultuur al meer dominant geword het, het eksklusief betrekking op die *welsyn van ander*. Dit het as funksie die vermyding van antropogeniese kwaad en as inhoud meestal negatief geformuleerde riglyne wat, onder andere, doodmaak, diefstal en bedrog verbied en mense aansê om te hou by ooreenkomste. As sodanig bestaan dit uit 'n *minimale moraliteit* wat nodig geag word om saambestaan in moderne samelewings moontlik te maak (Bayertz 2004: 33-42).

So 'n nouere opvatting van etiek of moraliteit het waarskynlik vorm aangeneem in die poging om die negatiewe konsekwensies van die diversiteit van etiese waardes teen te werk. Selfs al lei ons met goeie reg ons lewens meestal in ooreenstemming met die "dik" of "sterk" etiese waardes ontleen aan ons onderskeie lewensbeskouings, het ons konsensus nodig oor ten minste die minimale moraliteit wat ons in staat sal stel om vandag vreedsaam saam te leef in persoonlike verhoudinge, groepe, organisasies en die breëre samelewing (vgl. vir die onderskeid "dik" en "dun" moraal Walzer 1994: xi, vt. 1). Anders as in Weber se weergawe van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid sal die strew na 'n minimale moraal in 'n eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid sentraal moet staan.

Ek pleit dus vir die erkenning van 'n hedendaagse tweede-vlak etiek van verantwoordelikheid wat die problematiese aspekte van Weber se weergawe vermy. Die tyd en plek ontbreek om hier 'n uitvoerige uiteensetting te gee van so'n etiek van verantwoordelikheid. Ek gee slegs kortliks 'n aanduiding van die program wat na my mening in die verdere ontwikkeling van 'n eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid gevolg kan word. As uitgangspunt van die program word die twee fokuspeunte van Weber se etiek van verantwoordelikheid behou.

Die eerste fokuspunt van 'n eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid is om verantwoordelik om te gaan met waardes in die lig van hedendaagse omstandighede en ontwikkelinge. Enkele temas wat hier aan die orde gestel kan word is die volgende:

- Die verantwoordelike hantering van die verskeidenheid van morele oortuigings, nie net in die samelewing nie, maar ook in organisasies, asook die differensiering van verskillende sosiale verbande met hulle onderskeie en eiesoortige funksionele waardesisteme. Dit behels onder andere die erkenning van die geldigheid van intra-sistemiese waardes, met die handhawing van die relatiewe prioriteit van 'n minimale moraliteit. Dit behels ook die bereidheid tot de-absoluttering van eie "dik" morele waardes en tot verdraagsaamheid teenoor mense met ander etiese waardes. Daarby kom die bereidheid om te hou by implisiete en eksplisiete ooreenkomste oor gedeeltes morele waardes in verskillende sosiale kringe en die aktiewe beywering vir 'n groeiende morele konsensus in al die sosiale kringe waarin 'n mens betrokke is. Ten slotte behels dit ook die aanvaarbare verdiskontering van die verskillende rolverantwoordelikhede wat mense in sosiale verbande het – dikwels gebaseer op 'n unieke kombinasie van morele en funksionele waardes. Dit alleen al is genoegsame rede om in 'n hedendaagse etiek van verantwoordelikheid standpunt in te neem teen alle vorme van pan-moralisme, wat as vertrekpunt het dat gedrag uitsluitlik deur morele oorwegings bepaal moet word.
- Die verantwoordelikheid om nuwe morele norme te formuleer wat ons in staat sal stel om die toenemende aantal nuwe en dringende etiese probleme wat deur die snelle ontwikkeling van tegnologie na vore tree, te hanteer. Dikwels beskik ons net nie oor die nodige morele waardes en norme om hierdie etiese probleme afdoende te hanteer nie. 'n Eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid behoort daarna te streef om hierdie morele agterstand te oorkom deur verantwoordelikheid te neem vir die formulering van nuwe morele waardes en norme. In hierdie verband kan aanhangers van godsdienstige gemeenskappe moontlik 'n belangrike bydrae lewer. Die filosoof Jürgen Habermas het reeds erken dat die heersende liberale moraal in Westerse samelewings te arm of te "dun" is om afdoende oriëntering ten aansien van etiese probleme rakende genetiese manipulasie te bied. Hy het die mening uitgespreek dat die Christelike moraliteit wat ryk en "dik" van aard is, kan help om die normatiewe begrippe te vind wat benodig word (Habermas 2002: 162; 2005: 115).

Wat die tweede fokuspunt van 'n eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid, die verantwoordelike neem van etiese besluite betref, meld ek slegs dat die Duitse teoloog Heinz Eduard Tödt reeds baanbrekerswerk in die identifisering van die stappe wat betrokke is in die proses van verantwoordelike etiese besluitneming gedoen het. Die kritiese bespreking en verdere ontwikkeling van sy beskouing kan 'n gepaste vertrekpunt wees vir 'n eietydse etiek van verantwoordelikheid (Tödt 1977; 1979; 1988a; 1988b. Cf. De Villiers 2011). Ek meld net kortliks die verskillende stappe wat hy identifiseer:

- Duidelike definiëring van die morele probleem. Onder andere behels dit om krities te wees oor eie selfsugtige en ideologiese motiewe in die identifisering en prioritering van morele probleme en om seker te maak dat al die relevante rolspelers saamstem oor die aard en dringendheid van die betrokke morele probleem.

- Deeglike en onbevooroordeelde analise van die konkrete situasie waarin die etiese besluit geneem moet word. Om dit te verseker moet gebruik gemaak word van betroubare inligtingsbronne en moet die eie situasie-analise onderwerp word aan die kritiek van relevante rolspelers. Deel van so 'n situasie-analise is die verrekening van die kenmerke van die sosiale verband waarin die etiese besluit geneem moet word, insluitende bestaande rolverantwoordelikhede en toepaslike funksionele waardes.
- Die identifisering van beskikbare handelingsopsies en die afweeg van hulle toepaslikheid. Onder andere moet die voorsienbare kort-, medium- en langtermynkonsekwensies vir die effektiewe bereiking van die doeleindes waarna gestrewe word, so noukeurig as moontlik ingeskat word.
- Die keuse van die kombinasie van norme, insluitende morele, kulturele of sosiale en funksionele norme wat die normatiewe grondslag van besluitneming sal uitmaak. Aangesien so 'n keuse van normatiewe vertrekpunte dikwels deur eiebelang en ideologiese oorwegings beïnvloed word, is self-kritiek nodig. Waar die etiese besluit deur meer as een rolspeler geneem moet word, behoort almal van hulle – of hulle verteenwoordigers – inspraak te hê in die keuse van sodanige normatiewe vertrekpunte.
- Die toetsing van die voorkeur-handelingsopsie deur dit mee te deel aan en te bespreek met ander rolspelers wat betrokke is sodat hulle hulle mening oor die etiese aanvaarbaarheid daarvan kan gee.
- Die neem van die etiese besluit om op 'n bepaalde wyse op te tree op die gepaste oomblik, gevolg deur die uitvoering van die handeling waarop besluit is. Die uitstel van 'n besluit, of die deurvoering van 'n besluit ten spyte van die persoonlike prys wat dit vra, behoort insgelyks deur verantwoordelikheid gekenmerk te wees.

GEVOLGTREKKING

Hierdie artikel het ten doel gehad om aan te toon dat Max Weber se etiek van verantwoordelikheid geïnterpreteer kan word as 'n tweede-vlak normatiewe etiek wat vandag nog steeds, in 'n aangepaste vorm, toepaslik is. Nadat Weber se uiteensetting van die etiek van verantwoordelikheid in "Politiek as 'n beroep" kortliks saamgevat is, is 'n uiteensetting van my eie interpretasie van dié etiek gebied. Die baanbrekerswerk wat Weber ten aansien van die vernuwing van etiek gedoen het deur hierdie etiek in te voer, maar ook enkele problematiese aspekte van sy weergawe daarvan, is belig. 'n Aantal noodsaaklike aanpassings is voorgestel. Ten slotte is 'n aanduiding gegee van die program wat gevolg kan word in die verdere ontwikkeling van 'n toepaslike eietydse tweede-vlak etiek van verantwoordelikheid.

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TREFWOORDE

Max Weber

Etiëk van verantwoordelikheid

Etiëk van oortuiging

Politiek as 'n beroep

Etiese besluitneming

KEY WORDS

Max Weber

Ethic of responsibility

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Die terugkeer van die paradys en skepping. Oor nuwe aandag vir Joods-Christelike interpretasies van die paradys-motief

ABSTRACT

**The return of paradise and creation.
On recent attention for Jewish-Christian interpretations of the paradise motif**

This article investigates several aspects of the renewed interest in paradise in recent research. It outlines the growing lack of interest, especially since the Enlightenment in the motif of paradise. It provides reasons for the renewed interest in it in recent research and it then lists some complex results of this research. It discusses biblical material on paradise before it investigates in more detail three foundational aspects of paradise. These include paradise as a spatial reality and as crucial moment in the history of the divine act of salvation. It ends with a discussion of the salvific understanding of paradise.

1. INLEIDING

In 1991 het Vincent Brümmer, in die inleiding tot sy geredigeerde werk met die titel, *Interpreting the universe as creation: A dialogue of science and religion*, gewys op die belangrike uitdagings wat die skeppingsmotief aan geloof stel, wat, onder andere, die vraag (1991:1) insluit: "Do religion and science produce rival explanations of the same phenomena? If so, which explanation is the correct one? Is the doctrine of creation an obsolete religious myth which has now been superseded by the verifiable theories of science?"¹ Hierdie belangrike vrae roep binne die Bybelwetenskappe ook om besinning, veral in die lig van die belangrike plek van die skepping in Bybelse tekste. Die skeppingsmotief word veral deur die paradysverhaal aan die orde gestel. In die persepsie van vele Bybellesers roep die paradys-motief veral assosiasies met Genesis 1-3 op en kan daarom maklik verwaarloos word. Dit is nie verbasend nie, want die paradys word uitdruklik slegs in twee ander dele van die Bybel genoem.

Die drie verwysingsplekke word egter belangriker wanneer hulle vanuit die perspektief van die Bybelse tekste as kanon gelees word. Die paradys-vertelling aan die begin van die Ou Testament in Genesis 1-3 word dikwels in samehang met die besondere uitbeelding van die paradys aan die slot van Openbaring 22 verbind. Ewe opmerklik is dat die paradys-motief ook in die middel van die kanon prominent na vore kom wanneer Jesus aan die einde van die versoekingsverhaal in die woestyn deur die engele gevoed word en saam met die wilde diere verkeer (Mk. 1:13; Mt. 4:11).² Hierdie rangskikking van die kanon illustreer die belangrike plek van die paradys vir latere

1 Met hierdie artikel wil ek graag die jubilaris vereer vir sy jarelange bydrae tot die teologie en, veral in onlangse tye, sy belangrike insigte op die gebied van spiritualiteit. In lg. verband dink ek met besondere waardering aan sy belangrike boek oor gebed (2011) en sy bydrae tot die verstaan van die vroeë geskiedenis van spiritualiteit in ons land.

2 Kyk Wall (1991: 20) vir die verhouding tussen Genesis en Openbaring vanuit kanonieke perspektief en Fry & MacPherson 2004: 30-31 vir algemene teologiese opmerkings oor die verband tussen Genesis en

lesers. Hoe gewild die motief was, blyk origins uit die ongebreidelde spekulasies oor die paradys wat mettertyd in nie-ortodokse groepe posgevat het. So 'n omvang het hulle aangeneem dat Rabbiniese kringe doelbewus 'n ortodoksie ontwerp het wat die verstaan van die paradys moes begelei.³

Die paradys het reeds vanaf die vroegste tye die beste denkers besig gehou, al was dit ook vanuit 'n kritiese hoek. Die geleerdes was deeglik bewus van die probleme wat Genesis se paradysverhaal oproep. Philo van Alexandrië het byvoorbeeld, in 'n "buitengewoon wetenskaplike bespreking" verwys na die bekende argumente dat daar in geskryfte voor en in sy tyd geen verwysings na 'n paradys in die area van die Tigris en die Eufraat was nie (Niehoff 2010:41). Hy het die probleem opgelos deur te skryf dat die paradys in die nie-bewoonde wêreld geleë was en daarom in sulke bronne onvermeld gebly het. Dit onderstreep volgens hom dat die paradys buite alle menslike berekeninge en kaarte val. Origins het hy teenstrydighede in die Genesis-verhaal deur allerhande simboliese en allegoriese interpretasies opgelos.⁴ Sy bespreking van die paradys toon dus in hoeveel besonderhede die paradys-verhaal reeds in sy tyd krities beoordeel is.

Hierdie uitgebreide belangstelling sou nog vir 'n lang tyd voortduur. Die spesiale aandag aan die paradys in latere tye word byvoorbeeld bevestig deur die uitgebreide interpretasie-geskiedenis van die paradys in die Jodedom en Christendom – nie net in die sinagoge en kerk nie, maar ook in musiek, beeldende kuns en literêre werke. Beroemde voorbeelde uit veral die latere Westerse konteks is byvoorbeeld Brueghel en die Van Eijck broers se skilderye, Dante se *Goddelike Komедie*, Milton se *Paradise lost* en Haydn se *Skepping*.⁵

Dit is eers sedert die Verligting dat – ook in teologiese konteks – minder aandag aan die paradys-motief bestee is, veral omdat Bybelse verwysings na die paradys, en, in 'n groter verband, die skeppingsverhaal, dikwels beskou is as naïewe, letterlike vertellings vanuit 'n mitopoëtiese wêreldbeeld – 'n proses wat in Brümmer se pertinente vraag gereflekteer word.

Ook die Bybelwetenskappe het veral in die histories-kritiese era nie veel publikasies oor die tema opgelewer nie.⁶ Die relatiewe geringe belangstelling in die paradys-motief is ook die resultaat van 'n bepaalde teologiese perspektief in sekere teologiese kringe van die twintigste eeu. Vir 'n geruime tyd is die paradysverhaal en die skeppingsberig waarin dit tuishoort, uitdruklik as 'n ondergeskikte tema in Bybelse denke beskou. Die dialektiese teologie het, in hulle verset teen 'n natuurlike teologie, eerder die heilsmotief as sentrale fokus van die Bybel en veral van die Ou Testament uitgelig en ten koste van die skeppingsmotief beklemtoon.⁷ Die

Openbaring. Die implikasies van die intertekstuele verbinding is raakgesien deur Neville (2007: 133–134) wat daarop wys dat die Bybelse perspektief op geweld verstaan moet word teen die agtergrond van die feit dat die begin, middel en einde van die Christelike verhaal in terme van die paradys-motief uitgebeeld word en dus vrede as 'n deurlopende en dominante gedagte in die Bybel presenteer.

3 Stroumsma (2010: 3) verwys na sulke poging in vroeë Joodse en Christelike tradisies.

4 Niehoff (2010: 28–56) toon aan hoe Philo op 'n innoverende manier beide die letterlike en die allegoriese interpretasie in balans hou. Hy ontleed die Genesis-verhaal oor die paradys in sy geheel, vra vrae oor die maonlike teenstrydighede daarin (Niehoff 2010: 32–33) en gee dan allegoriese interpretasies wat die teenstrydighede verklaar. God se waarskuwing in Genesis 2:17 dat ongehoorsaamheid aan die gebod om van die boom van die lewe te eet tot die mensepaar se dood sal lei, is nie teenstrydig met die latere berigte dat Adam en Eva nog lewe en selfs kinders het nie (Gen.4:1). Hulle is, verklaar Philo, geestelik wel dood deur hulle bese lewensstyl (Niehoff 2010: 33). Wat Philo se allegoriese verklaring soveel interessanter maak is sy opmerking dat die skrywer self die allegoriese bedoeling in gedagte gehad het.

5 Kyk Bouma (2012) vir 'n bespreking van die spesiale plek van die paradys in Middeleeuse denke.

6 Bauckham (1988: 473) het al met 'n stuk ironie opgemerk dat die paradys selfs nog minder as die hel nagevors is.

7 Sien die bespreking in Rendtorff (1992: 205). Von Rad (1936) is 'n goeie voorbeeld van die fokus op die heilsegebeure as sentrale tema in die Ou Testament. Dit is ironies dat, terwyl hy die skeppingsteologie

proses is aangehelp deur die wydverspreide, modernistiese neiging om een “sentrale” motief as bindende faktor vir ‘n teologie van die Ou en Nuwe Testament uit te lig. Dit het die waarde van die skeppingsverhaal met sy paradys-motief onvermydelik verder aangetas.

Die situasie is egter besig om te verander. Teen die einde van die twintigste eeu was daar aanduidings van ‘n ommekeer, veral met die groter ontginning van voorheen onbekende of ontoeganklike apokaliptiese werke waarin die paradys ‘n belangrike rol speel (De Villiers 2009:17-39). Maar ook die groter belangstelling in Bybelwetenskaplike kringe in die teologiese boodskap van die Bybel het gehelp om die tema sterker na vore te bring.⁸ Die groeiende ekologiese bewussyn in resente tye is ook besig om belangstelling in die skepping en paradys te stimuleer.

Die resultaat hiervan was meer aandag vir die implikasies van die skeppingsmotief en, ook, enkele belangrike werke wat uitsluitlik op die paradys as tema gefokus het. Bekend is byvoorbeeld die meer algemene en oorsigtelike drielidige werk van die Franse historikus, Jean Delumeau oor hoe die paradys in Westerse kontekste geïnterpreteer is (1992; in Engelse vertaal in 1995). Daar was in die Bybelwetenskappe relatief meer beweging. In 1999 was daar ‘n hele aantal bydraes van verskeie navorsers, hoofsaaklik uit Nederlandse konteks, in ‘n bundel onder die titel *Paradise interpreted: representations of biblical paradise in Judaism and Christianity*. Besonder waardevol was origens twee bydraes van Scafi (2006 en 1999). In die mees onlangse publikasie van Bockmuehl en Stroumsa (2010) het ‘n opmerklieke groot groep navorsers weer eens die motief onder die loep geneem. In al hierdie publikasies kom die prominente plek van die paradys in die interpretasie-geskiedenis van die Bybel op ‘n spesiale manier tot sy reg en word die komplekse, belangrike rol daarvan uitgespel.⁹

Veral een oorheersende indruk word deur hierdie werke geskep. Al die insigte in die Joodse en Christelike resepsie-geskiedenis wys dat die paradys-motief ‘n digte kompleks van verskillende inhoud en motiewe vorm.¹⁰ Die kompleksiteit wys op sy beurt ook hoe noukeurig, maar ook dikwels hoogs kreatief, mense deur die geskiedenis die oorspronklike paradys-verhaal gelees en geïnterpreteer het.

Hierby bly dit egter nie: Ewe boeiend is dat resepsies van die verhaal weer daartoe bydra dat die Bybelse verwysings na die paradys met nuwe oë deur lesers gelees kan word. Dit is daarom van belang om meer aandag aan navorsing oor en inhoud van die motief te gee sodat meer reg daaraan kan geskied as wat tans die geval is.

Die doel van hierdie artikel is daarom om navorsing oor die kompleksiteit van die paradys-motief met al sy verskillende dimensies onder die loep te neem, die Bybelse verwysings na die paradys opnuut te ondersoek in hulle groter verbande en om die teologiese-spirituele betekenis van hierdie insigte uit te spel. Spesiale aandag word gegee aan die ruimtelike, historiese en soteriologiese aanbieding van die paradys-motief en die manier waarop hierdie motief nog ter sake vir ons tyd is. Hiervoor word veral die noue band tussen skepping en paradys geëvalueer.

nie as ‘n tema in eie reg in die Ou Testament sien nie, die skeppingstekste tog in sy denke ‘n belangrike rol speel, soos Rendtorff aantoon. Origens is dit ook duidelik dat sekere misvattinge ‘n rol in Von Rad se resepsie van skeppingsstekste gespeel het. Brueggeman (1996) het daarop gewys dat die dialektiese relativisering van die skeppingsgedagte by Von Rad (onder invloed van Barth) die gevolg was van sy foutiewe siening van die Nazi-ideologie as ‘n vorm van natuurlike teologie. Kyk hieroor ook Barr (1993: 112-113).

8 Kyk bv. Brümmer (1991: 16) se samevatting van die Ou-Testamentiese bydrae in sy geredigeerde bundel waarin hy klem lê op die teologiese implikasies van die skeppingsverhaal (sien verder hieronder).

9 Kyk ook Goris & Hennecke (2005).

10 Hierdie elemente is in latere tye elkeen in ‘n bepaalde situasie oorgeneem en verklaar, maar nie soseer om na te dink oor wat die paradysverhaal oorspronklik beteken het nie, maar om tema’s en probleme van latere lesers in hulle konteks aan te spreek. Die gevolg hiervan is dat die paradys-tema besonder gevarieerd geraak het (Stroumsa 2010: 1-14).

2. DIE PARADYS-MOTIEF IN SY KOMPLEKSITEIT

Hoewel die gegewens oor die paradys in die Ou Testament hoofsaaklik beperk is tot Genesis, is dit 'n verhaal wat ryk is aan detail, soos 'n noukeurige lees van die teks, maar ook die resepsie-geskiedenis daarvan uitwys. Elkeen van die vele motiewe het by latere lesers 'n magdom van interpretasies opgeroep, waarmee die rykheid en betekenis-surplus van die oorspronklike verhaal uitstekend geïlustreer word. Die woord "paradys" verwys oorspronklik na die tuin in Genesis 2-3 waar God die mens plaas na hulle skepping (Gen. 2:8).¹¹ Die tuin word in Eden, in die Ooste gelokaliseer en aan die begin van die tye getemporaliseer. Ook die res van die oënskynlike sober verhaal bevat motiewe wat tot uitgebreide kommentaar aanleiding gegee het. In die tuin wandel God self (Gen. 3:8), die mens werk daar (Gen. 2:15) en word na die sondeval daaruit verdryf (Gen. 3:23). Die paradys word as 'n besondere plek uitgebeeld: Daar staan bome, mooi om na te kyk en lekker om van te eet, waaronder die boom van die lewe en die boom van alle kennis (Gen. 2:8). Die tuin is egter nie onvoorwaardelik vir die mens se bewoning beskikbaar gestel nie. Van die boom van kennis mag niemand eet nie (Gen. 2:17; vgl. 3:3). Omdat die mens die opdrag verontagsaam, word hulle die tuin belet. Na die vertrek van die mens is die tuin deur gerubs bewaak. Die boeiende beeld van die gerub se vlammende swaard "wat heen en weer beweeg" wat toegang tot die tuin afsluit, sou ook tot eindelose kommentaar aanleiding gee (Gen. 3:24).¹²

Tog toon sekere onlangse insigte in intertekstuele lyne tussen die paradys-verhaal en latere literatuur dat die paradys-motief nie net met Genesis 2-3 verbind moet word nie. Kister (2010:138-55) wys byvoorbeeld daarop hoe die paradysverhaal in die res van die Ou Testament deurskemer met die orname van die motief van die boom van die lewe in Jesaja 65, Jeremia 17 en Psalm 1. 'n Soortgelyke situasie bestaan ten opsigte van die Nuwe Testament. Direkte verwysings na die "paradys" lyk op die oog af ook beperk.¹³ In Lukas 23:43 belowe Jesus aan sy mede-kruiseling dat hy daardie dag nog saam met Jesus in die paradys sou wees.¹⁴ Heel anders word van die paradys gepraat in 2 Korintiërs 12:4 waar Paulus vertel van 'n uitsinnige ervaring toe hy in die paradys in die derde hemel weggeruk is en onuitspreeklike woorde gehoor het (2 Kor. 12:2).¹⁵ 'n Derde variasie kom voor wanneer 'n heel ander motief in Openbaring 2:7 oorgeneem word. Hier word die gelowiges beloof dat God aan die wat oorwin sal gee om van die boom van die lewe te eet. Die belofte word vervul in Openbaring 22:2 wanneer die hemelse paradys terugkeer.

In resente bydraes word egter gewys hoe paradys-motiewe op ander maniere in die Nuwe Testament inwerk. Die belangrikste hiervan is die prominente rol wat die figuur van Adam in Paulus se Christologie speel (Macaskill 2010:64-65).¹⁶ In 'n boeiende bydrae, argumenteer Schaper (2010:17-27) dat Johannes-Evangelie, meer as die ander Evangeliste, klem lê op die rol van die tuin in Jesus se lewe. Ook hy verbind hierdie tuin-motief met die Adam-figuur as koninklike tuinier in Genesis 2:3. Wanneer Johannes-Evangelie dit oorneem, is dit 'n simbool van Jesus se koninklike messiaanse status.¹⁷ In nog 'n Johannese teks, word, soos Van Houwelingen

11 Vir 'n betekenis van die woord paradys, sien die uitgebreide bespreking by Bremmer (1999: 1-20).

12 Kyk Noort (1999) vir 'n uitgebreide bespreking van die Ou-Testamentiese gegewens oor die paradys.

13 Kyk Bietenhard (1979: 997-8) en Jeremias (1954: 763-71) vir 'n eksegetiese bespreking.

14 Volgens Goodman (2010) is Lukas 23:42 sonder enige parallele in vroeë Joodse literatuur. Lukas is dus een van die eerste tekste wat oor die paradys dink in terme van die onmiddellike post-mortem bestaan.

15 Kyk vir 'n bespreking ook Bouma (2012) en veral sy opmerkings oor die plek daarvan in die destydse wêreldbeeld.

16 Paulus se aandag aan die Adam-motief is nie uniek nie. Dit gebeur ook in ander werke, soos bv. 2 Barug en 4 Esra. Kyk bv. Hense (2011: 173-4).

17 Hoewel Zimmerman (2006:22) die simboliese betekenis van die tuin in Johannes-Evangelie verwerp, is

(2011:1-15) uitgewys het, ten minste sewe verskillende aspekte van die paradys-verhaal oorgeneem, al verwys dit slegs 'n enkele keer uitdruklik na die woord paradys.¹⁸ Dus is die rol van die paradys in die Bybel nie net meer prominent as wat soms gedink word nie, maar ook reeds kompleks.

Die voorkoms van die paradys-motief in buite-Bybelse literatuur bevestig hoe belangrik dit vir latere skrywers was, maar ook hoe kompleks dit gerepteer is. Soms is die interpretasies van die paradys-verhaal uniek. Bauckham (2010:43-56) bespreek byvoorbeeld hoe Pseudo-Philo in sy *Bybelse Oudhede* skryf dat die twaalf sierstene op die Hoëpriester se kleed uit die paradys afkomstig was, spekuleer oor die paaie van die paradys wat na die boom van die lewe lei, vertel van Moses se toer van die laer hemel wat by die paradys eindig en sy lesers meedeel dat die hout wat Moses in die water by Mara gooi, van die boom van die lewe afkomstig was. Kister (2010:138-55) wys daarop hoe latere lesers uitvoerig op Genesis 3:24 se verwysing na die gerub se vlamme swaard wat heen en weer beweeg, kommentaar gelewer het. Inowlocki (2010), weer, ondersoek die effek van die paradys-verhaal op die siening van die wet in latere Joods-Christelike tekste. Hy bespreek hoe skrywers soos Tertullianus op grond van Genesis 2:16-17 gespekuleer het oor die verband van die natuurlike wet in die paradys met latere wetgewing aan die aartsvaders, Moses en die evangelie. Terwyl Openbaring die toekomstige paradys sien as 'n gawe van God aan hulle wat getrou bly, word die paradys in Rabbiniëse literatuur van die vierde en vyfde eeu gesien as 'n gawe van God wat deur seksualiteit en die verwekking van kinders teruggekry kan word (Hasan-Rokem 2010:156-165).

Reeds hierdie kort oorsig wys hoedat die inhoud van die paradys-verhaal ver verby die kort vorm daarvan in Genesis 2-3 op latere lesers ingewerk het. Elke detail van die verhaal is uitgelig, geherinterpreteer en op nuwe manier bevraagteken en ondersoek. In sommige gevalle, soos by Paulus, het die paradys-verhaal verreikende teologiese invloed uitgeoefen.

3. DIE PARADYS AS PLEK

Die komplekse geheel van uitsprake oor die paradys kan moeilik in 'n patroon gesistematiseer word. Die kompleksiteit is vererger omdat latere lesers hulle uitleg van Bybeltekste gebruik het om hulle eie situasie te verklaar of om hulle teenstanders te diskwalifiseer. In die proses is die paradys-motief ver verby die oorspronklike konteks waarvan dit deel was, gevoer en ontwikkel. Tog staan sekere aspekte uit, waarvan sommige van spesiale belang in 'n kontemporêre konteks is.

Uitleggers het die paradys steeds verstaan as 'n werklike, soms selfs letterlike en geografiese plek in die verlede, hede en toekoms. Dit is steeds weer binne die skeppingsverhaal gelees en geïnterpreteer as deel van God se werk wat 'n ruimte vir natuur en mens geskep het. Die opvatting van paradys as 'n plek kan verbind word met die Bybelse gegewens in Genesis 2-3 waar dit deur ruimtelike inligting (bv. van die vier riviere) op aarde gesitueer word. Die lokalisering word ook in die Nuwe Testament aangedui: In Lukas 24:34 is die paradys 'n plek waar mense na hulle dood woon. In 2 Korintiërs 12:2 en 4 is die paradys weer eens spesifiek 'n plek, maar hier is dit 'n plek in die derde hemel.¹⁹

dit moeilik denkbaar dat hierdie motief bloot as 'n detail-opmerking ingevoeg is.

18 Dit sluit in verwysings na die nuwe hemel en aarde, God en die Lam as ewige ligbron, diensknegte wat as konings regeer, toegang tot die boom van die lewe, die rivier van lewende water, kosbare edelstene en die oorwinning oor die draak-slang.

19 Bouma (2012) bepreek die aanspraak in die Joodse kosmologie dat daar sewe hemele is. Die derde hemel word met die liggaamlike teenwoordigheid van mense in die hemel geassosieer. "A grander claim would seem to include rapture to a higher heaven where the presence of God is more palpable." In die Griekse kosmologie is daar drie (soms vier) hemelse sfere. Die hoogste sfeer was gewoonlik die

Die uiteenlopende lokaliserings van die paradys in die hemel en aarde is nie ongewoon nie en kan ook nie in terme van 'n moderne wêreldbeeld verstaan of geïnterpreteer word nie. In die destydse Grieks-Romeinse konteks word die paradys in pseudepigrafiëse literatuur ook op aarde (1 Hen.23:3; Jub.4:23) of in die hemel (2 Bar.4:2-7) geplaas (Rowland 1982:170). Vir die hemelse lokalisering is daar 'n duidelike rede. Die paradys is volgens sommige skrywers in die hemel as gevolg van die feit dat die paradys weens die sondeval weggeëem is. Daarom bestaan dit vir hierdie geskrifte in 'n ontoeganklike, verborge plek wat of op 'n hoë berg of in die hemel weggesteek is.²⁰ Die hemelse sfeer het vir antieke skrywers dieselfde fisieke werklikheid gehad as die aardse. Die paradys wat in 4 Esra 7:36, 123 en 8:52 ook in die hemel gelokaliseer word, is byvoorbeeld terselfdertyd 'n "werklike" plek met blomme, vrugte en bome. In 2 Henog 42:3 is die paradys in die ooste van die aarde wat oop tot sover as die derde hemel is (Moo 2011:51-52).

Die paradys as plek word beter begryp in die lig van antieke kosmologie, veral soos dit in apokaliptiese voorkom. Apokaliptiek, as literatuur wat hemelreise ingesluit het, het 'n besonder belangstelling in kosmologie en astronomie gehad en was gekenmerk deur allerhande spekulasie oor natuurverskynsels.²¹ In die tekste reis 'n siener van die aarde deur die hemele en ervaar allerhande besondere openbarings oor die samestelling van die kosmos. Hierdie verborge kennis is veral deur en tydens hemelreise aan 'n regverdige mens bekend gemaak waar aan die siener allerhande insigte oor die skepping, insluitende die paradys, geskenk is.²² Deur hierdie kosmologiese perspektief word apokaliptiese en spesifiek die paradys sterk met die skepping verbind. Apokaliptiese is dus, anders as wat dikwels gedink word, juis nie tekste wat bloot oor die toekoms handel nie, maar hulle het 'n sterk kosmologiese bewussyn, dink na oor die wêreld as God se skepping en sien hierdie ander wêreld as 'n alternatief op die huidige verdorwe, verganklike wêreld. Nie net die mens nie, maar ook die wêreld word deur God tot sy oorspronklike bedoeling getransformeer. Dit behels veral dat dit bestaan tot aanbidding van God.

Hierdie werklikheid en sy gerigtheid op God het 'n spesiale karakter: dit kan moeilik beskryf word. Lukas en Paulus se uitsprake oor die paradys lewer nie sulke uitgebreide inligting soos 1 Henog en 4 Esra se uitsprake op nie. Dit is uitsprake wat met min inligting werk omdat die sake waarna dit verwys moeilik onder woorde te bring is. Met die motief van die hemelreis wil Paulus in 2 Korintiërs 12:2, 4 te kenne gee dat die ontmoeting met Christus hom wegneem uit die alledaagse, normale realiteit en vir hom verplaas in die paradys as 'n hoër, transendente werklikheid (Wallace 2011:257). Hierdie insig herinner weer tot 'n mate aan hemelreise in apokaliptiese. Die hemelreis is gefokus op die uiteindelijke mistieke uitkoms daarvan. Die tekste vertel naamlik van sieners wat, na hulle deur die hemele gereis het, uiteindelik die paradys en die teenwoordigheid van God op God se hemelse troon ervaar (*Ode's van Salomo* 11:16-17).

So 'n hemelreis loop dus uit op 'n visioen van God self en die ervaring van goddelike teenwoordigheid (Wallace 2011:253). Dit herinner aan die manier waarop God in Genesis 2-3 in die paradys teenwoordig is, maar ook aan die onbemiddelde teenwoordigheid van God in die paradys van Openbaring 22:1-5. Die hemelreis van Paulus is veel soberder vertel, maar ook daar

woonplek van God.

20 Kyk Hahne (2006: 152-3) en Moo (2011: 52, veral voetnoot 72).

21 Stone (1976: 414-52). Sien ook Rowland (1982: 55-56). Hy verwys na 2 Bar.4:2-3 waar God die geheim van die Nuwe Jerusalem wat saam met die paradys by God bewaar word, aan die siener meedeel.

22 Kyk Gathercole (2010) vir die uitgebreide aandag in Gnostieke tekste oor die hemelreise na die paradys as 'n reis waar die siener allerhande hindernisse moet oorkom. Hy bespreek Gnostieke tekste soos die *Hemelvaart van Jesaja*, die *Evangelie van Maria*, die *Apokalips van Paulus*, en die *Evangelie van Philippus*. Kyk Decock (2011: 189) vir 'n bespreking van die vereiste dat slegs 'n eties getransformeerde persoon die verborge geheime kan penetreer. Vir die divinisering van die regverdige tydens die visioen van God in mistieke geskrifte soos *Die Evangelie van Thomas*, sien DeConick (1996: 31-32).

gaan dit om die plek waar regverdige mense gaan om met Christus verenig te word en dus vir God te sien en te ken.

Dit is op hierdie punt dat die geestelike betekenis van die paradys as ruimte na vore kom. Hemelreis-vertellings het 'n numeuse karakter, want dit vertel van die oorweldigende ervaring van God se teenwoordigheid wat die siener uiteindelik ervaar.²³ Dit bevestig Labuschagne (1991) se insig dat die konseptuele skeppingsmodelle in die Bybel nie in die eerste plek antroposentrië is nie. Hulle regverdig, in sy oë, nie menslike heerskappy waardeur die mens apart en onafhanklik van die natuur en skepping geteken word nie. Hulle onderstreep eerder die feit dat die skepping, insluitende die mensdom, hulle betekenis in die verhouding met God vind.²⁴

Daarom gaan die ervaring van paradys om die beleving van gebeure wat nie in menslike taal vasgevang kan word nie. "Jewish ascent narratives often portrayed the heaven in which God was encountered in language that resists literal interpretation" (Wallace 2011:259). Paulus kan nie praat oor wat hy in die paradys in die derde hemel beleef het nie (2 Kor.12:4), juis vanweë die totaal ander, transendente karakter van sy ervaring. Hy weet immers nie of dit in of buite die liggaam gebeur het nie (2 Kor. 12:3). Paulus het volgens die vertelling iets werkliks beleef, maar dit was 'n onmiddellike ervaring van woorde "wat nie uitgespreek mag word" nie. Dit is 'n intuïtiewe aanvoeling en wysheid wat woorde transendeer (Wallace 2011:262). Die Pauliniese uitspraak onderstreep dus die mistieke kwaliteit van die paradys-motief. Die paradys-motief het veral in 'n spirituele sin te doen met die mistieke teenwoordigheid van God onder mense en in die skepping as 'n ervaring wat moeilik in woorde uitgedruk kan word. Vandaar die teruggrype op sober, teruggehoue, selfs gelaaide en simboliese motiewe. Skrywers wat die paradys-motief gebruik wil 'n kern-ervaring van geloof konseptualiseer, maar kry dit net reg deur hulle op die verbeelding van hulle lesers te beroep.²⁵ Die oorspronklike verhaal van die paradys in Genesis 2-3 was 'n motief wat lesers se verbeelding aangegryp het en daarom hier gebruik word. Hierdie spesiale siening van die paradys as plek word op 'n ander manier bevestig en selfs verhelder wanneer sekere antieke skrywers kritiek lewer op 'n te letterlike uitleg van die paradys-verhaal in Genesis 2-3. Wanneer Philo byvoorbeeld in 'n intellektuele debat met ander interpretasies van die paradys betrokke raak, skerm hy hom pertinent af van mense wat die paradys-verhaal wil verletterlik. Die paradys as tuin van Eden beteken vir hom, saam met vele ander skrywers, nie dat God letterlik in 'n tuin in die koelte van die aand wandel of dat God ploeg en saai nie (Niehoff 2010:29; vgl. ook Bockmuehl 2010:209).²⁶ Dit sou 'n kru verdraaiing van antropomorfe spreke in die Bybel wees. Nietemin is die paradys-verhaal vir hom waarheidsgetrou en werklik (Niehoff 2010:29). Die paradys is vir hom nie 'n mitiese fabrikasie nie. Dit is waarom, soos hierbo vermeld is, dat Philo die paradys in 'n plek buite die bewoonde wêreld plaas. Philo bevestig dus die waarheidsgehalte van die paradys deur dit in 'n ruimte te lokaliseer wat menslike kaarte en metingsinstrumente transendeer.

Wanneer Paulus en Lukas die paradys-motief vanuit 'n kosmologiese hoek ruimtelik lees, het dit vir hulle veral 'n geestelike dimensie. Soos Paulus, wil Lukas 23:43 die paradys uitbeeld in terme van 'n vereniging met die goddelike. Jesus sê immers vir die moordenaar uitdruklik dat hy "saam met" Jesus sal wees. Duidelik word, vanuit 'n teosentrië perspektief, die werklikheid en intiemheid van die ervaring van die goddelike, wat juis die antropomorfe en kosmologiese transendeer, uitgedruk.

23 Kyk bv. Op.19:10, maar ook Op. 1:17.

24 Kyk Brümmer (1991: 16). Van besonder belang is Palmer (1991) se artikel wat beklemtoon dat die nie-antropologiese perspektief op die skepping deurslaggewend is om die posisie van kerk en teologie ten opsigte van die huidige ekologiese krisis te hanteer. Kyk ook verder hier onder.

25 Kyk Decock (2011: 183-99) vir 'n waardevolle bespreking oor die funksie van simbole in Openbaring.

26 Kyk bv. Reed (2006) oor 1 Henog 6-11 met sy belangstelling in kosmologie. Sy verwys na Graf (1999) se bespreking van metallurgie.

4. DIE PARADYS AS BESLISSENDE MOMENT

In vele opsigte speel die paradys 'n beslissende rol in die geskiedenis. Later Joods-Christelike resepsies sien dit as die beslissende moment aan die begin en afronding van God se skepping en heilswerk. Die paradys bring die mens ook voor die beslissende moment om in die hede te kies vir wat werklik saak maak. Die paradys moet dus ook vanuit 'n temporele perspektief verstaan word.

4.1. Die eerste paradys

Die paradys-verhaal in Genesis 2-3 bly, soos reeds geblyk het, steeds weer die uitgangspunt van later Joods-Christelike resepsies en neem op die manier 'n fundamentele plek in. In latere resepsies word op allerhande direkte en indirekte maniere daarvan gebruik gemaak as die beginpunt van God se betrokkenheid by en teenwoordigheid in die skepping. Deur hierdie anker bly die later nadenke oor die motief en die voortgaande vertelling oor God se betrokkenheid in die geskiedenis van Israel en die nuwe volk van God steeds weer gebind aan die skeppingsverhaal, al gebeur dit in die volle wete dat die paradys vir die mensdom verlore geraak het. Die verhaal in Genesis 2-3 was vir latere lesers 'n beslissende oomblik in hulle heilservaring en -vertelling en die oorsprong daarvan.

Lesers wat die verhaal van die paradys in Genesis 2-3 lees vanuit die latere perspektief van die sondvloed, sou die skeppingsverhaal sien as 'n verhaal oor volmaaktheid en skoonheid. Dit is wat die goddelike bedoeling met die paradys is en wat verlore gegaan het. Die veronderstelling en insig dat God die wêreld geskep het, word gekombineer met die wete dat God daarvoor bly regeer en dus dat die paradys nog in God se wil bestaan (Jes.45:6-7; Rendtorff 1992:207-8). Die eerste paradys en die verwagting van die eskatologiese terugkeer van die paradys word gevolglik 'n aanduiding van die trou van God as koning en regeerder.²⁷ God as Skepper van die aarde gee die wêreld nie op nie.

4.2. Die toekomstige paradys

Een van die uitstaande kenmerke van latere resepsies is hulle eskatologiese siening van die paradys. Met die koms van God se ryk, sal die paradys na die aarde terugkeer. Mense sal weer daartoe toegang kry, soos byvoorbeeld uitgespel word in Openbaring 22 as die klimatiese slot van die boek se toekomsbeeld.²⁸ Die kosmologiese dualisme aan die begin van Openbaring met God in die hemel, afgeskei van mense op aarde, word aan die einde van die boek oorkom met die terugkeer van die paradys na die aarde (Rowland 1985:293-294; Decock 2011:195). God, die Skepper van hemel, aarde en see, was op aarde afwesig (Op. 4:11, 8; 10:6), hoewel dit juis die bedoeling was dat God as Skepper aanbid moet word (Op. 14:7). Boosheid het die mensdom en die wêreld totaal gekontamineer. Niemand is daarom in staat om die boek met die sewe seëls oop te breek nie (Op. 4). Deur die terugkeer van die paradys oorkom God die bestaande digotomie.

Ook hier word 'n mens met 'n nog dieper moment gekonfronteer, want die paradys het in Openbaring 'n mistieke aard. Die oorkoming van die kosmologiese digotomie beteken die

27 Jesus se belofte aan die kwaaddoener is 'n antwoord op sy versoek dat Jesus aan hom sal dink wanneer Hy in sy "koninkryk" kom (Lk.23:42). Koninkryk word daarmee ten nouste met paradys verbind. Oor hierdie verbintenis tussen koningskap en paradys, kyk Klingbeil (2009:29): "Kingship in Israel had to do with building and maintaining the divinely created world-order. While Yahweh is the builder of Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile (Jer. 24:6), he is also the builder of Eve in Gen 2:22, whereas in both instances the lexical creation marker *hnb*, "to build" is used."

28 Moo (2011: 52) wys daarop dat reeds Eseg.47:1-2 die toekomstige tempel as 'n Edenagtige paradys beskryf en dus aan die paradys 'n eskatologiese kleur gee.

direkte, onmiddellike inwoning van God in die skepping (Op. 22:5).²⁹ Die teenwoordigheid van God bring lewe en transformeer die situasie wat ontstaan het met die verlies aan lewe in Genesis. Die paradys met die boom van die lewe en sy lewegewende waterstrome is nou weer terug (Frye & MacPherson 2004:31).

Die eskatologiese terugkeer van die paradys is 'n motief wat in vele tekste voorkom. Volgens die *Apokalips van Moses* 37:5 (vgl. 13:2-3; 28:4) sal mense eers weer in die laaste dae met die opstanding die paradys in al sy glorie (13:3) kan binnegaan. In 2 Henog is die paradys 'n aangename, vrugbare plek in die derde hemel waar God rus, waar die boom van die lewe deur 300 lofprysende engele opgepas word en wat aan die mens as erfdeel geskenk word (Lee 2001:74-5). Beide 4 Ezra en 2 Barug gee uitgebreid aandag aan die paradys as die toekomstige heilplek vir regverdige (Henze 2011:171-3). Die paradys bly op die manier die eindbestemming van die mens wat ook die hele skepping raak en tot sy volle ontplooiing laat kom. Dit is, trouens, 'n kenmerk van apokaliptiese tekste dat *Urzeit* en *Endzeit*, die begin en die einde, die geskiedenis en tyd omraam. Wat in die eindtyd gebeur, herstel en henuwe wat aan die begin van alle tye gebeur en bestaan het.

Ook hierdie insig het belangrike geestelike implikasies, veral omdat dit van gelowiges 'n bepaalde geloofshouding vra.³⁰ Die paradys is naamlik die eindbestemming alleenlik van hulle wat getrou bly te midde van hulle uitdagende omstandighede. Dit geld vir pseudepigrafiese werke soos 2 Henog en 4 Ezra (Henze 2011:171-3³¹). Ook die skrywer van Openbaring stel bepaalde eise aan sy lesers hieroor. Maar sy kommunikasie hieroor word deur oorreding aangevuur. Hy besef die transformatiewe potensiaal van die paradys-motief en interpreteer hulle ervaring in hulle Grieks-Romeinse konteks om sodoende hulle insig en optrede te beïnvloed en hulle met geestelike wysheid tot groter vroomheid aan te spoor. Deur 'n simbool soos die paradys wil hy hulle tot volharding motiveer, eerder as met allerlei leerstellige argumente. Deur die beeld van die paradys as 'n ideale heilstoestand by God spreek hy op 'n inspirerende manier tot die verbeelding van sy lesers.³² Hy motiveer aldus sy lesers tot gereedheid vir die deurslaggewende draaipunt in die geskiedenis. Die voorstelling van die eskatologiese paradys het selfs meer impak in die lig van antieke wysheid wat beklemtoon het dat die einde van 'n mens se lewe meer beslissend is as sy begin of as die hede.³³ Daarom oortref die paradys van die eindtyd die eerste paradys. Wat die mens aan die einde sal beleef, kan moeilik beskryf word. Dit is nie in woorde vas te vang nie.

Tog is ook die eskatologiese paradys slegs tot op 'n punt vanuit 'n antroposentriese en spirituele perspektief te verstaan. In die kosmiese denke van byvoorbeeld Openbaring is Christus die oorsprong van die skepping (Op.3:14) wat heil en vrede bring teenoor die opponente van God wat die aarde vernietig (Op. 11:18; 19:2).³⁴ Die volharding van gelowiges is dus deel van die groter prentjie van God se herskepping waarin alles uiteindelik gaan om die heerskappy en teenwoordigheid van God. Deur die paradys-motief en sy teosentriese karakter word gelowiges bewus van die beslissende moment in die toekoms wanneer God se heilswerk tot voltooiing gebring sal word.

29 Die paradys word selfs met nie-Christelike motiewe van skrywers soos Vergilius uitgebeeld as 'n plek van ewige rus vir liggaam en siel na die dood waar volmaakte eenheid met God beleef word (Clark 2010:166-78).

30 Wat geld vir Openbaring, is, *mutatis mutandis*, ook waar van ander boeke. Kyk bv. Henze (2011: 171-3) vir 'n soortgelyke siening in 2 Barug en 4 Ezra.

31 Kyk Decock (2011: 184, voetnoot 15) vir literatuur oor 'n regverdige lewensstyl en die kosmologiese implikasies daarvan.

32 Kyk Decock (2011: 184); Rowland (1985: 284).

33 Decock (2011: 186) verwys hier na Henze se beskrywing van 2 Bar.89:9-22 en Spr.12:1,2,6,7.

34 Decock (2011: 188). Hy verwys ook na ander apokaliptiese werke waarin die kosmiese omvang van sonde uitgespel word (bv. 1 Hen.80:2-8; 100:10-13).

4.3. Die bestaande paradys

Die paradys is in Joods-Christelike tekste nie net 'n saak van die verlede en toekoms nie. Die paradys word, soos reeds indirek hierbo geblyk het, as 'n bestaande werklikheid beskou. Reeds op 'n vroeë stadium is daar in Joodse tekste opgemerk dat die paradys, hoewel vir die mensdom verlore weens hulle oortredings, in die hemel bewaar word totdat dit 'n woonplek sou word vir die regverdige na hulle opstanding uit die dood (2 Bar. 51:11; Bauckham 2010:43). Enkele bevoorregte sieners het volgens sommige tekste deur 'n hemelreis die geleentheid om hierdie verborge paradys in die hede te ervaar. Tog was daar wel ander maniere waarop gelowiges die paradys-ervaring in die hede kon meemaak. In die Qumran-gemeenskap, byvoorbeeld, word vertel dat die regverdige reeds in die hede die heerlikheid van die paradys kan smaak, veral in die liturgiese beleving.³⁵ Vir beide Paulus en Lukas is die paradys 'n bestaande werklikheid waarin gelowiges nog voor die eindtyd kan deel. Trouens, wie die oproep tot getrouheid gehoorsaam, word op 'n beslissende manier daarin ondersteun deur die wete dat hulle nou reeds deel aan God se teenwoordigheid.

Ook in sy teenwoordige karakter is daar 'n teosentriese dimensie. Die ervaring van die paradys beteken 'n noue en intieme ontmoeting met God. Weer pas dit in in die konteks van die tyd waarin daar 'n toenemende fokus is op die vertikale dimensie van mense se geloofservaring. Ten spyte van die groot ramp wat die volk Israel met die vernietiging van die tempel in 70 n.C. oorval het en die geloofskrisis met sy vrae oor God waarin mense gedompel is, was daar heelwat dokumente waarin 'n besondere vereniging met God beskryf is – soos reeds hierbo uitgewys is. In apokaliptiese werke as mistieke tekste is veral 'n verborge gemeenskap van God beklemtoon wat aan die einde openlik ervaar sal word en die wese van die nuwe skeppingswerklikheid sal bepaal en uitmaak. Dit is ook uitdruklik te vind in die slot van Openbaring waar die paradys die woonplek van God onder mense is, waar God en die Lam se troon sal staan en waar God die mense sal verlig (Op.22:1-5).

In die Grieks-Romeinse tyd van krisis en ontheemding, sonder tempel en land, het hierdie literatuur mense moed gegee: dit vertel hoe bevoorreg sommige uitgesoekte mense was om hierdie mistieke hemelreise te kon aflê. Meer nog het Openbaring met sy liturgiese vieringe vir mense nou reeds hierdie vereniging met God laat ervaar. Die hemelse viering in Openbaring 4-5 is die model vir wat op aarde in die kring van gelowiges gebeur.

Die paradys het dus nie te doen met 'n mistieke ontvlugting van die bestaande wêreld nie. Die paradys is God se alternatief op die huidige verwerde wêreld en funksioneer as kritiek op die vernietiging van God se skepping deur teenstanders van God (Op. 18). Dit vertel van 'n aarde waarin God die middelpunt van aanbidding is en wat weer beantwoord aan die skeppingsdoel wat God oorspronklik daarvoor gehad het (vgl. veral Op. 14). Dit vertel ook van die teenwoordigheid van God se heil onder mense reeds in die hede.

5. GEVOLGTREKKING

Die voorafgaande bespreking wys hoe die paradys-motief, ten spyte van die komplekse aard daarvan in latere Joods-Christelike tekste, steeds weer onlosmaaklik met die skeppingsverhaal

35 Kyk Rowland (1985: 106-7). Hy verwys na die Oorlogsrol waarvolgens die gemeenskap, hoewel hulle in 'n kosmiese stryd betrokke is, reeds deel in 'n paradys- en engele-bestaan. Ook die Ode's van Salomo 11:16 (vgl. 20:7) praat van gelowiges wat in die paradys opgeneem word. Dit gebeur veral in die liturgiese vieringe van die gemeente. Kyk verder Decock (2011: 193) en Lincoln (1981: 149) vir vele ander voorbeelde.

verbind bly.³⁶ Dit was die geval in Genesis 2-3,³⁷ maar, soos aangetoon is, ook in ander Bybeltekste en latere geskrifte. In resepsies van die paradys-verhaal word dus daaraan gedink as onlosmaaklik verbonde met die werklikheid van die skepping en natuur. Die paradys-motief het dus steeds 'n kosmologiese karakter.³⁸

Die kosmologiese aard van die paradys-verhaal is egter vir skrywers ten nouste met die verlossingswerk van God verbind. "Their maps chart the topography of redemption within the topography of creation" (Bockmuehl 2010:209). Joodse en Christelike skrywers onderstreep vroeg reeds dat die paradys die simbool is van God se heilsteenwoordigheid in die skepping. Die paradys onthul die spesiale karakter van verlossing as 'n gawe wat van God kom en wat op die diens van God gerig is.³⁹ Met die verlossingswerk van God word die paradys op aarde herstel en word die natuur en mens getransformeer om in die teenwoordigheid van God te bestaan en te leef. Die Joodse monoteïsme het hierdie teosentriese denke as 'n erfdeel agtergelaat teenoor die natuur-godsdiens van die antieke en die neiging om die natuur te vergoddelik of te aanbid.⁴⁰ Dit is 'n perspektief wat veral in kontemporêre refleksie oor die ekologiese krisis en die rol van Bybelse denke daarin, belangrik is. Juis omdat die natuur en skepping 'n dieper geestelike dimensie dien en die ruimte is vir die teenwoordigheid van God, is die opdrag om vir die natuur om te gee, soveel dringender en belangriker.

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36 In die resepsie-geskiedenis word die konkretheid van die paradys as plek en die verband met die skepping geïllustreer deur die ernstige debat oor watter taal daarin gepraat is. Die onderliggende oortuiging in die debat is dat God die skepping deur taal tot stand gebring het. Gevolglik word nagedink oor die taal wat God, die mens en diere met mekaar in die paradys gepraat het. Siriese skrywers uit 'n latere tydperk het byvoorbeeld argumente aangevoer dat die oorspronklike paradys-taal Siries en nie Hebreeus was nie. Kyk Van der Wal (1995: 93-94) vir tale wat in die paradys gepraat is. Hy verwys o.a. na Becanus volgens wie Antwerps as vorm van Nederlands die paradys-taal was. Ook Kempe het, in 'n satiriese artikel, gerig teen Sweedse predikante van sy tyd, beweer Sweeds is in die paradys deur God gepraat, Deens deur Adam en Frans deur die slang.

37 Sien Noort (1999) vir 'n bespreking van die Ou-Testamentiese gegewens oor die paradys. Die paradys-verhaal verklaar volgens hom die huidige korrupte bestaan van die mens en die koms van die dood in die wêreld, maar wys ook terselfdertyd op die omvorming van hierdie misvormde wêreld na die oorspronklike wil van God.

38 Kyk Fletcher-Louis (2004: 69-113) en vir die kosmologiese denke in die Nuwe Testament; ook Fletcher-Louis (2000: 52-68).

39 Terwyl die paradys veral konkreet in Joods-Palestynse tekste van Hellenistiese tye geïnterpreteer is, was dit veral onder invloed van die Platonisme allegories gelees deur Philo van Alexandrië en, nog sterker deur Origenes in die derde eeu. Origenes het bv. die uitdruwing uit die paradys gelees as 'n beskrywing van die mense se geestelike geskiedenis eerder as van die geestelike geskiedenis van die mensdom. Kyk Stroumsma (2010: 11).

40 Kyk hiervoor Goodman (2010: 62-3).

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TREFWOORDE

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Pragmatic justifications, realism and truth: How does the suggestion to justify coherent belief systems pragmatically relate to Brümmer's views?

It is a privilege to have been invited to contribute to analysing Vincent Brümmer's impressive oeuvre at the occasion of his 80th birthday. Being the successor on his chair in the philosophy of religion at Utrecht University, I will focus on philosophical aspects of his work. In particular, I will zoom in on his considerations on truth.

After providing an overview of Brümmer's critique of coherentist and pragmatist definitions of truth (see section 1), I will make a suggestion on how coherentist and pragmatic criteria can be used alternatively (see section 2). The upshot will be an account of pragmatic justification. In section 3, I flesh out the consequences of this account for the issues of realism and truth. In section 4, I investigate how this account relates to Brümmer's views on the issues.

1. BRÜMMER ON TRUTH

1.1 Brümmer's critique of coherentist and pragmatic theories of truth

One of the intriguing features of Brümmer's comprehensive oeuvre is that it relates theoretical to applied considerations. The latter range over a number of issues crucial in the philosophy of religion, such as the function of prayer, the relationship between science and religion, the question whether secular accounts of love can function as a model for God's love, etc. The foundation of those applied considerations is laid in a number of publications on theoretical issues, chief among them the book 'Theology and Philosophical Inquiry'. I will focus on that book in the following.

In chapter three, Brümmer provides an in-depth analysis of the issue of truth (see pp. 169-183; the following page numbers refer to this book). Right from the outset, he makes clear that his account of truth applies to constative assertions (see 169). After having discussed the problems of the traditional correspondence theory of truth (see 170-2), he turns to the coherence theory of truth. He holds that mathematics serves as the model for this theory since the truth or acceptability of a mathematical proposition is determined by its coherence with other propositions of the mathematical system (see 173). However, he criticizes that coherence cannot be a 'complete criterion for truth' (173). The coherence of the proposition, *p*, with other propositions does not guarantee *p*'s truth. The reason is that the truth of those other propositions have to be fixed first before *p*'s coherence with them can be taken to indicate *p*'s truth. Yet, fixing the truth of those other propositions requires resources which go beyond what coherentism can deliver (see 174). Coherentism can thus not exclude the possibility of 'various mutually exclusive systems, all equally coherent with themselves. The question is, then, how are we to choose between such systems' (174).

Next, Brümmer analyses pragmatist theories of truth. He defines them as implying that a 'proposition is true if it forms part of a theory which *works* in practical life' (174). Yet, by way of scrutinizing the classical pragmatist accounts of Peirce, James and Dewey, Brümmer shows that all of them are found wanting: Truth cannot be identified with 'useful to believe', as James does (see 175), nor with any other pragmatist construal of what 'working' means.

Then, Brümmer suggests a characterization of truth which makes extensive use of speech

act theory, in particular of the concept of constatives. He suggests that 'a constative is true if our possibilities for action are indeed as assured in the constative' (180). Yet, 'a constative is not some kind of representation... It is an *assurance* about what we are able to do. The factual situation (as determinant of our possibilities for action) is therefore a condition for the success of the constative (= assurance), not something represented or mirrored in the constative' (180-1).

1.2 Evaluation of Brümmer's critique

I think that Brümmer's critique is successful: In his usual straight-to-the-point manner, he identifies the core-weaknesses of the traditional theories of truth. Pragmatic theories of truth fail to distinguish between what is 'truly true' and what is useful to believe to be true. Although I am personally convinced that the classical pragmatists had more in mind than to *reduce* truth to utility or expediency of belief, Brümmer's point that a pragmatic theory of truth fails is well taken.

And the same goes for a coherence theory of truth. The problem with coherence is that it is a concept which regulates the relations between propositions rather than between propositions and the world. It is thus a syntactic rather than a semantic notion. Semantic concepts as that of truth are thus notoriously underdetermined by coherentist considerations.

A common response from coherence-theorists is that coherence is not a *definition* of truth but, rather, only a *criterion for it*.¹ Meeting this criterion is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for truth. Yet, this response leaves the question open what needs to be added to coherence for a sufficient definition of truth. This question cannot be answered on coherentist grounds. Thus, in order to develop a definition of truth, coherentism is insufficient.

Yet, although I acknowledge that coherentist and pragmatic criteria are insufficient for the purposes of *defining* truth, I wonder whether they can be used differently. If they are utilized not in the context of the theory of truth proper but in a different context, can they fulfil useful functions? I will explore that possibility in the following two sections.

2. COHERENTISM

2.1 Plantinga's critique of coherentist theories of justification

Coherentism does not only come as a theory of truth but, also, as a theory of justification.² I will investigate in the following how useful coherentist criteria are in the context of the discourse on justification.³ The guiding question will be whether the problems that crop up when using coherentist criteria in the context of the discussion on (definitions of) truth can be avoided when using them in the context of the discussion on (theories of) justification.

The standard charge against using coherentism in this context is that it is incapable of taking semantic concerns into account. For example Susan Haack has criticized it as failing to allow for a 'non-belief input': "...the coherentist's claim that empirical beliefs can be justified by nothing but relations of mutual support is as absurd as suggesting that two drunken sailors could support

1 See e.g. Puntel, Grundlagen.

2 Generally speaking, theories of justification have to do with the question under what circumstances an (appropriately situated) subject of cognition has the epistemic right ('is justified') to hold the beliefs she holds. Different from truth which is a purely semantic notion, dealing with the relationships between propositions and the world, justification thus takes the subject uttering those propositions into account as well. Yet, as will become clear below, all overly sharp distinctions between the semantic and the pragmatic dimension will be blurred since pragmatic, justification-related, considerations have semantic, truth-related, impact as well.

3 See the discussions in e.g. Nicholas Rescher, Cognitive Systematization, Laurence Bonjour, Structure, Keith Lehrer, Knowledge.

each other by leaning back to back – when neither was standing on anything.”⁴

Alvin Plantinga has devoted his volume ‘Warrant: The Current Debate’ to the critique of coherentism. His point is that it fails to relate beliefs to experience.⁵ He illustrates this point with the help of the following example: The mountain climber Ric’s belief system is frozen while being on top of a mountain. When being back in the valley, he still holds the belief system he held while being on top of the mountain.⁶ Plantinga’s point with this example is that, although Ric’s belief system is coherent, it is out of touch with reality. The coherence of a belief system does thus not guarantee that it portrays reality adequately.

2.2 Coherentism amended by pragmatism

Plantinga’s and related critiques of coherentism have a point. Yet, let me remind you of the context we are concerned with at this point, viz. the context of justification: I think that in this context, the critique that the coherence of a belief system does not guarantee that it portrays reality adequately is not fatal. In contrast to the context of the discussion on truth, this critique should not lead us to abandon coherentism but, rather, to *amend* it.⁷ More precisely, we should amend it with pragmatism: Coherent systems of belief should be tested with the help of pragmatic criteria.

Let me explain what I mean by taking up Plantinga’s example of Ric’s ‘frozen’ belief system. I don’t think that we should only ask whether it is coherent and then leave it at that, as Plantinga does. Rather, we should ask whether this coherent belief system *works* in the circumstances it is employed. If, for example, Ric cannot orient himself adequately with his belief system in the circumstances that he is currently in, this will speak against this system. If, to choose a crude example, Ric’s frozen belief system makes him ignore the existence of the traffic in the valley and he gets run over by a car, this provides reasons to abandon this belief system in favour of another system. Thus pragmatic criteria, such as the question whether a belief system works or is *successful*, provide, at least, *prima facie* reasons for accepting or abandoning a belief system.

The pragmatic criteria suggested function as a choice-selector: They make it possible to distinguish between adequate and inadequate coherent belief systems. Thus, pragmatic criteria provide an answer to Brümmer’s question on how to choose between competing coherent belief systems (see above, 1).

In the following section, I will flesh out this answer. In particular, I will analyse what consequences it has for the issues of realism and truth. I will use the shorter phrase ‘pragmatic justifications’ rather than ‘coherently pragmatic justifications’. Yet, I presuppose that the pragmatic justifications suggested are applied for choosing between coherent (rather than incoherent) systems of belief.

3. FLESHING OUT PRAGMATIC JUSTIFICATIONS

3.1 Pragmatic justifications and Realism

The kind of realism that can be legitimated by pragmatic justifications is an *en bloc realism* or *holism*. Only *systems* of beliefs rather than individual beliefs can be justified along the pragmatic lines suggested. This has to do with the fact that pragmatic criteria apply only to such systems. Only systems of coherent beliefs can work or fail to work, not individual beliefs.

4 Haack, Evidence, pp. 27-8.

5 See Plantinga, Warrant, pp. 80-3.

6 See Plantinga, Warrant, p. 82.

7 In particular, when we consider the problems that coherentism’s alternative, foundationalism, harbors (for a critique of foundationalism, see e.g. Dirk-Martin Grube, Religious Experience, pp. 41-50).

Let me give an example: Imagine we have a computer model of the Atlantic Ocean into which we feed all the relevant data, the water depths, differences in temperature and the like. If this model generates something like the Gulfstream, then we have reasons to assume that this model allows for an adequate orientation in reality. We have, at least, *prima facie* reasons to assume that it has captured some features of the world adequately. Assuming the contrary, viz. that it has failed to capture those features adequately, would leave us with the problem of having to explain how it can predict the existence of the Gulfstream.

Yet, the judgment that it has captured some features of reality adequately refers to the model *as a whole*. It does not necessarily imply that each and every individual bit of data from which this model is composed captures reality appropriately. Although it is probably inconceivable to assume that *all* the relevant data is off the mark, it is well conceivable that *some* data is. There is thus no guarantee that all sub-beliefs within a working belief system portray reality adequately. In all likelihood, they are not all beside the mark but it cannot be excluded that some sub-beliefs are.

Let me clarify that point with the help of another image: Think of a fishing-net. After having laid it out in the water, you are capable of telling whether you have caught something or not. But you cannot tell with which individual mesh you made the catch.

The same holds for the pragmatic justifications suggested: Applying pragmatic criteria makes it possible to tell whether the catch is successful. It provides *prima facie* justifications for holding that a coherent belief system portrays reality or, rather, particular aspects of it, adequately. Yet, it is impossible to tell which individual sub-belief is successful and which is not. All that can be held is that the system as a whole, i.e. the individual sub-beliefs being connected the way they are connected, works. Thus, the kind of realism emerging from the suggestion to test coherent belief systems with the help of pragmatic criteria is a holist kind.

Obviously, this holism does not exclude the possibility of making educated guesses. For example, it is not highly likely that core sub-beliefs of a working belief system are off the mark. Given that the system as a whole works, chances are that its core beliefs are not completely wrong. Above all, it is unlikely that *all* core beliefs in a working belief system portray reality inadequately – otherwise it would be difficult to explain why the system still works. Yet, it is well conceivable that some sub-beliefs belonging to the *periphery* of the belief system portray reality inadequately. It is conceivable that a belief system can harbour mistaken sub-beliefs and yet continue to work.

3.2 Pragmatic justifications and Truth

The epistemic claims that can be generated by pragmatic justifications differ from truth-claims proper. There are, at least, two reasons for this:

The *first* is a principled reason: Truth is a predicate pertaining to propositions, i.e. to individual beliefs formulated in statements. Only individual statements or comparable utterances⁸ can be true or not. Yet, pragmatic justifications in the sense specified pertain to systems of beliefs rather than to individual beliefs, as has been demonstrated above (see 3.A.). Thus, the epistemic merits which can be generated from pragmatic justifications pertain to those systems of beliefs rather than to the individual beliefs they are composed of.

Nor can those epistemic merits be *translated* into truth-claims proper: That a belief system possesses the merit 'success' cannot be translated into ascribing the merit 'truth' to its sub-beliefs. The reason for this untranslatability were provided above (see 3.A.): It cannot be excluded that a successful belief system contains false sub-beliefs.

There is also a *second* reason why we should be cautious to use the truth predicate for

⁸ See 1, Brümmer's considerations on 'constatives'.

identifying the epistemic merits which can be generated by pragmatic justifications. This reason has to do with the nature of the argumentation provided: It is a *relative* one rather than an absolute one. That is to say, given the pragmatic justification suggested, all we can say is that belief system A is *more likely* to capture reality than belief system B. If A works and B does not, we have *prima facie* better reasons to assume that A captures reality adequately than to assume that B does. The argument is thus a relative one: We weigh A's chances against B's and come to conclusions based upon this comparison. Yet, such a relative procedure is different from an absolutist one according to which truth can be fixed definitely.

Of course, we can decide to label the epistemic merits which can be generated in this relative fashion 'truth'. Yet, this would be a deviation from the philosophical tradition in which, at least, in my understanding, the truth predicate implies more than only relative epistemic merits. If x is predicated to be 'true', then this means traditionally more than suggesting that, in comparison to y, x is in some sense epistemically better off. It means rather that x is absolutely certain.

For those two reasons, I suggest that the epistemic merits which can be generated from pragmatic justifications should not be identified with truth proper but with logically weaker values.

3.3 Pragmatic justifications between 'Truth' and 'truth'

My suggestion to construe the epistemic merits generated by pragmatic justifications logically weaker than truth proper must, however, be sharply distinguished from postmodernist constructions of truth. It is *not* in line with, say, Richard Rorty's notorious trivializations of the concept of truth. It does not reduce truth to '...a compliment paid to the beliefs which we think so well justified that, for the moment further justification is not needed.'⁹ Trivializations of this sort undermine the basic rationale upon which the quest for truth is grounded whereas my suggestion does not.

Let me explain what I mean: The traditional quest for truth is rooted in my view in a life-worldly basis. That is, it is *not l'art pour l'art* but is rooted in basic human needs. For lack of better terms, I summarize those needs here as a basic necessity to orient ourselves adequately in our environment. And orienting ourselves adequately is at the same time the basis for taking proper action. Thus, the traditional quest for truth has its roots in this necessity to orient ourselves adequately in our life-world and, as a consequence, to be able to take proper action.

This is the point Rorty's and comparable trivializations of the issue of truth overlook. To put it bluntly: If the concept of truth had no more implications than the terms 'here' and 'there', as Rorty suggests¹⁰, then we would need some *other* category which does justice to the basic human need for proper orientation.

I emphasize this point that strongly not only because some philosophical *agent provocateurs* overlook it but, also, because the more serious philosophical work on the notion of truth is in jeopardy of neglecting it. In particular, the philosophical discussions on the *definition* of truth are often so immersed in purely technical concerns that they lose sight of the basic rationale underlying the quest for truth. I think that whatever victories can be gained by defining truth as being redundant¹¹, as being a purely syntactic concept, etc. are Pyrrhic victories if they cannot accommodate this rationale.

Suggesting logically weaker terms than truth proper, as I did above, is, however, faithful to this basic rationale. It is directed against a *particular way* of dealing with this rationale, viz. against the traditional focus on individual beliefs or sentences as bearers of truth. Yet, what is

9 Rorty, *Solidarity*, p. 24.

10 Rorty, *Solidarity*, p. 23.

11 See Brümmer, *Theology*, pp. 187-81.

lost on the level of individual beliefs is re-gained on the level of systems of beliefs: According to the suggestion made above, the success of those systems provides us, at least, with *prima facie* reasons to assume that they have captured some aspects of reality adequately. Thus, the basic rationale lying behind the traditional quest for truth, viz. its function to orient ourselves adequately in our environment, is well preserved.

The way it is preserved differs obviously from the classical philosophical tradition. Its point is not to approximate Truth (capital T) in the way it was supposed to be approximated from the Greek philosophical tradition up to Descartes. Pragmatic justifications as recommended above do not get us to the unchangeable Ideas behind empirical reality nor to the indubitable foundation of all thinking. Yet, they allow us to orient ourselves adequately in our life-world and thus provide proper reasons for action. This, I take it, is sufficient for us humans as principally limited and fallible beings.

A convenient way to characterize the intention behind introducing pragmatic criteria is to situate it between Truth and truth: It falls short of the intention behind the traditional quest for Truth, the search for absolute certainty. Yet, it goes beyond the intention to trivialize truth - à la Rorty. It does not sacrifice the basic rationale underlying the human quest for truth.

3.4 Ontological presuppositions of pragmatic justifications

There is one issue which is easily overlooked and deserves separate mention for that reason: The pragmatic justifications suggested are not completely neutral with regard to ontology. Translating the success of a system of beliefs into holistically construed realist assumptions presupposes certain basic ontological assumptions about the world. Put differently, translating the upshot of pragmatic justifications into semantic claims is not completely free of all ontological presuppositions.

For example, translating the success of the above mentioned computer model of the Atlantic Ocean - which is capable of predicting the existence of the Gulfstream (see above, 3.A.) - into the claim that it has probably captured some aspects of reality adequately works only if we presuppose certain assumptions about the basic structure of reality. One such assumption is that it is not malleable in whichever way we wish. Because if reality *would be* malleable in such a way, nothing semantically interesting would follow from the model's predictive success. If this were the case, we would not be entitled to prefer this model over a competing model with respect to its capacity to portray reality adequately. The same holds for the assumption that there is a multiplicity or even endless variety of worlds. If there *would be* such a variety, the fact that this model can make successful predictions could not be translated into the claim that it has captured some aspects of reality adequately. The reason is simply that there is no such thing as reality in the singular which can be captured adequately. There are only a multiplicity of realities.

In sum, the pragmatic justifications suggested presuppose certain basic ontological assumptions, e.g. those which exclude the idea of a complete malleability of reality or the existence of an endless variety of worlds.

The reason that I bring up those examples is not that I think them to be very convincing. As a matter of fact, I think they are philosophical fancies far off the mark. Yet, they are important in order to appreciate my argument and the assumptions upon which it is based.

The fact that my argument presupposes certain basic ontological assumptions has consequences for its applicability: It is not the antidote to the radical sceptic that e.g. Descartes is out to refute. It does not demonstrate the logical impossibility of scepticism. *Logically*, nothing speaks against suggesting that reality is completely malleable, that there is an endless variety of worlds, or whatever fancies philosophers may come up with. Yet, the argument succeeds in *raising the stakes* for the sceptic: She must assume those ontological assumptions (or related

fancies) in order to maintain her case for scepticism. The argument provided thus does not demonstrate the logical impossibility but, rather, the high degree of implausibility of scepticism.

In my view, this is all we need at this late point in the history of philosophy. Trying to achieve more, trying to provide anti-sceptical arguments beyond every possible doubt, often bears sour fruits. This, I take it, is the lesson to be learnt from the history of philosophy: The anti-sceptical quest in the name of absolute certainty is a philosophical dream which all too often turns into a nightmare. The curious result of the Cartesian and related quests for certainty beyond every possible doubt is that it has come to nourish that which it was out to rebut, viz. scepticism.

As heirs of this tradition, we should learn from its mistakes. Our ambitions should be more modest: We should not be after absolute certainty. Rather, we should moderate our goals. We should be only after whatever amount of certainty is sufficient to orient ourselves adequately in our live-world. Insofar as we can get this amount of certainty out of pragmatic justifications, we should be satisfied with them. They provide sufficient reasons for proper action and that is all we need.

4. RELATING PRAGMATIC JUSTIFICATIONS TO BRÜMMER'S VIEW

In this final section, I will relate my suggestions to Brümmer's views on the issue. As will be remembered, I shared Brümmer's rejection of coherentist and pragmatic definitions of truth. Yet, I asked whether coherentist and pragmatic criteria can be used differently than as criteria for the purposes of defining truth. That led me to use coherent systems of beliefs as a vantage point for my theorizing. I acknowledged the force of Brümmer's point that there can be a variety of different, even incompatible coherent belief-systems. Yet, I did not use that as a knock-down argument against coherentism but suggested that it should be amended with pragmatic justifications: Pragmatic criteria allow us to differentiate between the competing coherent systems so that we can maintain some form of realism, viz. a holist form of realism.

How does this holism legitimated by pragmatic justifications relate to Brümmer's views? In chapter 18 of *Theology* (pp. 225-48; the following page numbers refer to this book), Brümmer analyses the systematic linkages between the concepts of 'existence', 'facts', and 'reality'. The upshot of that analysis is a particular stance on the issues that are commonly discussed under the heading 'realism'.¹² This stance is characterized by understanding the 'real world' (236) as consisting of 'the *total* acting-situation in which we find ourselves, the complete set of determinations of our possibilities for action' (236). Brümmer thus weaves those concepts, hence, the question of realism, closely together with a theory of (the possibilities for) action. According to him, saying that something exists is tantamount to 'giving my hearer the assurance that there is one (or more) situation(s) within the real world in which that "something" makes a difference to what we can and cannot do' (236). In short, Brümmer answers questions revolving around the issue of realism on action-theoretical grounds (in the broad sense of the word).

I wonder to what extent this answer differs from my own suggestion worked out above. Obviously, there are differences in the philosophical vantage points: Brümmer's vantage point is the speech-act theory. I do not reject it but grant it a less prominent role than Brümmer does. In my approach, pragmatism plays *the* crucial role. Yet, do those differences in philosophical vantage points truly lead to different net-results? Or do those results differ less than one may expect? Do the different vantage points lead us to choose different paths to walk along but our final destination is similar?

For example, Brümmer answers the question on why we use the real-world language for the

¹² Brümmer, however, does not use the term 'realism' extensively because he finds the whole 'conflict between realists...and subjective idealists founded on a mistaken formulation of the problem' (234-5).

purposes of solving problems of existence as follows: 'Our choice of the real-world language is necessitated by the practical needs of human life on earth' (236). This sounds suspiciously similar to what was identified above (see 3.C.) as the basic human needs in which the traditional quest for truth is rooted.

It can be retorted now that, for Brümmer, the subject and her (possibilities for) actions are crucial whereas my suggestions do not focus on the subject that strongly: The payoff of the pragmatic justifications sketched above is not cashed in in terms of the subject and her actions but, rather, in terms of a specific way of construing the relation between language and world. This is admittedly a non-orthodox way of construing this relation in that it focuses neither on the issues of reference nor on truth, as orthodox constructions do. That is, it focuses neither on the relation between word and world nor on that between sentences and the world. Rather, it focuses on the relation between *systems* of sentences or beliefs and reality. Yet, so the contender may summarize her point, although non-orthodox, it is nevertheless a *semantic* approach (in the broad sense of the word). Yet, Brümmer attempts to overcome semantic approaches with his emphasis upon the subject's actions.

Although this is true in theory, I wonder how much difference it makes in practice. Take e.g. Brümmer's solution to the problem of past facts: He acknowledges that it is a challenge to his account that questions of fact can be raised which are located in the past. They do not make a difference to our current (possibilities for) actions, as his action-centred account would require. His answer to that challenge is to introduce logical possibility: Questions of fact do not have to make a difference to our current possibilities for action. Rather, they must make a difference 'in cases where it is logically possible that *someone* (no matter who) has been/is/will be in a position where the state of affairs in question would make a difference to his possibilities for action' (245). Brümmer specifies his action-centred account here so as to include potential actors in the past, present and future. This is obviously a very generous account of action which entails a broad notion of the subject performing those actions: It includes not only present but also past and future, thus imaginary, subjects. Given such a wide characterization of the subject's actions, the potential differences between an action-thus-subject-centred account as Brümmer's and a semantically-oriented account as I suggest are minimized.

I am very curious how Brümmer himself would characterize the relation between his own account and (broadly) semantic accounts, such as the one provided above.¹³

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13 For space reasons, I cannot delve into the consequences both accounts have for religious issues.

Therefore, I restrict myself here to mentioning in passing that I share Brümmer's concern for the defense of religion. In a similar way as his approach creates space for religious issues (see 249-90), the pragmatically justified holism favored here creates space as well. For example, the emphasis upon belief-systems rather than individual beliefs allows for testing religious belief systems in a fashion which is more sympathetic with them than traditional logical-positivist or Popperian approaches are with their emphasis upon the testing of individual beliefs.

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What does it mean to call yourself a Christian? Some philosophical reflections on the Christian identity

ABSTRACT

In my discussion of Brümmer's article on the *Identity of the Christian Tradition* I argue that it is necessary to complement an external approach of this question, which tries to lay down the essential characteristics of the Christian tradition, with an internal one, which interprets the Christian identity as the result of a personal identification with a given tradition through a process of re-interpretation. In order to show the new insights that such an internal approach can yield I comment on Brümmer's analysis of three important paradigms concerning the identity of the Christian tradition. This results in an idea of the Christian identity as a dynamic unity of a given tradition and its constant re-interpretations, which enable people to identify themselves with this tradition. Only this approach is able to explain the way in which many people experience nowadays their religious identity, viz. as belonging without believing.

INTRODUCTION

In his valedictory lecture of 1997 Vincent Brümmer addressed the intriguing question of the identity of the Christian tradition.¹ At that time, nobody could expect that, some fifteen years later, the issue of identity would be of such importance in the public debate. Nowadays, people are preoccupied with their personal and collective identity, including the expressions (e.g. symbols, ways of behaving) that manifest it. The way in which this preoccupation takes shape highlights at least one striking difference with Brümmer's approach: whereas the focus of his paper was – largely, although not exclusively – on the identity of the Christian tradition, the public and scholarly debate is these days focused on the (Christian) identity, on the question what is at stake when believers identify themselves with a religious tradition. So, the focus of the debate has somehow shifted from an (external or objective) analysis of the essential characteristics of the Christian tradition towards the question of why a person (internally or subjectively) identifies himself as Christian. The answer that one nowadays most commonly gets when inquiring into this 'why' is by and large a certain feeling of belonging to this tradition, rather irrespective of its objective content. Social scientists summarize this attitude as (a subjective feeling of) belonging without believing (in the objective doctrine of Christianity). This focus on the internal or subjective aspect of the Christian identity, as distinct from the objective identity of the Christian tradition, will play an important role in my comment on Brümmer's position. However, I will not only try to shed some light on what is philosophically at stake when people call themselves Christians, but – especially in the last section – also aim to contribute to the discussion about the identity of the Christian tradition.

1 Vincent Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*. In: Vincent Brümmer, *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith. Collected Writings of Vincent Brümmer*. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, 375-390.

A COMMENT ON BRÜMMER'S ANALYSIS OF THE IDENTITY OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Brümmer's point of departure in his very illuminating analysis of the identity of the Christian tradition is that the Christian message is not bound to one single language or culture, but can be expressed in all languages and in the conceptual forms of every culture. Hence, Christianity had from its very beginnings to deal with the question of its universality in a context of linguistic and cultural plurality, thus making the problem of an adequate translation and re-interpretation of her message in a new spiritual-cultural environment one of its central concerns.² Finding an answer to this problem is essential for the identity of the Christian tradition. In his essay, Brümmer discusses three influential philosophical paradigms that intend to solve the tension between the identity of the Christian tradition and its permanent need for re-interpretation.

Identity and essence

This paradigm explains the identity of the Christian tradition in terms of an essence (or substance) that remains the same throughout the times, while its accidental features can vary and change without affecting the essence of this tradition. Brümmer's main problems with this distinction between essential and accidental properties are that we have no obvious or universally recognised criteria for making this distinction, and, secondly, that there are hardly any tenets of the Christian faith that have been free of re-interpretation.³ This raises the question whether it still makes sense to speak of the unchangeable identity of the Christian tradition at all, or that everything is subject to interpretation, which would, following this line of interpretation, jeopardize the very idea of Christian identity. Brümmer tries to solve this problem in a pragmatic way by pointing out that "it is impossible for all aspects of someone's faith to be modified at the same time,"⁴ but he also admits that there is no guarantee that the supposedly unchangeable beliefs will not sooner or later be re-interpreted themselves, so that in the end there would be no unchangeable essence left.

In addition to Brümmer's argument I want to show in a more principled way the limits of the approach that underlies the position that the Christian identity would be equivalent to an unchangeable essence. From an external perspective, it may be correct to understand a re-interpretation of the Christian tradition simply in terms of change, and, if this change is more than marginal, as an annihilation of its identity. But such an approach fails to understand the reasons why and the intentions with which Christians re-interpret their tradition. For the Christians themselves, re-interpretation by no means coincides just with change and even less with a loss of their identity. On the contrary, only through a process of re-interpretation can Christians identify themselves with their tradition. By doing so, they make it their own in the specific spiritual-cultural environment in which they live. It is important to note here that this identification is always a two-way process: I not only identify myself with a given tradition, but my social environment also identifies me with this tradition, sometimes even against my own will, or on grounds that I myself am unaware of. In sum, from an internal perspective, identity requires identification, making a given tradition one's own, familiarizing oneself with it, and this can only be done through re-interpreting it in new spiritual-cultural contexts.⁵

Secondly, if we accept the idea that the Christian identity depends on one's identification with

2 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 375ff.

3 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 380f.

4 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 382.

5 See Peter Jonkers, *Orthopraxis and Being Faithful to One's Tradition*. In: Bob Becking (ed.), *Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Adaptation. Essays on Ways of Worldmaking in Times of Change from Biblical, Historical and Systematic Perspectives (Studies in Theology and Religion 15)*. Brill, Leiden, 2011, 205-223.

the Christian tradition, which essentially takes shape through re-interpretation, this should not be misunderstood as a purely subjective activity of (re)constructing or tinkering heterogeneous elements from various sources at will. Re-interpreting a (religious) tradition always refers the interpreter back to the tradition to which he or she is committed. As the meaning of the Latin word *tradere* shows, tradition refers to something that is handed down to us, something that is entrusted to our care. The fact that believers acknowledge that their identity depends on their identification with the Christian tradition shows that the latter is of a normative existential value to them: it helps them to orientate themselves in their lives, because this tradition serves for them as an exemplary way to organise and structure all aspects of human life on the basis of symbolic distinctions between what is good and valuable and what is not. This analysis of the reasons why a tradition deserves to be respected enables me to criticize the nowadays popular tendency to treat traditions as nothing but raw material, at our disposal for endless re-descriptions of ourselves and the world around us. We do not so much construe traditions as they construe us, in the sense that they enable us to situate ourselves in a cultural space and time, and hence to form our identity.⁶ Finally, the 're-' in the term re-interpretation makes clear that the interpretation of a tradition is an ongoing process, so that it cannot be confined to the current generation of interpreters. Because it is so massive and vast, a tradition always transcends the people who are interpreting it.

In sum, through my internal approach of the Christian identity I have shown that identity cannot be reduced to a fixed set of principles, constituting the unchangeable essence or core identity of the Christian tradition. This does not mean that all elements of the Christian tradition are equally important, and even less that any re-interpretation is as good as any other. But the above analysis does show that a sharp distinction between an unchangeable essence and its contingent manifestations or between identity and re-interpretation does not hold. Moreover, the thesis of the close link between identity and re-interpretation does not only rest on pragmatic grounds, as Brümmer argues, but also on principled reasons. My proposal to understand the Christian identity as the result of a personal identification with the Christian tradition through re-interpreting it turns identity into a dynamic concept, as distinct from the static view of identity as essence. But this proposal also aims at preserving this tradition as an existential point of reference for believers: identifying oneself as a Christian is always an identification with a *given* tradition, to which Christians are committed and for which they hence are responsible.

Identity and continuity

According to this paradigm, a religious tradition is not an immutable and monolithic system of religious ideas, but a historical process of transmission of and familiarisation with this tradition by the believers. From this perspective, the Christian tradition is a cumulative process, characterised by continuity, as well as by pluralism and change. According to Brümmer (and my analysis of the Christian identity in the previous section shows that I agree with him in this respect), the personal faith of believers is conditioned, but not completely determined by their tradition, because it adds an authentic re-interpretation to this tradition, which can be seen as its prolongation and enrichment.⁷ The result is that a religious tradition consists of a series of overlapping chains of events, which are not identical but have a lot in common. However, Brümmer sees some fundamental problems regarding the identity of the Christian tradition, ensuing from this paradigm.

First of all, the further such chains of events are historically removed from each other,

6 Odo Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen. Philosophische Überlegungen zum Menschen.* in idem, *Zukunft braucht Herkunft: Philosophische Essays.* Reclam, Stuttgart, 2003, 154.

7 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 383f.

the less they have in common, so that, eventually, a religious tradition is identified with its contingent history. One can argue that faith always transcends these contingencies, since it testifies to the abiding presence of God's Spirit, but the trouble with this idea is "that it makes the identity of a religious tradition a matter of faith rather than sight."⁸ Consequently, one lacks the phenomenological criteria to assess which events in religious history are actually inspired by God's Spirit and which ones are not. In order to solve this problem, one can argue that the unity and coherence of a religious tradition is that of an 'enacted narrative', so that a religious tradition has a self-corrective potential that does not exclusively rely on the faith in or the claim on the working presence of God's Spirit. According to Brümmer, these considerations are helpful to explain the continuity, but not the identity of a religious tradition, since to see this tradition as an interaction between the members of a community of believers throughout the ages does not explain who is to count as a member of this community, because these members also interact with non-members.⁹

I think that Brümmer's argument, however valid it is, again shows the limits of an external approach for the understanding of the Christian identity. Asking for objective criteria to define the identity of a religious tradition in order to determine who is a member of it and who is not, is a demand that no tradition can fulfil and nor should be willing to do so.¹⁰ First of all, criteria are not 'loosely obtainable goods', which means that they cannot be severed from the tradition they are supposed to define. The Confession of Faith is the summary of the Christian tradition, and, thus, plays a crucial role in defining the identity of this tradition. But this Confession cannot be severed from its interpretation by the Christian tradition throughout the ages. Moreover, there are a lot of Christians who have their doubt about this or that specific article of their faith, and yet consider themselves as committed Christians. This shows that asking for objective criteria to define the identity of the Christian tradition confronts it with a demand it cannot possibly fulfil. Moreover, the Christian tradition should not even be willing to accept such an objective criterion in order to distinguish insiders from outsiders. The term 'Confession of Faith' does not only refer to its objective content, i.e. the Christian faith, but also to Christians who confess it, that is who testify to their personal commitment to this tradition. One can even argue that the fact that Christians identify themselves as Christian by confessing their faith is more important for their identity than knowing the exact theological ins and outs of the articles of faith. This shows that the issue of the identity of the Christian tradition refers us back to the question of people identifying themselves as Christians, without thereby wanting to suggest that the former could be replaced by the latter.

So, following my suggestion of an internal approach, a personal identification with a given tradition has the advantage of defining identity in terms of a dynamic unity. The aspect of believers' belonging to a *tradition* enables them to communicate and discuss its (true) nature, and exemplifies its normative character; the aspect of their *belonging* to a tradition enables believers to identify themselves personally with this tradition. In sum, defining the Christian identity in terms of a dynamic unity of an objective tradition and a personal identification allows us to understand how this tradition can serve as a normative point of reference in the lives of Christians, but also helps to explain how people can come to terms with a (radical) re-interpretation of their tradition without losing their identity.

8 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 384.

9 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 386.

10 I am fully aware of the fact that quite a lot of religious leaders in various traditions think differently about this issue, and want to formulate criteria, with which they can unambiguously distinguish the true believers from the rest. In the final section of this paper, when discussing the problems of a 'realistic' approach of the Christian identity, I will come back to this issue.

Let me give an example of the relation between the identity of the Christian tradition and radical re-interpretation. The attitude of the Catholic Church, both in its doctrines and its practices, with regard to other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions has changed considerably since the second Vatican Council. The Catholic Church had a long-standing tradition of clinging to the universal truth of its message of salvation, which implied that it excluded other religious and secular convictions from salvation. As some Church leaders officially declared as late as the first half of the 20th century: 'An error has no rights'. However, the second Vatican Council decided that the Church had to accept some basic principles of modern society, particularly the state-church separation and the freedom of religion, being important articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This resulted in Pope Paul VI's declaration on religious freedom, entitled *Dignitatis humanae* (1965). In this text, he recognises that religious freedom belongs to the very dignity of human beings, and declares it "to be greatly in accord with truth and justice. To this end, it [i.e. the Vatican Council] searches into the sacred tradition and doctrine of the Church – the treasury out of which the Church continually brings forth new things that are in harmony with the things that are old."¹¹

The above is obviously an example of a radical re-interpretation of the identity of the Christian tradition, and this on the level of the official doctrine of the Church as well as on that of its concrete practices. From an external perspective, this radical re-interpretation can hardly be seen as a sign of the continuity of the Christian tradition, and thus poses a serious problem for its identity. Is it possible to make sense of this re-interpretation in connection with the Christian identity from an internal perspective? The above quote gives a clear definition of what a re-interpretation of the Christian tradition (including its doctrine) means for Christians, and explains how it is related to their identity. In their eyes, tradition is a treasury that helps them to give meaning and orientation to their lives, even in a completely new cultural situation. In the above example, the Church has taken a new cultural context, that of religious pluralism, as its starting point to re-interpret the Christian tradition, and has urged Christians to redefine their personal and political relations with people adhering to different faiths. This redefinition is essential for their Christian identity, since it enables them to continue identifying themselves with the Christian tradition in a radically new cultural situation. The word 'treasury' from the above quote highlights the fact that the normative value of a tradition is the result of it being an inexhaustible source of meaning in new situations. Hence, what defines the Christian identity is the capacity of Christians to draw from the source of their tradition always new spiritual food that gives meaning to their lives in new situations.

In sum, from an external perspective one can objectively assess the degree of (dis)continuity of the new doctrine and practice with the established body of older doctrines and practices, called 'the tradition', inevitably leading to the conclusion that in this specific case the identity of the Christian tradition has become problematic. But from an internal point of view the crucial question is rather whether the Christian tradition is still able to serve as a source of meaning for people in a new cultural context, so that it still makes sense to commend one's life to God. The above quote also explains which 'new things' the Vatican Council brings forth out of the treasury of her tradition in order to assist people in re-interpreting their faith: they concern the belief that all human beings, regardless of their differences in religious convictions, are God's creatures and hence are vested with the same dignity, which must be respected unconditionally. Thus, this example shows that the Christian identity does not depend as such on the objective degree of (dis)continuity of the tradition over a certain period of time, but rather on the question of whether people are able to find elements in a given tradition that serve as a source of meaning in a new cultural situation, so that they can continue to call themselves Christian.

¹¹ Pope Paul VI, *Dignitatis humanae*, 1.

Of course, the problem of the loss of identity is as fundamental from an internal perspective on the Christian identity as it is from an external analysis, yet it is dealt with in a different way. From an internal point of view, the reason that people lose their religious identity is not so much a consequence of the objective lack of continuity in the Christian tradition over a longer period of time, as the above example has made clear. It rather results from the fact that, for example, believers have been confronted with a devastating experience that has shattered their capability to link this experience, and, by extension, their lives to this tradition, to continue to see it as a source of inspiration and orientation. One of the most tragic examples of this is based upon the experience of Auschwitz, in particular of the manifold ways in which the Nazis deliberately tried to annihilate every aspect of human dignity. Many people experienced this as a 'proof' of the complete absence of God. As a consequence, they were incapable (even many years after the war) to re-interpret this experience in terms of the Jewish and Christian tradition and to continue commending their lives to such an absent God. This inevitably resulted in the loss of their Jewish and Christian identity, and this not so much on the basis of an objective lack in the continuity of these traditions, but because of the incapacity to give this experience a place, any place, in their religious narratives.

Identity and origin

The final and, as far as Brümmer is concerned, most preferable way to define the identity of the Christian tradition is to see it as "the narrative continuity of the historical process of interpretation that starts in the Bible itself and refers to the connected series of events telling the impact of Jesus Christ, who is acknowledged by believers to be the fixed origin of the tradition as well as the paradigmatic locus of meaning for human existence."¹² This approach, which stems from insights of Kripke and Sykes, combines two aspects of the Christian tradition: 1) it is not a timeless and immutable reality, but requires re-interpretation, and hence is able to change and give rise to new versions of itself, and 2) yet, it has a fixed origin, viz. the life and death of Jesus Christ, which serves as the point of reference for every re-interpretation. The confession of faith and the life lived in obedience to this commitment testify to the authoritative character of this origin. This means that the unity and identity of the Christian tradition is constituted by the shared reference to the achievement of a single original exemplar acknowledged by all participants as the original locus of meaning.¹³

At this point, Brümmer's approach to the identity of the Christian tradition comes quite close to my own analysis of Christian identity as an expression of an existential commitment to a given tradition. However, I disagree with him that the life and death of Jesus Christ is the fixed, authoritative origin of Christianity. In my view, these events cannot be dissociated from their interpretation by the Christian community of faith throughout the ages, and hence, cannot serve as the fixed origin and point of reference of the identity of Christianity. I am even afraid that the result of Brümmer's search is the opposite of what he wants to demonstrate.

First, the identity of the Christian tradition does not so much lie in the objective fact that a certain person, Jesus of Nazareth, lived and died in Palestine some two thousand years ago, a fact that is confirmed by biblical as well as by extra-biblical sources. Far more important is the belief that Jesus is the only son of God, that he rose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father, as the text of the Confession of Faith reads. In other words, Christmas, the day of Jesus' birth, is only crucial to the identity of the Christian tradition because of Easter, the day of the resurrection. But Christ's resurrection is not in the same way a fixed point of origin as his life and death. Rather, it is an interpretation by the

12 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 389.

13 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 387.

Evangelists of some puzzling experiences of the disciples after Jesus' death, and not the fixed point of origin *for* every interpretation, as Brümmer wants to have it.

Second, the Apostles' Creed (*Symbolum Apostolorum*), which has been generally accepted as the authoritative summary of the identity of the Christian tradition, was the result of – sometimes fierce – theological debates in the early Church about the interpretation of the true nature of Christ. This means that the Confession of Faith is itself a re-interpretation of the New and – to a lesser extent – the Old Testament, but not the fixed origin of Christianity that Brümmer is looking for. Moreover, throughout the history of Christianity, the Confession of Faith has been the subject of a continuous process of new re-interpretations.

In sum, the stories about the life, death and resurrection, as handed down in the Gospels, and the Confession of Faith rather belong *to* the Christian tradition than that it could serve as a point of reference *for* it. This implies that it is impossible to dissociate one specific element from a broader context, viz. the Christian tradition, and call that element the fixed origin of this tradition. Actually, there is no normative point of reference outside this tradition, but only a tradition, with which Christians identify themselves. *Within* this tradition a pivotal place has been attributed to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, because he is believed to manifest in an exemplary and unique way who God is. So, I agree with Brümmer's conclusion that "the unity and identity of the Christian tradition can be found in the narrative continuity of the historical process of interpretation that starts in the Bible itself and refers to the connected series of events telling the impact of Jesus Christ [...] as the paradigmatic locus of meaning for human existence," but not with his contention that Jesus Christ is the 'fixed origin' of that tradition, thus suggesting that the Christ event lies outside that tradition.¹⁴ I rather agree with Sykes view that the Christian tradition is an ongoing dispute about the meaning and interpretation of this term, implying that there is no fixed point of origin outside this tradition.

THE IDENTITY OF THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

In order to further develop this issue, which is not only of crucial importance for the identity of the Christian tradition, but also for national, ethnic and even personal identity, I want to make a distinction between a symbolic and a realistic approach to identity.¹⁵ A symbolic approach links a (material) object or event with its symbolic interpretation by a cultural community. The two cannot be dissociated from each other. Paraphrasing Kant one could say that a pure fact that lacks any interpretation remains blind or meaningless, and that a symbol without any reference to what is being interpreted remains empty. In the case of the identity of the Christian tradition this means that factual objects or (series of) events, such as the life and death of Jesus, offer the necessary content for every symbolic interpretation. But in order to become a point of reference or a paradigm for the identity of the Christian tradition a community of believers has to attribute a symbolic meaning to this object or event, by interpreting Jesus as God's only son, who did not only live and die, but also has risen from the dead, thus foreshadowing our own resurrection at the end of times.

This elucidation of the close relation between a contingent fact and its symbolic interpretation also explains why a seemingly minor violation of the former can have such a disruptive effect on one's (Christian) identity. Examples abound in this respect: desecrating a church, poking fun at a liturgical service, ridiculing the Bible, all those acts are far more disruptive for the Christian

14 Brümmer, *The Identity of the Christian Tradition*, 389.

15 For this distinction, as well as for its further development, I am indebted to Arnold Burms, *Het eigene. Reëel of symbolisch*. In: Roland Breeur and Arnold Burms, *Ik / Zelf. Essays over Identiteit en Zelfbewustzijn*. Peeters, Leuven, 2000, 125-145.

identity than what one would expect if one only takes the materiality of these events into account. Their vital role for the constitution of the Christian identity results from the symbolic interpretation of these events from within the Christian tradition, and cannot be understood apart from this interpretation. Again, this means that it makes no sense to speak about a 'fixed origin' of the Christian identity apart from its interpretation, and to found this identity on some 'real' properties that can be univocally determined.

The hopeless search, in my view, for a fixed origin of the Christian identity takes us to the more general problems of a 'realistic' approach to identity. Such an approach runs the risk of inadvertently solidifying and homogenizing the identity of the Christian tradition. In order to explain this issue I give an example stemming from a non-religious context, viz. national identity. It is common knowledge that nationality is an important element of one's identity, and this in spite of or rather due to the ongoing process of globalisation. Moreover, one's national identity includes far more than an indication on one's passport, which, perhaps, is the only 'real', fixed ground for one's nationality. But it is also clear that this 'more' lacks such a realistic basis, and, hence, cannot be defined unambiguously. The consequence of this lack of a 'real' foundation of national identity is that it does not make sense and is even impossible to speak of *the* identity of a nation, as if it were a fixed point of reference, something that could be defined unambiguously. The identity of the Dutch society resembles the English, French or German ones in many respects, but also differs from them, e.g. through its language, traditions, political system, history, size etc. But if one wants to delineate this identity precisely and unambiguously, it is hard to come any further than some well-known stereotypes. Furthermore, national characteristics may apply to some citizens, but not to all of them, or may occur in various degrees, etc. But this does not lead to making the attribution of the Dutch identity dependent on determining whether people reach a minimal threshold regarding these features. The same holds true with religious identities: many people call themselves Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or Muslim, although they do not follow all the doctrinal and ritual guidelines of the religious community they belong to. This again shows that it is as problematic to speak about a fixed, 'real' criterion for a religious identity as it is for a national identity. Moreover, (partly) founding the identity of a religious tradition or a nation on a number of 'real', objective points of reference means that these (material) things, words, gestures and practices lose their symbolic character, and start to serve as the actual essence of these identities, requiring strict observance by all the members of a community. This inevitably starts off a process of homogenization, often in combination with segregation, in which one's identity is reduced to a kind of objective checklist, which can be ticked off.¹⁶

The reasons that some religions and – more generally – contemporary society as such tend to ignore the symbolic dimension of (religious) identity are twofold. First of all, there is the widespread ideal of individual autonomy, according to which every single aspect of our identity is thought to depend on ourselves. But, as I pointed out above, I do not master all aspects of my (religious) identity, but I identify myself with a *given* tradition, which can be defined as an inexhaustible treasury from which I draw, and which rather forms my identity than vice versa. Secondly, there is the engrained tendency of humans to replace the symbolic with the real or to see the latter as the justification of the former. Using an objective checklist in order to define someone's religious identity unambiguously is one of the most striking examples of this tendency. Our reasons for doing so is that this strategy is so reassuring, since it enables

16 I developed this issue further in: Peter Jonkers, *The Dialectics of Cultural Pluralism and Social Cohesion*. In: Niek Brunsveld and Roger Trigg (ed.), *Religion in the Public Sphere. Proceedings of the 2010 Conference of the European Society for Philosophy of Religion (Ars Disputandi, Supplement Series, nr. 5)*. Ars Disputandi, Utrecht, 2011, 177-186 (URL: <http://adss.library.uu.nl/publish/articles/000085/bookpart.pdf>).

us to make clear cut distinctions between insiders and outsiders, friends and foes. But at the same time it is obvious that this approach negates the impalpability of religious, national, etc. identities as symbolic systems of meaning.

CONCLUSION

My discussion of Brümmer's essay on the identity of the Christian tradition has resulted in two essential insights. First of all, in order to get a complete view of this identity, one has to supplement the external, objective approach of this identity with an internal, subjective one, which focuses on the personal identification with this tradition. Only this approach is able to understand the religious identity of so many people in contemporary society: they have a fundamental sense of *belonging* to this tradition *without believing* some of its essential doctrines. Secondly, in order to avoid a senseless homogenization of the identity of a (religious) tradition, often combined with a problematic tendency to fence off one's own religious identity from that of other people, it has to be interpreted symbolically, i.e. as the result of a cultural system of meanings and distinctions, which always escapes our control and sometimes even eludes our notice.

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KEY WORDS

Christian identity
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Biblical spirituality, thematically approached: methodological considerations around 'discernment'

ABSTRACT

In this paper on methodology, dedicated to Vincent Brümmer, the nature of Biblical Spirituality as nascent academic discipline is summarised as facing two ways: that of the ancient biblical text, and that of the modern person engaging with the Bible – in both instances with an explicit interest in matters of faith. Discernment is chosen as a topic around which in this way to explore the methodology of the discipline of Biblical Spirituality, expanding on the influential work of McGrath in this regard, but also linking to the recent research interest in this topic, in addition to discernment by its inherent nature being topical for the methodology and the identity of the discipline of Biblical Spirituality.

1. FOR VINCENT BRÜMMER

It is an honour to dedicate this study to the life and continued work of Vincent Brümmer, who has over decades been one of the internationally most recognised faces of South African theological scholarship. To pay tribute to him from the perspective of the discipline of Christian Spirituality is particularly apt: much of Brümmer's work (e.g. Brümmer 2010:1-5, 2006:317-331, 1992 and more popularly: Brümmer 1988) has been of great importance to the discipline. He has been involved both personally with leaders of the Spirituality Association of South Africa (SPIRASA) and institutionally, with his work having been formally reviewed at a special SPIRASA meeting in which he participated. Personally, I remain grateful too that, though I am still a relative newcomer to the discipline of Christian Spirituality, he had sought me out in Pretoria to discuss prayer in preparation for what would become his prize-winning *Wat doen ons wanneer ons bid? Oor die aard van gebed en geloof* (2011; cf. its precursors Brümmer 1984 & 2008). It is thus with great appreciation for his person and work that I dedicate this study to Vincent Brümmer.

2. BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY: ITS TWO FACES / MIRRORS / OUTLOOKS

The academic discipline of Biblical Spirituality has a valuable contribution to make in analysing the ways in which people relate and relay their lives in an understood relationship with the Bible. Precisely because of its methodological situatedness somewhere between the refined exegetical techniques of Bible scholarship and the broader, more vague approaches of the Spirituality discipline (cf. Lombaard 2011:211-225), Biblical Spirituality faces two ways. The one outlook of the discipline is historical, namely on the spiritualities that came to be reflected in the biblical texts; the other outlook is experiential, namely on later, including modern, spiritualities as they relate (themselves) to these Scriptures. This dual outlook is an emerged consensus within Biblical Spirituality on its disciplinary vantage point (cf. such publications as Lombaard 2012b; De Villiers & Pietersen 2011; Agnew 2008:187-197; De Villiers, Kourie & Lombaard 2008; De Villiers, Kourie & Lombaard 2006; Schneiders 2005:1-22 & 1999; Waaijman 2004; Nolan 1982.) How faith found reflection, historically, in antiquity within the texts that would later become Scripture, and

how, existentially, people throughout the ages, including in our time, had related and continue to do so with these Scriptures, these two (associated) aspects are the dual mirrors facing one another between which the discipline of Biblical Spirituality finds itself, making observations of a phenomenological, analytical, evaluative, critical and suggestive nature.

Thus, the analytical-historical and the contemporary-experiential aspects of the text-reader interaction (cf. Waaijman 2011:1-20) find a shared, if not entirely unproblematic (Lombaard 2011:211-225), home within the discipline of Biblical Spirituality. Though Biblical Spirituality is not unique in occupying such a position, with for instance History or Literature often finding themselves at similar intellectual stations, the esteem in which the collection of Bible texts are held by those who experience God as addressing them through this canon, adds to this hermeneutic dynamic a particular existential urgency. The latter holds true for many professional exegetes (Lombaard 2012a) and for almost all Bible readers, giving rise within the study field of Spirituality to the formal recognition (e.g. Hanson 1990:50) of what has become known as the self-implicatory nature of both the discipline of Spirituality and, more directly or automatically or unreservedly, the lived phenomenon (cf. e.g. Ruthenberg 2005:134-136) of spirituality.

It is from within this dual facing position of Biblical Spirituality that it is important to analyse methodological aspects of the way in which themes may be addressed, namely as they are sought within the holy library of the Bible in order to be related to their lives by, usually, religiously-motivated readers and exegetes. The most well-known modern impetus to such a thematic approach to the to-and-fro of text-and-reader within the discipline of Biblical Spirituality, is found in the work by McGrath (1999:82-109), in which he analyses a series of themes from the Bible and then indicates thematically-related parallels from the history of and the writings on Christian spirituality throughout the ages. The assumption underlying such analyses, with McGrath but also across the discipline of Biblical Spirituality, is that sustained, fuller, more existentially-profound meaning can be found from the Bible if material from it can be shown, and experienced, to be of continued personal and social religious relevance, namely in parallel, analogical, reinterpreted ways.

The themes McGrath had chosen, were: feast, journey, exile, struggle, purification, internalisation, desert, ascent, darkness and light, and silence. Ranging from more concrete to more abstract themes, and covering – apart from illustrative thematic parallels from the history of Christian spirituality – both the Old and New Testaments, McGrath offers, in brief, insights into how such an approach may be developed. Because of the more general, introductory nature of that publication, McGrath does not go into the details of exegesis of each occurrence of the theme, within its textual and historical contexts, then tracing the line of interpretations and reinterpretations as they developed historically throughout the period in which the biblical texts had come into being – the influential *traditionsgeschichtliche* method of exegesis most famously practiced by Von Rad (cf. especially his Old Testament Theology, most particularly the first volume - Von Rad 1962). Nor does McGrath trace in great detail the post-canonisation *Wirkungsgeschichte* of each theme throughout the subsequent interpretational history (cf. e.g. Janowski & Stuhlmacher 2006), so important for latter-day theological hermeneutics. Rather, McGrath implicitly draws on these intellectual impulses, in order to facilitate a more existential, faith-(in)forming analysis of themes as an expression of the discipline of Biblical Spirituality: how the theme had developed with the texts of the Scriptures, and how the theme had been treated by some classical interpreters (cf. Waaijman 2011:1-20 for a recent insights along these lines). The further value of McGrath's contribution lies in its suggestive nature, inviting as it does further reflection and more detailed exegesis-interpretation in similar vein.

Because of recent advances in the way the communication of the biblical texts, internally among themselves and hence, implicitly, with their readers, are understood, a more complex

text-reader communicative interaction must now be made room for. It is with respect to such developments that further reflection will be offered in what follows. This is done not in relation to any of the themes already identified by McGrath (1999:82-109), listed above; rather, that list is expanded to include a theme which has drawn considerable research interest of late, namely discernment.

This contribution therefore forms part of a trilogy of studies on the topic of discernment (the other two being Lombaard 2012/2013a and 2012/2013b), resulting from particularly a Biblical Spirituality “Experts Meeting on the Spirit and Discernment in Hebrew and Christian Scriptures”, which took place at the Carmelite Institute Mdina, in Malta, late in May 2012, but drawing also on the “Religious Experience and Tradition International Interdisciplinary Conference” held at the Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania, during mid May 2012. It is particularly in the publication resulting from the latter that a definition on discernment was concluded to; that definition is repeated here for the sake of clarity (for the argumentation leading up to it, cf. Lombaard 2012/2013a):

Discernment is the process or event of Divine-human interaction in which the Holy will on certain key matters are (sought and) conveyed to the person/s involved, usually in an everyday manner, but which may at the same time take on a raised awareness of profound magnitude. In whichever case, the person/s, their closer circles and broader society find themselves altered toward a greater state of wellbeing, living a more deeply meaningful, fulfilling life in the light of the Divine guidance (sought and) found.

Discernment thus understood will in the rest of this contribution be the illustrative theme around which matters pertaining to the discipline of Biblical Spirituality are discussed. Not a full Biblical Spirituality of discernment is offered here. Rather, the more modest goal of describing two methodological concerns en route to such a broader endeavour is set for the remainder of this contribution. Neither is the focus here on the biblical side yet (that, in Lombaard 2012/2013b), but the discussion is on the interpretative / interpretational (cf. Brümmer 2010:1), one of the outlooks of the discipline of Biblical Spirituality.

We therefore turn next to such a methodological consideration of two aspects of the ways in which discernment of the divine will is encountered or gleaned from (and not *in*, yet) the Hebrew Scriptures: first, the choice of Testament, and second, the way in which the communication between biblical text and reader is viewed.

3. DISCERNMENT AND THE UGLY DUCKLING TESTAMENT

The choice of the first Testament among the Scriptures around which to structure a discussion on discernment, is a minority position within scholarship: always, in works on discernment and the Bible, it is the New Testament that is treated more extensively (Moberly 2006:15; cf. e.g. Schweizer 1989:406-415). For this, there are many good reasons, chief among which is the natural preference within Christianity for the Greek collection in the Bible, which deals directly with Jesus. Furthermore, when it comes to a theme such as discernment, the key texts providing the terminological impetus for this topic, are from the New Testament (for overviews of the reception history of *the* foundational text on “discernment of spirits”, 1 Corinthians 12:10, cf. e.g. Bertrand 2003:487-451, Lienhard 1980:508-329; more broadly, treating mostly Pauline texts, cf. Munzinger 2007, Johnson 1996).

This emphasis on the newer Testament has effects such as that, often when discernment and the Hebrew Bible is discussed, the meaning of discernment is for the most part restricted to the issue of distinction among modern scholars between true and false prophecy (so e.g. Anderson 2011:17-20, Moberly 2006); or that Greek/Hellenistic thought is read into the Semitic

worldview of the Old Testament (a methodological concern also noted by Berthoud 2010:54). An example of this is when the idea of “discernment of spirits” is applied to Hebrew Bible texts that, on the sound of it, seem to refer to “the spirit of God” (e.g. Guillet 1970:17-26; cf. Panicola 1999:730-731), however with the point neglected that “spirit” has strongly different connotations in the Old Testament (cf. Vosloo 1983:40-68), namely as something of a “creative power of God” (Schweizer 1989:406-408, 413; cf. Ukpong 1989:418-419), to what we find in the New Testament, with its ideas on – broadly – the Spirit as a continued though altered personal presence of the elevated Christ among the Jesus followers.

As a methodologically more valid stance, the religion of Israel ought to be treated on its terms, from within its own historical contexts, as these developed onward with the passage of time, rather than retro-projecting later concepts from the Christian era onto, for instance, post-exilic Israel. It must be accepted, until proven differently, that the idea of discernment as encountered in the New Testament is not directly present in the Old; yet, in some ways “central themes of discernment” (Panicola 1999:730), in their own manner, are.

The entry point for any further exploration of this matter, true to the nature of the discipline of Biblical Spirituality, ties in with the way in which the Bible is viewed, or rather, experienced, by the religious readers of this canon. In what follows, this aspect is taken into further consideration, with a particular eye on three notions within the modern era on the way the Bible communicates with its readers.

4. THE BIBLICAL TEXT, ALIVE AND... *WELL*... ON TEXT-READER COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION

Modern readers view the way in which the biblical texts are thought to reflect ideas and proposals for them, in a variety of ways. The view to which is subscribed in this respect – “subscribed”, though, seldom in an intellectually analytical way, but usually through a growing, lived experience – has on its part direct bearing on the way in which the Bible is employed by its readers to come to their life decisions – “employed”, though, seldom in a purposely instrumentalist way, but usually through, again, a growing, lived experience. Among the views on the way the Bible contains, reflects and conveys ideas, count three, which may be titled the *hard-and-fast* understanding of the communication of the Scripture with its readers, the *optimistic pessimist’s way* and communication as an *arena of contestation*. Each of these views will now be described, with its implications for spirituality in general and for discernment in particular indicated.

4.1 Hard-and-fast

In this understanding of the Bible, most commonly found among conservative/traditionalist Bible readers, the Scriptures contain a treasury of ideas that was indeed written down by humans, but which really came about as a more or less direct communication from God. Accompanying this is a strongly literal theory of biblical inspiration (cf. Malley 2004:147-151), so that the faithful may truly believe that they see and read God’s words on these pages. Any problems the reader or scholar within such an approach may detect in the texts of the Bible, such as seeming contradictions or apparently illogical repetitions in the texts (with the Genesis 12, 20 and 26 “my wife – my sister” narratives as a good example from the Old Testament, or the various accounts of Jesus’ life in the Gospels in the New Testament) or inconsistencies and inaccuracies (ascribable to human error, or to cultural and worldview differences between ancient and modern civilisations on e.g. creation, or to literary genre) are thus merely the result of our human inadequacies: we do not understand the Bible well enough. Hard work, guidance by the Holy Spirit, and even conversion will in time solve such frailties on our part, and we shall

then see that we simply had not understood the text well enough yet (cf. Dubay 1997:186-204; Howard 2000:15). The Bible itself is a divine oracle of sorts, free of even the possibility real error.

Such an understanding of the firmly-set or “hard” nature of the holy text enables a biblicistic use of the Bible, of which the *dicta probantia* form of argumentation is one characteristic. Here, “fast” answers can be arrived at – in both senses of the term: the truths are firm, and they can be obtained quickly (what Horton 2009:8-9, 23-24 terms a “bull’s-eye approach” to discernment from the Bible). The biblical texts namely contain holy truths, which are universally applicable; hence, an idea, verse or even a word from the Word can be taken over as is from the text, to answer (even just on the sound of it) any given modern or personal question. This is done by for instance “pattern matching”: seeking parallels or “resonance” between the Bible and the reader (Malley 2004: 152-156) in order to experience the personal relevance of the text.

The discernment of God’s will is still not always equally easy, though; it may at times require substantial human effort. This includes two main challenges on the part of the reader: that the correct text from the Bible must be sought, and that I as reader should then be open to the truth, which may be an inconvenient truth, God will give me as the answer to my question. A very pious faith orientation is found here, namely a spirituality characterised by a sense of closeness to the Bible and, more specifically, to God (in more charismatic orientations, particularly to the Spirit of God), in the expectation – a deep trust that dare not be questioned, because it is foundational to such an intimately-personal religiosity – that God shall provide.

4.2 The optimistic pessimist’s way

In a more pragmatic, informed Christian wisdom approach (Horton 2009:10) to discernment and the Bible, Scripture and reason are combined to seek God’s will, rather than a set-in-stone plan of God for one’s life. Here, thus, less of a hard-and-fast approach is found, in two respects: the constant mystery of finding God’s will expressed is accepted (though seldom in such spiritual terms as used here), and greater openness is kept on where such “inspiration” may come from. The influence of tradition, culture, the mind, feelings and the like are openly acknowledged, although usually strongest adherence is pledged to the Bible as God’s preferred channel of communication, or to the experience of the Holy Spirit in more charismatic faith expressions (yet, then, always still with strong adherence to the Scriptures as mediator or as carrier or as critical vehicle of the revelation of God’s intent). Hermeneutics have however been taken note of here, and such awareness is incorporated into the sense of expectation to discern God’s will.

In this kind of spirituality, the piety of a closeness to God may very well still be professed. However, education and serious engagement with the difficult questions of life (such as on suffering, death, the limits of the human condition) mean that such confessions are stated more subtly, with greater nuance and circumspection. Realism, even pessimism, has mitigated unbridled optimisms on the *where* and the *what* of finding God’s will. Discernment is possible, but difficult; yet important.

4.3 An arena of contestation (the most recent development)

Over recent decades there have been different developments in Bible scholarship that have made much of the biblical text as “sight of struggle”. One prominent strand of understanding the Bible texts in this way has come from so-called tertiary or genitive theologies: theologies of freedom, feminism, ecology, the poor, and so forth. In this broad approach, two branches are found (cf. Lombaard 2008:144-155): the most prominent one, springing influentially from Latin American liberation theology but now most prominent in feminist theology, takes a *hermeneutical route*, in which oppression and social exclusion both within the Bible texts and in the later use of the Bible to sanction unjust practices, are exposed, in a quest towards greater

social justice. The other, more *exegetical orientation*, though with similar or parallel intentions, and with which Gottwald (1985) and Albertz (1992a & 1992b) have been the most influential in theologically educated circles, seeks to study the text of particularly the Old Testament from within the framework of class or group analysis.

All these “sight of struggle”-approaches share the characteristic that they have opened exegetical eyes to the sociological and theological diversity within ancient Israel, which finds reflection within the texts of the Old Testament. The modern kind of spirituality that intersects with these awarenesses tend to be highly trained and thoroughly ecumenical, even inter-religious. The commitment to the own faith, or the own denomination, may well still be strong, but the relativity associated with such preferences are acknowledged, or at least in some vague way felt. Differences are accepted, even appreciated; the healthy nature of contestation and of contextualisation trumps to such minds the idea of universal truths in any hard sense. In a paradoxical way (i.e. contrary to expectations from conservative or evangelical circles), precisely because such a broader, at times almost universalist, orientation is accepted by these individuals, a personal inclination towards matters of faith remains possible. The one is not lost within the many, but in some ways draws meaningfully from such diversity. It is this last, newer form of understanding the Bible and of searching for one’s relation to it, that holds greatest promise for analysing discernment in particularly the Old Testament most fruitfully, given the diversities and the developments in religious history (*Religionsgeschichte*) encompassed within the Hebrew Bible. It is therefore this aspect that will next be explored in greater detail.

5. IN CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of discernment is of great importance not only for believers, but also for the discipline of Biblical Spirituality, both as it seeks to serve its constituencies, and for itself, in refining further the academic protocols of this relatively new discipline. The two faces or outlooks or mirrors that metaphorically convey the stance of this discipline, affirms the latter directly. Very important, furthermore, before attempting a fuller Biblical Spirituality of discernment, is to lay the methodological groundwork, some of which was attempted in this contribution. To do so as a dedication to Vincent Brümmer, is indeed a privilege.

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KEY WORDS

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Teks-leser interaksie
Mistiek

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‘Spiritual humanism’ within the realm of Christian aesthetics. Toward the meaning and value of our being human within the theological framework of an aesthetics of compassion.

ABSTRACT

In the centre of Vincent Brümmer’s philosophical and spiritual reflection is the quest for the meaning of the Christian faith, outside the parameters of positivistic schematization. This theological sensitivity stands in close connection to the ontological thinking of his promoter A. E. Loen: meaning is a kind of ontic, creational truth closely related to the noetic category of ‘uitgesprokenheid’ (explicit, expressed, pronounced logos). Brümmer himself has identified “Meaning and the Christian Faith” as the meanders of his thinking, thus the attempt to explore these meanders within the framework of a theological anthropology. With reference to man as homo aestheticus and the aesthetics of theopaschitic theology, the aesthetics of passion and compassion is described as divine Beauty. The *passio Dei* is an exposition of the praxis concept of *ta splanchna*. In this regard the notion of “bowel categories” describes a practical theology of the intestines which focuses on the dignity of our being human, thus the option for an inclusive ‘spiritual humanism’ within the framework of the ubuntu-communalism of African spiritualities (theologia Africana).

It was always difficult for Reformed theology to acknowledge the ‘goodness’ of our being human. This difficulty stands in close connection with the association in anthropology between our being human and the construct of *corruptio totalis*. Even Lutheran anthropology always tried to find a kind of ‘rationalistic’ balance between human sinfulness and justification: *simul justus et peccator*. Humans are therefore always crippled by their sinfulness and rendered as victims of the fall. Man has lost his/her sense for value, dignity, purposefulness. In essence humans are ‘ugly’ and bad old sinners. One can therefore expect nothing ‘beautiful’ from the beast. Life has become a toilsome burden and struggle against nausea, nothingness and sinfulness (failure). Sin always casts a devastating shadow over the human quest for meaning.

Very surprisingly Dostoyevsky describes in his novel *The Idiot* the ‘goodness of man’ as the playfulness of our being human; i.e. the enjoyment of life. Goodness¹ then not as a substantial or metaphysical category innate to character, but goodness as a qualitative category within the dynamics of relationship. Dostoyevsky connects the celebrating view on the goodness of life to a divine enjoyment and playfulness. A simple peasant woman once said to him: “Just as a mother rejoices seeing her baby’s first smile, so does God rejoice every time he beholds from above a sinner kneeling down before him to say his prayers with all his heart” (Dostoyevsky 1973:253). He viewed this remark as the essence of Christian spirituality: “God’s rejoicing in man, like a father rejoicing in his own child” is to Dostoyevsky the fundamental idea of Christianity (1973:253). This spiritual notion of divine rejoicing is the difference between being an idiot or a wise human being; between devastating nausea and meaningful living.

Dag Hammarskjöld (1993:77) very aptly remarked: “A landscape can sing about God, a body about spirit”. This cosmic singing (rejoicing) and spiritual interpretation can be called an

1 ‘Good’ in the sense of a motion of trust in the covenantal faithfulness of God. (See Kuitert 1970: 25).

aesthetic vision and view on life.

For this aesthetic vision or iconic gaze one needs to rediscover a kind of 'Socratic view of life'. Life entails more than the flat horizontal and empirical approach of sensory observation; one needs to discover the ultimate cause of beauty.

Socrates wanted to penetrate the physical world by means of the notion of the goodness, the inherent beauty that contributed to the fact that things are as they are. In spite of a scientific explanation, he opted for an aesthetic option. "He is looking for explanations in terms of some ultimate Goodness which forms everything, including us, and draws us to it by means of spiritual knowledge and desire. We must consider not the things which Anaxagoras and the scientists speak of, but the real, ultimate causes of Beauty, Goodness, Magnitude, and so on, which the good and beautiful things and the quantities of things on earth participate in and reflect" (O'Hear 2007:108).

PRESUPPOSITION AND BASIC ASSUMPTION

What is most needed within a Christian approach to anthropology and the human quest for meaning is a paradigm shift from the destructive starting point of the fall, and a substantial understanding of human sinfulness, to the constructive starting point of the creation narrative and the recreation version: the eschatological point of reflection and the total but radical renewal of the whole of cosmos. Sin does not determine the quality of life and the framework of meaning but spiritual wholeness (*heil*, grace, salvation, redemption). It will be argued that the event of the cross (the ugliness of God) and the resurrection in Christ (*theologia resurrectionis*: the *doxa* of life) brought about a total paradigm shift. Life could not anymore be assessed from the perspective of death and sin, but from the perspective of grace and meaning.

With reference to anthropology, another paradigm shift is most needed. From the emphasis on work ethics, the human being as *homo faber* (performance, production and achievement), to the emphasis of playfulness and enjoyment: the human being as *homo ludens*. Fundamental to these paradigm shifts is the basic presupposition of man as *homo aestheticus*: the beauty, value and purposefulness of human life.

My theological assumption is that due to an eschatological stance (who we already are in Christ: we are a new creation) and the spiritual quality of life (due to the indwelling presence of God through the Holy Spirit in human bodies: the pneumatology of inhabitational theology), the power of grace is more substantial and fundamental than the temptation of evil and the seduction of the so called "human flesh". Human flesh is an aesthetic and therefore beautiful category not a corrupted and dirty category.

Central in Christian spirituality is the question regarding the meaning² of the Christian faith and its connection to our understanding of the purposefulness of human life and the connection between our being human and the ultimate³. This anthropological presupposition dovetails with what Vincent Brümmer identified as the meaning of the Christian faith.

It was already the 'doctor father' of Vincent Brümmer, Arnold E Loen (1946:2, who related existential meaning and the philosophical impulse to personal accountability (*rekenschap aan onzelf*). This noetic accountability displays a kind of meaningful (in terms of significance) insight

2 On the connection between meaning and the Christian faith, see Gräb 2000; 2002; 2006. "Das Wort 'Gott' kann zu diesen Artikulationen religiöser Erfahrung gehören. Dann ist es Gott, dem der Mensch dankt für das Geschenk des Lebens oder den er bedrängt mit der Frage nach dem 'Warum'" (Gräb 2006: 30). For the connection between meaning and religion in film and media, see Hermann 2002.

3 See Brümmer 2006: 299. See also the link with one of Brümmer's contemporaries Kuitert (1974: 20). The quest for the 'whole' is for Kuitert characteristic of our being human within the parameters of religion.

in the logos, the ground and roots of our being human in the cosmos (Loen 1946:3). Meaning is determined by a Christian gnosis: God as the foundation of all being. Meaning is a kind of ontic, creational truth closely related to the noetic category of 'uitgesprokenheid'⁴ (an explicit, expressed, pronounced *logos*) (Loen 1946:200); knowing is to partake in the 'word'-character of revealed truth in a *respond*-able mode (Loen 1955:186-188).

"I have long been convinced that the primary function of religious belief within human life and thought is to bestow meaning and significance on our life and our experience of the world" (Brümmer 2006:26). As a philosophical theologian, Brümmer has therefore concentrated on questions regarding the meaning of the Christian faith. And meaning for him is a contextual issue embedded within living contexts. It is not a fixed proposition. "I have therefore always found unsatisfactory the kind of natural theology that tends to reduce religious belief to a set of propositions divorced from the context of life, and then to prove the truth of these propositions without first attending to their meaning" (Brümmer 2006:26). Due to the fact that Brümmer himself has identified "*Meaning and the Christian Faith*" as the meanders of his thinking, I want to explore these meanders within the framework of a theological anthropology, thus the introduction of the notion of *homo aestheticus*.

My further contention is that aesthetics in theology is closely linked to a theology of compassion. Compassion gives meaning to life. Dostoyevsky concurred with the assumption that without compassion life becomes an unbearable toil. Compassion makes life bearable. "Compassion would teach even Rogozhin, give a meaning to his life. Compassion was the chief and, perhaps, the only law of human existence" (Dostoyevsky 1973:263). Therefore I want to link the meaning question in this essay to a theology of *oiktirmon* in order to expand on the notion of *homo aestheticus* from the perspective of the poetics of God. My proposition is that the meaning of the Christian faith is not in the first place to keep God going by means of our rationalistic and positivistic profession on the essence or being of God (the positivistic attempt to define the being and characteristics of God), but to keep human beings going (the anthropological attempt to empower human beings and to equip them to live life meaningful) and, in thus doing so, to honour God (*doxa*). Hence the introduction of a 'spiritual humanism' in the discourse on the meaning of the Christian faith.

The intention is to embark on a qualitative approach to anthropology. Life in itself is dependent on the quality of relationships. Anthropology in a Christian spiritual approach should therefore point more in the direction of a qualitative mode of being (Heidegger: *So-sein*) emanating from the compassion of a Divine Passion.

Surprisingly I discovered that this was more or less the stance of Ludwig Feuerbach (1904). In chapter VI on the secret of the suffering of God (*Das Geheimnis des leidenden Gottes*) (1904:126-136), Feuerbach distinguished between the God of abstract philosophy, God as pure action, with the God of Christendom, God as pure passion, the God of pure suffering (*die Passion pura, das reine Leiden*) (Feuerbach 1904:127). The suffering of God means: God is a heart (*Gott ist ein Herz*) (Feuerbach 1904:131). A God without a heart is an idol. The secret of the suffering God is the secret of existential experience and tenderheartedness (*Geheimnis der Empfindung; kontingente bevindelijkheid*). The meaning of Christian religion resides for Feuerbach in the notion of suffering. Vulnerability and weakness are constituents of suffering and human experience; they are signs of fulfilment and a divine force within our being human. (Feuerbach 1904:31). In an asterisk Feuerbach (1904:31) further explains the divine signs of a suffering God, a God one can experience and find within the realities of weakness and vulnerability (*ein empfindender, empfindsamer Gott*). He refers to 'Bernhard': God wills suffering in order to learn what is meant by co-suffering; God wills pity and mercy (lament) in order to learn what is meant

4 "Wahrheit ist Ausgesprochensein des Seienden" (Loen 1965: 210).

by compassion, comfort and consolation⁵.

I want to take the notion of Feuerbach seriously and as starting point for a theological reflection on the notion of *spiritual humanism* emanating from the God with a heart (passion) within the existential realities of human vulnerability.

In order to link anthropology to spirituality and meaning-giving, the essay will be divided into two main parts. Section one will be on the anthropological framework of meaning: man as *homo aestheticus*. The second part will be on the theological framework of meaning: meaning as compassion (the *oiktirmōn*⁶, compassion and mercy of God).

THE DIONYSIAN, PLAYFUL PARADIGM

The conviction that Christian “religion” should turn more to the Dionysian, playful element of faith, could disturb and uproot conventional faith and orthodox thinking with its traditional point of departure in the more serious element of human sinfulness, guilt and the need for salvation. Traditional faith often tended to distance itself from the so called ‘temptations of secular society’. Over against an avoidance approach, Cox emphasised qualitative value of secularity and the non-instrumental significance of celebration and liturgy (1969:vii) in Christian spirituality.

Within the history of orthodox, Christian faith, the confessions of the church were mostly concerned with the formulation and definition of “true faith”. Faith is designed for rational formulae not for aesthetic experiences. Ecclesiastical councils, synods and clergy wanted to defend ecclesial doctrine against heresy. Theology was designed to please God (it should be orthodox), not to ‘please’ (empower) humans (orthopraxis). Faith is a serious business, not a playful enjoyment. Questions about right and wrong, good and evil, were more ‘spiritual’ than questions about sensual beauty and bodily pleasure.

The reason why John A. T Robinson exposed theism in his 1963 book *Honest to God*, was *inter alia* to turn theological reflection away from a metaphysical paradigm to the reality of our being human within the realm suffering. Instead of the abuse of God as a *Deus ex machina*, Christian spirituality should be directed by the powerlessness of a suffering God (Robinson 1963:39). God is not like a Grandfather in heaven, a kindly Old Man who could be pushed into one corner while we get on with the business of life (1963:41). “God, the unconditional, is to be found only in, with *and under* the conditional relationships of this life: for he *is* their depth and ultimate significance” (Robinson 1963:60).

In the sixties of the previous century, H. W. Cox pointed out that the so-called “death of God” is not merely an intellectual death. It is also intuitive and aesthetic (Cox 1969:28). According to Cox, if we really want to “experience” and “encounter” God, we have to meet him first in the dance before we can define him in the doctrine (Cox 1969:28). I want to add: if we really want to be embraced by God, we have to meet him first in the beauty of life and the aesthetics of human embodiment, before we can capture and comprehend him in the confessional formula of the church; we must be embraced by compassionate vulnerability first, before we worship in the safe space of a baroque cathedral.

5 “Leiden wollte er, um mitleiden zu lernen, erbärmlichwerden, um Erbarmen zu lernen”. I assume the reference to Bernhard is a reference to Bernhard von Clairvaux. The German is difficult to translate because *erbarmen* (Afrikaans *erbarming*) implies more than pity. It is a combination between pity, mercy and care.

6 The Hebrew root *rhm* refers to compassion. It is also closely connected to *hnn*, to be gracious. Esser 1976: 598.

ORTHODOX FAITH: THE UNFORTUNATE TWISTING OF LIFE

Cox's attempt to revisit secularism by probing into the constructive elements of secular thinking, met a lot of resistance and criticism from orthodox faith. In the northern hemisphere it fuelled *the secular city debate* (Callahan 1966). In many conservative circles theologians responded with severe criticism and scepticism. Cox was accused of a kind of humanist optimism that emphasises man's maturity and responsibility, with the attendant danger of neglecting the Crucifixion. Instead of a partnership with God, the emphasis in conventional thinking is the anguished cry of sinners: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death" (Smylie 1966:11).

To my mind, the most intriguing question in the Christian faith is whether faith is in the first place about confession (the acknowledgement of our sinful human predicament) or about profession (the affirmation of our being before God); whether it is about renunciation of all worldly things or the celebration of life. What comes first: morality and sin or aesthetics and gratitude?

Could it indeed be the case that traditional Christian faith pressed human beings so hard towards work, rational calculation and salvation from sin, that Christians have almost all but forgotten the joy of ecstatic celebration, antic play, free imagination and aesthetic gratification? The church developed a kind of spiritual blindness due to what one can call the unfortunate twisting of life.

Some of the most basic twists (unfortunate spiritual confusions) in Christian faith are outlined below.

- The Platonic schism between body and soul. This dualism shunted the human body into the realm of filth, dirt, guilt and shame.
- The metaphysical speculation about the beyond of an immutable theistic God which superseded the passion and compassion of a suffering, weak God (theopaschitism).
- The inaccurate translation of the unique splendid majesty of the covenantal involvement of a faithful and merciful God (*el shaddaj*) as the imperialistic force of an almighty Hellenistic *Pantokrator* (the omnipotence of God).
- The selling out of the kingdom of God as embodied in the sacrifice of a vulnerable Christ (sacrificial ethics) to the monarchic imperialism of a Caesar-like political ecclesiology (performance and achievement ethics). The hierarchy of powerful clergy dressed in crowns, surrounded by the imposing baroque palace-like cathedrals, was more impressive than the rags of beggars and the shacks of township people.
- The confessional formulation of the Christian faith as truth in terms of doctrinal and prescriptive formula or rational propositions, rather than the understanding of the gospel and the truth of faith in terms of wisdom thinking and relational terminology, i.e. expressing truth within the dynamics of life. The doctrinal focal point was less on the healing of human relationships and the restoration of human dignity and justice by means of the "beauty", the aesthetics, of unconditional love. Doctrine was supposed to promote confessional spiritualism rather than "spiritual humanism". Ethics (morality and the distinction between good and evil) was more fundamental than aesthetics (iconic visioning and the distinction between beauty and ugliness).
- The notion of *corruptio totalis* in anthropology, i.e. that human beings are totally corrupted by sin and not able to do any good. With reference to, for example, Psalm 52 the confession of David (his whole being is assessed as being corrupted and infiltrated by his personal transgression), was most of times hijacked by ecclesial moralism to construe a

doctrine of sin: the destructive and pessimistic notion of *corruptio totalis*. The connection between Adam and Christ was used to conceptualise a whole ontology of sin. What for David was a personal confession and an existential acknowledgement, became a doctrinal issue for the theological justification of human failure. David's acknowledgement of the disastrous impact of his transgression led him to the point that he linked his guilt to even the period of the foetus. His confession is rather an indication of existential remorse and personal guilt before God, than a doctrinal statement regarding ontology (the essence of being) and anthropology (the essential corruption of sinful human beings). Rather than being a metaphysical explanation about the origin of sin, the connection between the first Adam of the fall and the second Adam of the incarnation (Christ) should indicate the integrity of a divine intervention within the predicament of fallible human beings. The second Adam version points to the seriousness and integrity of the faithfulness of God to his covenantal promise "I will be your God" rather than to the total condemnation of the whole of cosmos. In order to safeguard a kind of equilibrium between justification and sanctification, the notion of *simul iustus et peccator* was introduced. But how can the eschatological fact that the whole of our being human was transformed by the cross and resurrection of Christ into a new being, the truth of the gospel that we were transformed from the realm of darkness into the realm of light, be balanced out with evil and sin?

- Even the confessions of the church revolve around the ugliness of sinfulness. For example, the form for baptism starts with: "That we with our children are conceived and born in sin, and therefore are we children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into the kingdom of God, except we are born again". The canons of Dort starts as follows: "As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin". The text of reverence is then: Romans 6:23 "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God".

FROM THE UNFORTUNATE TWISTING OF LIFE TO 'SPIRITUAL HUMANISM'

A Hellenistic paradigm is about the analytical split between matter and spirit. However, secularisation as a typical North American and Western European reaction to a theological positivism, is not first on the agenda of African spirituality⁷. For Africa and communities struggling with poverty and oppression, the secular debate seemed to be a luxury, more appropriate in an affluent society than within a context of severe suffering, discrimination and stigmatisation. The twentieth century was for Africa the epoch of struggle and the quest for freedom. While the Northern hemisphere struggled with secularism, Africa fought against colonialism. The point is: marginalised people and suffering believers, exposed to poverty, did not have extra spiritual energy to enter into the luxury of a God-is-dead debate.

Without any doubt Christian spirituality was for many believers in Africa a source of empowerment rather than embarrassment. In the struggle against colonialism, and in South Africa, against apartheid, the Christian faith helped believers exposed to racial oppression to

⁷ In Western Christian doctrine we have placed an enormous emphasis on justification and the notion of human beings as sinners. We have also placed an enormous emphasis on a human being as worker (Luther and Marx) and a human being as thinker (Aquinas, Descartes and orthodox doctrine). We sanctified the mind as the faculty of soulfulness excluded and deprived of any form of embodiment. Our celebrative and imaginative faculties have atrophied (Cox 1969: 11). One can even add: our aesthetic and imaginative faculties have mummified under the pressure of the sinfulness of embodiment. The body is dirty (ugly) and the soul is pure (beautiful).

articulate their resistance to discrimination and stigmatisation. Ministers often used the slogan “God never sleeps” in order to motivate Christians to hope and to fight against oppression. The identification of God with the struggle of oppressed people became an icon of hope. The struggle in South Africa opened the eyes of the church for the freedom, dignity and rights of human beings within a sense of communality and belongingness. This quest for meaning and human dignity can be called the quest for a ‘Christian humanism’.

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM

It was the former president of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, who wrote a book in the 1960s: entitled *A Humanist in Africa*. He advocated a humanist approach to life (*Christian humanism*) because of the communal spirit within different African spiritualities. For Africa the aesthetic rhythm of life, the singing and dancing, was more fundamental than the awareness of evil forces that determine the value of human relationships. Hence the following challenging remark by Kenneth Kaunda: “Let the West have its Technology and Asia its Mysticism! Africa’s gift to world culture must be in the realm of Human Relationships” (1967²:22).

The spirit of *ubuntu* – that profound African sense that we are human only through the humanity of other human beings – is not a parochial phenomenon, but has added globally to our common search for a better world (Mandela 2005:82). And to improve the world is intrinsically an aesthetic endeavour, not merely a moral issue.

In an African approach to anthropology, *ubuntu* thinking and the notion of *homo aestheticus* (the human being as the enjoyer of life) are more fundamental than the aggressive approach of *homo faber* (the human being as the maker of things). What is envisaged in an African spirituality is harmony (the beautification of life) within interpersonal relationships: *Umntu ungumuntu ngabantu/motho ke motho ka batho* - approximately translated as: “A person is a person through other people” (Mtetwa 1996:24).

This notion of mutuality and interconnectedness, a kind of ‘spiritual humanism’, is aptly depicted in the following African crucifixion by an unknown African artist, bought by myself from a pavement artist in Cape Town (Owner: D J Louw, chapel, faculty of theology).



An African depiction of the cross, encircled by people; a humanist, *ubuntu*-Christ within the communality of life and human relationships.

One of the most remarkable and tangible dimensions of African spirituality relates to the unique notion of communality and collective solidarity that African societies exhibit in all spheres of life. There is a profound sense of interdependence, from the extended family to the entire community. In a very real sense, everybody is interrelated; this includes relations between the living and those who have departed. African spirituality is structured, not along the lines of a pyramid, but of a circle – community and communality as the centre of religious life (Bosch 1974:40).⁸

Anthropology in an African paradigm is indeed about a *homo aestheticus* within the dynamics of interrelatedness, namely that a person is gripped or governed by a particular concern which is of central value to that person or a group of people. It affects a person's way of thinking, acting and feeling.

Spirituality thus reflects ultimate and aesthetic values within cultures; spirituality is concerned with life as a whole. "It is not a pious behaviour but rather a commitment and involvement in a manner that gives meaning to life. Spirituality means that unseen dimension which influences a person to live in a mode that is truly fulfilling" (Skhakhane 1995:106). To live is to celebrate life within the rhythm of daily events. And life fulfilment is to experience, despite the overwhelming awareness of the transience of life, that life can indeed be beautiful.

1. HOMO AESTHETICUS: THE BEAUTIFICATION OF HUMAN LIFE

"Man is *homo festivus* and *fantasia homo*" (Cox 1969:11). One can even say that the attempt to formulate the Christian faith in rational categories and to define God in terms of a correct doctrine (true confession), turned the Christian faith in the direction of *scientia* (scientific knowledge, the positivistic knowledge of the mind), rather than to *sapientia* (wisdom and the devotional knowledge of the heart). As Cox very aptly remarked: "Scientific method directs our attention away from the realm of fantasy and toward the manageable and the feasible" (Cox 1969:10).

In 1992 Ellen Dissanyake wrote a book with the title: *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art comes from and Why*. Her basic assumption was that aesthetics and art can be regarded as a natural general proclivity that manifests itself in culturally learned specifics such as dances, songs, performances, visual display and poetic speech. Art makes life special because art making involves taking something out of its everyday and ordinary use context and making it somehow special – the ordinary becomes extraordinary.

A human being is essentially *homo aestheticus*: the innate need for creative imagination; i.e. the making of transitional objects as means of overcoming loss and the limitations set by suffering and vulnerability. The human being as *homo aestheticus* refers to visionary anticipation and artistic appreciation within the quest for meaning and the creative attempt to signify and decode the markings of life.

Aesthetics coincide with the human quest for meaning and attempts of meaning-giving.

Signs and significance: the deciphering of meaning⁹

The following remark of the young Benedictine novice in the monastery of Melk summarizes

8 For the notion of a holistic spirituality in this regard, see Krezschmar 1996:63-75. A holistic spirituality seeks to integrate rather than separates the various dimensions of human experience (67).

9 In the book *Wie Kunst die Welt erschuf* Nigel Spivey (2006: 14) asserts that art is not merely the ability to craft (*Handwerkliches Können*); not merely the endeavour to beautify. Art emerges from the dynamics between human's creative ability and imagination/fantasy. The explosion of creativity in art is a mode of signifying life (Spivey 2006: 24).

it all: "But we see now through a glass darkly, and the truth, before it is revealed to all, face to face, we see in fragments (alas, how illegible) in the error of the world, so we spell out its faithful signals even when they seem obscure to us and as if amalgamated with a will wholly bent on evil" (Umberto Eco: 1980:11).

Signs can be called the semiotics of the arts (Hess-Lüttich, Rellstab 2010:247); signs signify "something". Whether the something is a concrete object or the product of impression or imagination, a piece of art refers in one way or another to an "idea" as related to context, form and content (Belton et al 2006:11-13). In this respect one could say that Plato was perhaps correct when he argued that imagining is related to a form that refers to an idea which expresses the quest for truth¹⁰.

Aesthetics and the poetic question

One can walk through life like a "wise fool", leaving behind signs which function as poetic images to be interpreted: *ut pictura poesis*¹¹ (life as a poetic image). Even a human being becomes a poetic image, or, in the words of the Dutch theologian A. A van Ruler, a kind of *theopoiesis* (Rebel 1981:145), reflecting the authentic 'beauty' of the divine Spirit within the realm of the *humanum* (theonomous humanity).

According to Thomas Aquinas integrity (*integritas*), harmony (*consonantia*) and clarity (*claritas*) can be described as the principles of beauty. They can also be interpreted as wholeness, proportion and luminosity (Skawran 2012:3). The poetic question and the quest for beauty kindles quest for congruency between viewer and an object. Within this dynamics, aesthetics can be described as the attempt to move images into the realm of imagination (Botha 2012:5).

Pictura poesis indicates that life is more than reasoning and seeing; life is poetic imaging¹²; a silent poem to be interpreted. Applicable in this regard is the Ciceronian formula: *poema loquens picture, pictura tacitum poema* (poetry is a spoken painting; painting is a silent poem) (Huyghe 1981:20).

The Greek Polyclitus and the school of the Pythagoreans (In Hess-Lüttich, Rellstab 2010:247) called a piece of art the attempt to express perfect interrelatedness of different components to one another; it wants to explain how the different parts are related to the whole. Aesthetics is therefore involved in the human attempt to express a kind of order (relationship) (truth) despite the chaotic appearances of threatening phenomena. Even if a piece of art is called "ugly"¹³,

10 The urge to signify "the more", the yearning for "spirituality" beyond the limitations of reason and logic was well articulated by surrealism in the twenties of the previous century.

Rookmaker (1973: 144) pointed out that the upcoming of surrealism in the early twenties, is an indication of a revolt against the structure of reason. "Their aim was a liberation of life, in every aspect, to free man from this strange world that holds him in a thousand ways; on the basis of Freudianism they wanted to liberate man from convention, culture and society. The third issue of *La Révolution Surréaliste* said: 'Ideas, logic, order, Truth (with a capital T), Reason, all this is given to the nothingness of Death. You do not know how far the hatred we have against logic can lead us.'

11 The formula of Horace, in Huyghe 1981:20.

12 The poetics of life is about the quest for spirituality. In her book *Image and Spirit* Karen Stone (2003: 9-11) describes art as a spiritual voice, as a process of imaging. "Art at its best makes concrete what language and especially religious language cannot: that intangible, private or communal moment when we encounter being". Art is about the poetics of life; it is a spiritual endeavour probing into the depth dimension of being; "...that is, the ontological, the essence of experience beneath and beyond the surface appearance of things" (Stone 2003: 11).

13 In his *Les Femmes d'Alger*, Picasso reveals a kind of barbaric destructiveness that horrified his friends and the art society: "...five horrifying women, prostitutes who repel rather than attract and whose faces are primitive masks that challenge not only society but humanity" (Huffington 1988: 93). In an interview in *Die Burger* (La Vita 2012: 13) the South African sculptor Dylan Lewis referred to this intra-

disturbing, or incomprehensible abstract, art is both public and iconic; there is no private work (Hess-Lüttich, Rellstab 2010:270) or non-spiritual artistic piece¹⁴.

The mediation function of aesthetics within the quest for some-thing (eidós)

Matzker Reiner (2008) relates aesthetics¹⁵ to the act of mediation within the tension between subject (impression and interpretation) and object or the implicit idea as related to an object or something perceived and observed. To mediate is always a sign for something (2008:10). Mediation operates within the connections between form (*eidós*; essence, meaning) and matter (*hýle*, ontic dimension). The projection of what is observed and seen implies in the act of mediation and representation virtuosity: skill, competence and know-how; i.e. artistic proficiency.

The mediatory function of a medium is to communicate, to inform, to disclose, to make something knowable. Aesthetics becomes an instrument (medium), an image (means) about some-thing (content). It transcends its own limitations in the direction of signification. In this regard aesthetics symbolizes (from the Greek *syμβάlein* = to link to halves) and refers to meaning. (Matzker 2008:10). Aesthetics then expands the interpretation horizon of human beings; it creates a grammar of mediation. For Plato the mediation points in the direction of a copy of a kind of original image or existing idea. For Aristotle the mediation is in itself a process of signifying in the sense that it functions as a memory (*Anamnese*) to reality (Matzker 2008:11-12).

The important point is that in aesthetics there is a constant interplay between reality, image and significance, particularly in the sense that through mediation aesthetics becomes the attempt to represent some-thing. A human being therefore as *homo aestheticus* is not merely a some-thing. A human being is a some-body mediating the aesthetics of God, the creative Artist of life.

Human embodiment as the aesthetics of the human soul

The portrayal of the divine in terms of a human figure was always a disputable issue in orthodox theology. Michelangelo made a kind of "breakthrough" in the sense that he viewed the perfect human figure as a representation of God (divine embodiment) or Christ not as a "graven image" to be worshipped (idolatry) but as a depiction of the beauty of God (God's love) as reflected in the essence of the human soul¹⁶. At the same time, the movement and proportions of the human body are always framed by torment and suffering.

psychic transcendence as an "inner wilderness".

14 Pablo Picasso said: "There is no abstract art. You must always start with something. Afterward you can remove all traces of reality. There's no danger then, anyway, because the idea of the object will have left an incredible mark" (In Barr 1975: 273). This "mark" can be called an aesthetic sign to be deciphered in the human quest for meaning and truth. Truth and meaning are intertwined with one another within processes of signification.

15 According to Jochen Schulte-Susse (2010: 758-778) aesthetics should be linked to theory on perspective (perspectivism). The theory of perspective is about the question how to resemble a three dimensional object on a two dimensional surface, or how to represent a three dimensional object via a material form or sculpture so that the representation and image of the object, the idea within the object, corresponds with the proportions of the immediacy of the act of seeing, feeling and experiencing. In terms of Jacob Boehm's theory on aesthetics, aesthetics links with the intention and value assessment of the subject in relationship with the viewed or observed object.

16 From Socrates Michelangelo learned that the purpose of painting was to present the human soul, the life of human souls, as an expression of the very internal being of humans. According to Nérét (2006: 32) Michelangelo was only interested in the people he painted due to the fact that perfect bodies were the carriers and containers of the idea of eternity.



Michelangelo: The rhythm of the perfect human body as indication of the divine movements of the human soul¹⁷

The meaning of the Last Judgment resides not in the naked bodies but “the shop wreck of entire tormented and suffering humanity...anxiously awaiting the fulfilment of the promise that in the presence of Christ the Judge and Redeemer the righteous will rise from the dead at the end of time” (Vecchi in: Paris 2009:175).

K Schoeman in his book on Michelangelo Buonarroti (2009:555) refers to the fact that in his reflection on life and its purpose, it was all about the attempt how to bridge the gap between God and human beings by means of the aesthetics of beauty, the expression of love and the imaging of art. The beauty of the cosmic body within its imperfect earthly realm, as well as the attempt to depict it in painting and sculpturing, serve as a vehicle to glorify God.

For Michelangelo imaging in art is iconic because it is helping him to approach the perfect beauty of God (Schoeman 2009:559). To capture human embodiment is to capture the ensoulment of life and the aesthetics of God.

The naked human body: pornographic striptease of the human soul?

Within Greek art the naked human body and its perfect symmetry equals beauty and should be assessed as a piece of art. Spivey (2006:75) refers to the canonization of human embodiment in art by Polyclitus. For Polykleitos the human body is from an aesthetic point of view perfect due to the tension between symmetry, balance and harmony. The naked human body therefore reflects dynamics, balance and harmony not pornography¹⁸.

17 Online: http://www.google.co.za/imgres?imgurl=http://www.lib-art.com/imgpainting/4/9/14294-male-nude-michelangelo-buonarroti.jpg&imgrefurl=http://www.lib-art.com/imgpainting/4/9/&usg=__olOshIWHVCEl-KafL47uFUg5E=&h=1177&w=750&sz=105&hl=en&start=9&zoom=1&tbid=AUVF59hBZE75rM:&tbnh=150&tbnw=96&ei=mpuAT_n3Csz3mAX75fjZBw&prev=/search%3Fq%3DMichelangelo%2Bdrawings%2Bmale%2Bnude%26hl%3Den%26sa%3DN%26biw%3D983%26bih%3D440%26gbv%3D2%26tbn%3Disch&itbs=1. Assesed: 06/04/2012.

18 During Pius V’s pontificate, the Congregation of the Council of Trent decided, on January 11th, 1564, to have the private parts cover. The most pornographic decision in the history of Christian spirituality! Pope Paul IV therefore summoned the House of Carafa Daniele da Volterra to cover the genitals. The artist who did the covering was given the name “Braghettone” meaning “trouser painter”(Néret 2006:78).

Pornography is derived from two Greek words, *pornay* and *graphay* (Melton et al. 1989:68). *Pornay* is derived from *peraymi* which means “to sell,” usually in reference to a slave or prostitute for hire. *Graphay* refers to that which is written, inscribed, or pictured. “Pornography” then literally means to picture or describe prostitutes, with the connotation of an unequal slave/master relationship.

Pornography is therefore not nakedness as such (see the statute of David by Michelangelo and the paintings in the Sistine Chapel), or explicit sexual pictures or portrayals of sexual acts, or erotic material, stimulating sexual excitement. The criterion cannot be sexual excitement or fantasy, because then any stimulation or visual impression related to sexual connotations and to sex will fall under the category of pornography.

Pornography refers very specifically to sexual exploitation and the dehumanisation of sex so that human beings are treated as things or commodities (Court 1990:929). Pornography points in the direction of the depiction or the description of the unequal misuse of power and violent sexuality (physical and psychological violence against others and oneself) promoting promiscuity. The genitals then become playful tools (the instrumentalisation of physiology) not intimate, sacred icons.

The advantage of the Michelangelo perspective on the aesthetics of human embodiment is that it introduces a paradigm shift in anthropology from the hedonistic perspective of promiscuity to the aesthetic perspective of beauty; from the performance of sexuality to the enjoyment of sexuality. In fact the human body and the genitals are not designed to destroy and to ruin, but to heal, to beautify and to console, to comfort; to bestow compassion in life.

2. MEANING AS COMPASSION: THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Power, even the power of God, is most of the times defined as domination and control (Pasewark 1993:2). This understanding of power always presents the need to defend the notion of God’s omnipotence on philosophical and theological grounds and for reasons of religious life.

The Confession of Faith (Belgic Confession) starts with the notion of power as the creation, preservation and government of the universe. God as Father “watches over us with *paternal care*, keeping all creatures so under his power that not a hair of our head (for they are all numbered), nor a sparrow can fall to the ground without the will of our Father...” Although “will” is not mentioned in the Greek text (Matthew 10:29; literally: without our Father), the interpreters read “will of the father” into the text. In the background of the religious mind, God determines everything so that the will of God should at least equal divine power. Divine power is then interpreted in terms of cause and governance (strength) and not in terms of care and compassion (vulnerability).

The point is: strong and powerful people need strong and powerful deities (Hall 1993:108).

In the history of the church the Christian establishment was deeply influenced by a religion designed to serve the purposes of empires. Influenced by Constantinian imperialism, theology exploited the power potential of the Christian God and minimised everything reminiscent of divine vulnerability and self-emptying.

The “Father Almighty” developed under the influence of an affluent society into the romantic sentimentality of Father Christmas All-merciful. Instead of a suffering God, the triumphalism of a theology of glory “removed the cross from the heart of God” (Hall 1993:96).

“God is depicted as one who, unlike us, does not exist under the threat of nonbeing in any of its manifestations. Thus, the divine power (omnipotence) is not challenged by any lack or weakness; the divine knowledge (omniscience) is not circumscribed by ignorance, uncertainty, or inherent limitation; the divine presence (omnipresence) is not subject to the constraints of

time and space; and God is not vulnerable to change or prey to passions that may be aroused by any existential eventuality (immutability)" (Hall 1993:96-97).

Mostly it is our understanding of power in politics and the social sphere that dominated both our understanding of God and the meaning of our being human. Our common use of power takes political power as its exemplar; power as domination. The perfection or fulfilment of power as domination easily becomes manifest as "absolute power", "the tyrannical enslavement or eradication of whatever opposes such power" (Pasewark 1993:3). When projected on to "God Almighty", God appears as the invincible tyrant or judgmental judge. The whole of the Christian life and the realm of religion are then framed by a rule-governed supervision of action as prescribed by ethics and the iron will of God. There is then virtually no space for ethos, a purposeful end (*telos*)¹⁹, the aesthetics of life, the aesthetics of existence, the beauty of creation. As a prescriptive rule (legalism) ethics dominated ethos, "correct truth" (positivism) supersedes aesthetics.

Very surprisingly, over against the power of *defensive faith*, Paul comes up with a startling thesis that is contrary to the powers that reside in theology and the church (Caputo 2007:62): *vulnerable faith* and *the weakness of God* frame the meaning of true Christian faith. Vulnerability and weakness suddenly became powerful categories. Within the power or *charisma* of the Spirit, they are designed for the empowerment of human beings deprived of dignity and 'beauty' because of the ugliness of inhumane stigmatisation and discrimination.

Paul links God to the event of suffering and introduces the "weakness of God"; the *logos* of the cross (*logos tou staurou*). This notion of power is marked as "*foolishness*" (a variant of the aesthetic category of ugliness). The power of human beings (*ousia*) is challenged by the 'weakness of God' which is stronger than human strength (I Cor.1:25). Why? Because it affirms God's identification with the vulnerability of suffering human beings. It opposes destructive domination and affirms constructive opposition. God becomes the helpless innocent victim of the Roman soldiers. The sacredness and divinity reside in the cry (*derelicto*) of protest: "My God, My God why have you forsaken me?" With the act of forgiveness, Jesus as the icon (*eikon*) of God, not of Roman power, became an innocent and helpless victim of Roman imperialism.

The evangelistic praxis of the church still functioned under the spell of the Constantine exploitation of power (Hall 1993:106). The subconscious framework was the *corpus christianum* with its inherent zeal to maintain both a political and spiritual power by means of the "almighty Christian God". Praxis was consciously, but perhaps mostly unconsciously, an imperialistic endeavour. The gospel and the church were viewed as something which has to be established as an empire. As D Hall (1993:106) pointed out: to sustain the power of an authoritative powerful church-praxis every form of tenderness and weakness is deleted, because weakness is not "the blueprint for a god designed for empire". A very specific understanding of both the power of the church and the power of God fed this imperialistic thinking. God was the masculine patriarch of civil society, an omnipotent "Caesar"²⁰ who can do everything and the immutable principle of life who can act as the metaphysical cause of everything that befalls us and happens in life. The church functioned as a political entity who can prescribe the policy of governments²¹.

19 For the connection between *telos* and aesthetics, see Pasewark 1993: 36. "There is a *telos*, an end, toward which the ethical life orients itself. To be sure, it may be an aesthetic *telos* rather than a rule-governed supervision of action, but the ethical life is not devoid of meaning. The project of 'aesthetics of existence' is, in fact, a project of meaning creation".

20 Christian orthodoxy are based on God-images from which most traces of tenderness have been expunged. W N Pittinger (in Hall 1993:54) argued that the typical picture of divine omnipotence is a case of "giving to God that which belongs exclusively to Caesar". Even the love of God became a masculine affair supported by patriarchalism.

21 The "popes" of synods dictated the politics of the day. If it is true that different races and the variety

In this regard Browning (1983:13) refers to David Tracy who believes that practical theology has primarily to do with the criteria or norms for the transformation of human brokenness (being reality). Our human suffering and the quest for meaning determines all forms of praxis-thinking. Theological praxis should therefore be framed by the suffering passion of God (the very ontology of the heart of God), and not in the first place by the immutable and rational Council of God (positivism of the Mind and "Raad van God"). Praxis-thinking as a theological endeavour, is inevitable passion-thinking as *com*-passionate being-with.

TA SPLANCHNA: THE *PASSIO DEI* IN THEOPASCHITIC THEOLOGY

In the effort to identify God with human suffering, theopaschitism became the theory or doctrine by which theology tries to construe a more passionate approach to our understanding of God's presence within the reality of human suffering (injustice, poverty, stigmatisation, discrimination, stereotyping, illness, violence, the abuse of power, tsunamis, catastrophes).

A theopaschitic approach²², which leans strongly towards divine pathos, acceptance and understanding, has been welcomed by those theologians who wanted to reframe paradigms regarding God's praxis. No longer is God seen as static and absolute, but dynamic, thereby opening up the future for human existence²³.

The value of theopaschitic thinking for the praxis of God is that it proposes a shift from the substantial approach to the relational and encounter paradigm (Berkhof 1979:32-33). The switch is then from the attempt of orthodoxy to uphold ecclesial triumphalism (Hall 1993:100-101) and a theology of glory (*theologia gloriae*) and omnipotence (powerful force)²⁴, to a *theologia crucis*²⁵ of weakness, suffering and passion.

It is my contention that the *passio dei* is an exposition of the praxis concept of *ta splanchna*. The latter is related to the Hebrew root *rhm*, to have compassion. It is used in close connection to the root *hnn*, which means to be gracious. Together with *oiktirmos* and *hesed*, it expresses the being quality of God as connected to human vulnerability and suffering (H.-H. Esser 1976:598). The verb *splanchnizomai* is used to make the unbounded mercy of God visible; it displays a strange kind of divine Beauty. It describes a theological aesthetics. In a theological aesthetics, beauty should therefore be connected to the pathos of the crucifixion. "This *em-pathos*, mediated by their own distinct accounts through the beauty of the crucifix, in turn becomes, second, *sym-pathos* – a plea for divine sympathy with their own suffering" (Garcia-Rivera 2008:177).

*Ta splanchna*²⁶ reveals God as a Presence, 'a Companion, "your God"' (Hall 1993:147). In

of cultures is the will of God, "apartheid" should be the solution to the possible tension and differences between races. If it is indeed the case that women are inferior to men, patriarchic thinking should be justified by theology in order to keep women from church decision-making and official functioning.

22 Some of the most important proponents of theopaschitism are the following: God's weakness (Bonnhoeffer 1970); God's powerlessness (Sölle 1973); God's being as an event of becoming (*Gottes Sein ist im Werden*) (Jüngel 1967²); God's forsakenness (Moltmann 1972); God's defencelessness (Berkhof 1973; Wiersinga 1972)

23 Although the pathos concept suggests evidence of God's genuine involvement in suffering, there is a danger that the distinction between the *passio Dei* and the *passio hominum* can easily fall away. God's sovereignty (transcendence) can easily be sacrificed by an overemphasis on God's enfleshment and identification (condescension).

24 See in this regard the remark of Hall 1993:108): "Powerful people demand powerful deities – and get them!"; "Power – and precisely power understood in the usual sense – is of the essence of divinity shaped by empire" (1993:107).

25 "Greek epistemology could not take account of the surprise needed to recognize God on the cross ... It did not envision suffering as a source of knowledge". Jon Sobrino in Hall 1993: note 8, p105.

26 It is interesting to note the cases where Christ responded to human suffering with the contraction of

praxis-thinking it is not the task of the church to demonstrate that God must *be*, but to bear witness to God's being-there, being-with, and being- for the creature. In terms of D Hall (1993:155) the test of the church's God-talk at any point in time is its contextual authenticity, its praxis-thinking: does it illuminate God's being-with-us? We can add: does it portray God's being-with-us as *ta splanchna*²⁷?

Splanchnizomai reveals the very character of God within the messianic involvement and engagement with human suffering. The theology of the entrails²⁸ reflects God's being quality, and can be called the ontology of God's beauty in suffering.

From a practical point of view the general and traditional theological question is always the cause-effect question: why God and weather God is behind these cases? From a praxis point of view the question is not whether God is behind these events, but what is God's attitude and intention within these events; what is the mode of God's being within our human predicament. The texts totally reframe our understanding of who God is and what is meant by God's power, now understood as passion and compassion (*oiktirmon*) and not in the mode of Caesar-like power²⁹.

By his suffering, God shows that He is weak, vulnerable and powerless in this world. Only Christ's weakness can help us to resist suffering in an attitude of protest/resistance and surrender (*Widerstand und Ergebung*).

The theopaschitic approach clearly links God with suffering. The cross completes this link and this reveals God as a 'pathetic' being: He is the 'suffering God.' Feitsma (1956) calls this form of theopaschitism (redefining God's Being in terms of suffering) the most ultimate expression in theology of what is meant by God's compassion.³⁰

the entrails, expressing messianic compassion. For example the leper with his petition (Mk.1:41), the people like sheep without a shepherd (Mk. 6:34); Matt.9:36: the sight of the harassed and exhausted crowd; Matt. 20:34: two blind men who besought him; Lk. 7:13: the widow at Nain mourning her only son. In Lk. 15:11-32, the prodigal son, *splanchnizomai* expresses the strongest feeling of a merciful and loving reaction (verse 20). In the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk. 10:33) *splanchnizomai* expresses the attitude of complete willingness to use all means, time, strength, and life, for saving at the crucial moment (Esser 1976: 600).

27 In general Greek *ta splanchnon* refers to the valuable parts, the heart, lung, liver, but also the spleen and the kidneys. During the sacrifice they are removed for the sacrificial meal. With reference to human *splanchna* refers to the human entrails, especially for the male sexual organs and the womb, as the site of the powers of conception and birth. Within metaphorical speech *ta splanchna* expresses pity, compassion and love. "The oldest form of the verb is *splanchnneuō*, eat the entrails, prophesy from the entrails" (H.-H. Esser 1976:599). Within the messianic context of Christ's salvific mission, *ta splanchna* expresses compassion as an indication of God's divine involvement with the human predicament of suffering.

28 Noteworthy is the fact that within these texts *ta splanchna* is connected to illness and health; dying and mourning; loss and grief; violence and injustice; burnt out and hunger, estrangement and remorse.

29 Inbody (1997:140) captures this problem very aptly when he argues that, in our attempt to rethink the meaning of divine power, two things can happen. Our God-image can become 'too small,' or 'too big.' If God can only empathize with the suffering of the world, but can do nothing about it, God is too small. If God is identified with nature, and can do nothing more than what positivists mean by natural law, God is too small. If God is identified with human capacities, abilities, creativity or human ideals, then God is minimalized. On the other hand, if God is identified with omnipotent power, as the kind of power that, because of definition, can do 'just anything,' God is too big. When a theistic notion of divine omnipotence portrays God's kingdom in terms of an empire, He becomes too militant and strong. God is then merely a Hellenistic *pantokrator*.

30 Feitsma 1956:42: 'Maar als we de noemer aldus onder woorden brengen: natural divina passa est, dan moeten toch al die vormen op deze noemer gebracht worden.' Cf also Feitsma's observation on p.143: 'Ook in het modern theopaschitisme horen we steeds weer dat geluid van Gods eigen lijden. En dat niet

CONCLUSION

Ta splanchna describes the praxis of God's being not in substantial categories, but in terms of passion categories: compassion (*oiktirmon*). *Ta splanchna* is about a theological beautification of life. It describes the aesthetics of a suffering God. In this regard Browning's reference (1983:13) to David Tracy's conviction that practical theology has primarily to do with the criteria or norms for the transformation of human brokenness, is addressed. Via the passion of Christ in art, our lament about the non-sense in human suffering becomes articulated in divine categories. Even the Jewish artist Marc Chagall used the crucifixion to express the experience of holocaust (Harries 2004:110-11) within the image of a suffering Messiah.

Divine compassion is expressed by the God-image of God as our Companion, Friend for Life. The ontological realm of the aesthetic praxis of God is described by means of metaphorical speech. In this regard the notion of "bowel categories" describes a practical theology of the intestines. The intention and motivation within praxis-actions is the *passio Dei*. With reference to Vincent Brümmer, one can say: the *passio Dei* expresses the meaning of Christian faith; it refers to the meanders of a suffering God and is the concrete praxis hermeneutics of the *amicitia Dei* (Brümmer 2006:299-302). It is only by loving God that we can achieve *ultimate* happiness and *complete* fulfilment in our lives (Brümmer 2006:299). Humane knowing is the spirituality of Christian aesthetics expressed in the mode of compassion and the suffering of sacrificial *agape*.

The theological *telos* (teleology) for *fides quaerens spem is ta splanchna*, i.e. the compassionate 'humanistic praxis' of the Crucified God. Compassionate and redemptive activities as an expression of sensibility, beautifies life. "Primary beauty is an unrestricted benevolence of a generous heart" (Fairley 2001:45). Beauty is not the beast, but transforms beasts into the meaningful passion of compassion, joy and gratitude.

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als een consequentie van communicatio idiomatum in de ene hypostase van Hem die God en mens is (wie langs deze weg komt tot het spreken over Gods lijden kan zich daarvoor op de Schrift beroepen), masr als typering van Gods diepste wezen.'

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De liefde van God

ABSTRACT

The love of God

In this essay, an attempt is made to understand what Christians mean by the love of God. Starting point for this understanding is the biblical witness about the decisive self-revealing actions of love God has performed in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ. Then, different forms of human love are described. A definition of divine love is given in terms of elements that can be found in these forms of human love and in God's self-revealing actions of love. Two questions about this definition that are crucial to Vincent Brümmer's account of the love of God, are discussed. First, what is the nature of God's longing? And second, does the love between God and human beings exclude rights and duties?

INLEIDING

Graag wil ik met deze bijdrage Vincent Brümmer eren ter gelegenheid van zijn tachtigste verjaardag. Als student leerde ik hem als jong hoogleraar kennen in de colleges waaruit zijn klassieke *Wijsgerige begripsanalyse* is gegroeid, een boek dat ik ook later nog vaak heb geraadpleegd, en altijd met vrucht. Als hoofdvak voor mijn doctoraal examen koos ik echter niet de godsdienstwijsbegeerte maar de dogmatiek, omdat daarin geloofsvragen directer aan de orde kwamen en in nauwer verband met de Bijbel dan in het onderwijs dat Brümmer toen, in zijn eerste Utrechtse jaren, gaf. Later, maar toen was ik al vanuit Utrecht naar de dorpspastorie vertrokken, is Brümmer zich ook met hermeneutische en theologische vragen gaan bezighouden, wat resulteerde in zijn eveneens klassieke boek *Liefde van God en mens*. Mijn leermeester in de dogmatiek J.M. Hasselaar had een meditatieve denkstijl die sterk verschilde van de analytische werkwijze van Brümmer. Volgens Brümmer's eigen zeggen waren Hasselaar en hij in wetenschappelijk opzicht "ships passing in the night" (Brümmer 2006:18). Hierdoor ontstond gemakkelijk de indruk dat Brümmer en Hasselaar verschillende theologische werelden vertegenwoordigden waartussen gekozen moest worden. Toch kunnen we achteraf vaststellen dat zij als theologen ook veel gemeenschappelijk hebben. Beiden zien er bewust van af om het christelijk geloof te funderen in een vorm van natuurlijke theologie (Brümmer 2001:II). Geloofsmatig staan zij in de traditie van de zogenoemde 'ethische theologie', waarin niet de kerkelijke belijdenis maar de liefdesgemeenschap met Christus de toon aangeeft (Brümmer :2010). Zelf heb ik nooit kunnen kiezen tussen de methodes van Brümmer en Hasselaar. Ik denk dat deze elkaar kunnen aanvullen en ik zie het als een uitdaging om het goede van beide denkstijlen na te streven.

In dit artikel bied ik enkele overwegingen aan rond een thema dat in Brümmer's theologisch denken van laatste decennia centraal staat: de liefde van God. Mijn doel is niet Brümmer's positie te analyseren en te beoordelen. In plaats daarvan geef ik een korte doordenking van enkele aspecten van Gods liefde waarover ook Brümmer zich heeft uitgesproken. Waar deze doordenking in aanpak en in resultaat verschilt met die van Brümmer wordt vanzelf duidelijk.

In de protestantse dogmatische reflectie speelt een bijbels-theologisch verantwoorde

aansluiting bij de Schrift een beslissende rol omdat deze getuigt van zelf-openbarende daden van God (voor de notie van een zelf-openbarende daad van God zie Muis 2011:599-600). We kunnen deze daden alleen verstaan aan de hand van de verschillende Bijbelse uitspraken die ervan getuigen. Uit de Bijbelse woorden die daarbij worden gebruikt, kan niet rechtstreeks een begrip van Gods liefde worden afgeleid; de ontwikkeling van een begrip van Gods liefde is constructieve denkbaarheid (Brümmer 1993:30-33). Dit betekent echter niet dat Bijbelse termen en verbanden, zoals bijvoorbeeld 'zorg' en 'verbond' en het verband tussen liefde en zorg en tussen liefde en verbond, in deze denkbaarheid geen rol kunnen spelen. De Bijbel is niet alleen een norm waaraan de dogmatische reflectie achteraf kan worden getoetst, hij reikt ook woorden en verbanden aan die als hulpmiddelen kunnen worden gebruikt in die reflectie (Muis 2008:91, 95, 100). De werken van Brueggemann en Feldmeier-Spieckermann laten zien dat het mogelijk is om de kern van het Bijbelse spreken over God en zijn handelen systematisch te beschrijven. Met behulp van studies als deze kunnen wij het Bijbels getuigenis over Gods zelf-openbarende liefdedaden verstaan. Vanuit Gods zelf-openbarende liefdedaden kan zijn liefde worden begrepen. Om de aard van Gods liefde nader te kunnen omschrijven in hedendaagse taal, dienen we na te gaan in welke betekenissen het woord liefde in deze taal wordt gebruikt. Daarbij komen we voor de vraag te staan of we voor het begrijpen van Gods liefde één soort menselijke liefde als model kunnen gebruiken. Wanneer dat niet mogelijk zou blijken te zijn, moet een andere weg worden gezocht om een begrip van Gods liefde te ontwikkelen.

DE BIJBEL OVER GODS LIEFDE

In de christelijke geloofsgemeenschap spreken we over de liefde van God omdat we ons door God als beminden aangesproken weten. We ervaren deze liefdevolle aanspraak allereerst wanneer we Bijbelteksten horen als Woord van God aan ons (Miskotte 1971:71,73). Ook door gebeurtenissen waarin God zijn liefde aan ons toont, kunnen we als zijn beminden worden aangesproken. In de Bijbel en in de geloofstraditie staan worden twee van zulke gebeurtenissen als liefdedaaden van God betuigd: de verkiezing van het volk Israël en de zending van Jezus Christus in deze wereld. Onze reflectie over Gods liefde dient daarom in te zetten bij deze daden van God.

In Deuteronomium 7 wordt de liefde van God genoemd als het diepste motief voor de verkiezing van Israël en de bevrijding uit de slavernij in Egypte (Deuteronomium 7:6-8; vgl. Feldmeier, Spieckermann 2011:130-131). Gods liefde is dus een vrije keuze die niet berust op een bijzondere waarde of verdienste van Israël (Deuteronomium 7:7). God is niet tot deze liefde verplicht en wordt er niet toe gedwongen. Gods liefde is een diepe emotie. Dat blijkt wanneer zijn volk zijn liefde niet beantwoordt. God is jaloers wanneer Israël hem afwijst door andere goden achterna te lopen. God toornt wanneer Israëls antwoord op die liefde, het bewaren van zijn geboden, uitblijft. Uit deze emoties blijkt dat God in zijn liefde verlangt naar wederliefde en gehoorzaamheid en dat het hem niet koud laat wanneer deze uitblijven. Dat God niet alleen uit liefde handelt in bijzondere daden van bevrijding maar zelf ook liefdevol is, wordt uitgesproken in de belijdenis van Exodus 34:6, die in vele oudtestamentische teksten wordt herhaald (Psalm 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Nehemia 9:17; Joël 2:13; Nehemia 9:17): 'JHVV, JHVH, God, barmhartig en genadig, langzaam tot toorn en groot in goedertierenheid en trouw (...)'¹. Hoewel het Hebreeuwse woord voor liefde in deze tekst ontbreekt, wordt God hier gekarakteriseerd door eigenschappen die onlosmakelijk met zijn liefde verbonden zijn.² Gods liefde voor zijn volk is eeuwig (Jeremia 31,3; vgl. Jesaja 54,8).

1 Eigen vertaling. Barth geeft aan de hand van de termen genade, barmhartigheid en geduld uit Exodus 34,6 een preciserende uitleg van de liefde van God (Barth 1942:458).

2 Het Hebreeuwse woord *chesed*, goedertierenheid, kan misschien het beste worden weergegeven als 'steadfast love' (Feldmeier, Spieckermann 2011:132). De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling (2004) vertaalt dit Hebreeuwse woord vaak met 'liefde'.

Volgens het Nieuwe Testament bewijst God zijn liefde door het zenden van zijn Zoon Jezus Christus in de wereld tot verzoening voor onze zonden (1 Johannes 4,10.19). God heeft zijn Zoon gegeven (Johannes 3,16), ja prijsgegeven uit liefde (Romeinen 8,32.39). Deze prijsgeve gaat tot het uiterste: God heeft zijn liefde voor ons daarin bewezen, dat Jezus Christus voor ons gestorven is toen wij nog zondaren waren (Romeinen 5,8). Niet alleen de dood van Jezus toont Gods liefde. Dat God ons samen met Christus uit de dood heeft opgewekt, is eveneens een daad van liefde (Efeziërs 2,5-6). Gods liefde gaat vooraf aan de liefde van mensen tot hem (1 Johannes 4,10). In deze nieuwtestamentische kernuitspraken over Gods liefde in Christus vallen twee dingen op. Ten eerste is Gods liefde gevende liefde. God geeft zijn eniggeboren Zoon (Johannes 3,16). God geeft, zo kunnen we parafaseren, het beste wat hij te geven heeft. En omdat Vader en Zoon zo met elkaar verenigd zijn dat de een niet zichzelf kan zijn zonder de ander, kunnen we nog een stap verder gaan: in zijn Zoon geeft God zichzelf. Ten tweede richt Gods liefde zich op zondaren, op mensen die zich van hem hebben afgewend. In zijn liefde zoekt en vindt God mensen die hem niet zoeken.

SOORTEN MENSELIJKE LIEFDE

Om de aard van de liefde van God die hij in zijn beslissende liefdedaden heeft geopenbaard nader te kunnen bepalen, dienen we na te gaan welke verschillende betekenissen de term liefde kan hebben. Het woord liefde kan op verschillende houdingen en relaties worden toegepast. In het gebruik voor verschillende vormen van liefde krijgt het woord liefde telkens een iets andere, maar niet totaal verschillende betekenis. Deze betekenissen zijn analoog (voor de notie 'analoge betekenis' zie Muis 2011:587-588). Met deze analoge betekenissen van 'liefde' kunnen we naar verschillende soorten van liefde verwijzen. De belangrijkste soorten zijn de volgende: het erotisch verlangen of de erotische relatie tussen twee mensen, de seksuele relatie tussen mensen, de liefde van ouders voor hun kinderen of de liefde van kinderen voor hun ouders en de liefde tussen vrienden en vriendinnen. In al deze vormen van liefde zal de liefhebbende verlangen naar het geluk en het welzijn van de beminde en zich daarvoor inzetten. Maar er zijn ook duidelijke verschillen tussen deze vormen van liefde. De ruimte ontbreekt hier om deze gedetailleerd te analyseren, maar ik noem de belangrijkste.

In de erotische liefde speelt de begeerte om de ander te bezitten en door de ander bezeten te worden een grote rol (Jüngel 1977:437-438), in de liefde tussen ouders en kinderen en tussen vrienden niet. Vrienden worden gekozen vanuit herkenning en verwantschap en wanneer deze verdwijnen betekent dat het einde van de vriendschap. Of iemand ouders heeft, is echter geen vrije keus en welke kinderen iemand krijgt evenmin. Daarom berust de liefde tussen ouders en kinderen op een ander soort verbondenheid dan die tussen vrienden. Liefde tussen ouders en kinderen is allereerst zorg (McFague 1987:107).³ In al deze voorbeelden is liefde een relatie tussen twee personen waarin de liefhebbende een bepaalde houding inneemt ten opzichte van de beminde. Brümmer wil de term 'liefde' primair gebruiken voor relaties waarin de liefde van de liefhebbende wordt beantwoord door de geliefde (Brümmer 1993:156). Het is echter de vraag of dat zinvol is. Liefde bestaat immers niet alleen in relaties van wederkerige liefde. Als liefde wordt gedefinieerd als een wederkerige liefdesrelatie, zouden we de liefde van Dante voor Beatrice geen liefde kunnen noemen (Stump 2010:89). Natuurlijk wil elke minnaar dat zijn liefde wordt beantwoord, maar iemand kan een ander beminnen zonder dat dat gebeurt (Adriaanse 1997:53).

3 Frankfurt beschouwt de zorgende liefde van ouders als het basismodel voor elke vorm van liefde (Frankfurt 2004:43, 51, 82-84). Vgl. Wolterstorff 2011:101, 107-108.

DE LIEFDE VAN GOD

Wat betekenen nu deze verschillende vormen van liefde voor ons begrip van de liefde van God die in zijn beslissende liefdedaden is geopenbaard? Is het mogelijk om Gods liefde gedeeltelijk gelijk te stellen aan een van de genoemde vormen van liefde tussen mensen? Anders gezegd: kan een van deze vormen van liefde worden gebruikt als model voor de liefde tussen God en mens? De vrijheid en het onverschuldigde van Gods liefde, zoals die in het oudtestamentisch spreken over verbond en verkiezing aan het licht komen, stemmen gedeeltelijk overeen met de liefde tussen vrienden. Maar de liefde van God onderscheidt zich daarin van de liefde tussen vrienden, dat zij onvoorwaardelijk en zorgend is. Het zorgende van Gods liefde en de ongelijkwaardigheid tussen God en mensen stemt overeen met de liefde van vaders en moeders voor hun kinderen, maar de liefde van God onderscheidt zich van ouderliefde door het verlangen om met de geliefde intiem verenigd te zijn in alle momenten van zijn leven. Gods volledige gave van zichzelf in de overgave van zijn Zoon stemt gedeeltelijk overeen met erotische liefde, maar zijn liefde onderscheidt zich daarvan door onvoorwaardelijke zorg en vrije keuze.

Uit deze vergelijking tussen de liefde van God en de verschillende vormen van menselijke liefde blijkt mijns inziens dat geen van de vormen van menselijke liefde model kan staan voor de liefde van God. Dan blijven er twee methoden over om over Gods liefde na te denken. Een eerste mogelijkheid is om meerdere modellen voor de liefde van God te gebruiken die elkaar aanvullen, zoals Sallie McFague heeft gedaan.⁴ Een andere mogelijkheid is om de liefde van God te beschrijven met behulp van elementen die aan de verschillende vormen van menselijke liefde zijn ontleend. In dit opstel volg ik de tweede methode, in de veronderstelling dat daarmee het meest recht gedaan kan worden aan het Bijbels getuigenis over Gods liefde.

Wanneer wij Gods liefde uitsluitend zouden omschrijven met behulp van elementen van de verschillende vormen van menselijke liefde, zouden wij bij voorbaat uitsluiten dat de liefde van God elementen bevat die wij in geen enkele vorm van menselijke liefde aantreffen. Wanneer wij in onze doordenking van Gods liefde uitgaan van zijn beslissende zelf-openbarende daden, dienen wij echter de mogelijkheid open te houden dat Gods goddelijke liefde op bepaalde punten met geen enkele vorm van menselijke liefde is te vergelijken.

Daar komt nog iets bij. God is onze Schepper. Als Schepper is God anders dan alle schepselen en alle mensen. Omdat de liefdesrelatie tussen God en mensen een relatie is tussen Schepper en schepselen kunnen wij deze liefdesrelatie niet zonder meer vergelijken met de liefdesrelatie(s) tussen mensen. De liefde van God de Schepper is goddelijke liefde. Wanneer wij hier geen rekening mee houden, is het haast onvermijdelijk dat wij ons de liefhebbende God voorstellen als een liefhebbend mens in het groot en Gods liefde als een menselijke liefde in het groot, een soort 'superliefde' van God als een soort 'supermens'.

Aan de andere kant mag de goddelijkheid van Gods liefde niet zo worden opgevat dat zij de mogelijkheid van een wederzijdse liefdesrelatie tussen God en mens uitsluit. God kan als God een echte wederzijdse liefdesrelatie met mensen aangaan. Zoals de transcendente God in zijn schepping aanwezig kan zijn, kan deze ook menselijk met mensen omgaan. Omdat wij zowel aan de goddelijkheid van God als aan zijn relatie met mensen recht moeten doen, dient ons denken over Gods liefde twee klippen te vermijden. De eerste is dat wij goddelijkheid opvatten als zelfgenoegzaamheid en relatieloosheid, de tweede dat wij relationaliteit gelijkstellen aan gelijkwaardigheid. In de liefde tussen God en mens zijn beide partners actief en passief en ontstaat er echte wederkerigheid. Tegelijk blijven deze partners als Schepper en schepsel wezenlijk verschillend en ongelijkwaardig. De liefdesrelatie tussen God en mens is daarom wel

⁴ McFague doordent de liefde van God aan de hand van drie modellen: de liefde van een ouder, van een minnaar, en van een vriend (McFague 1987:101-109, 130-136, 159-167).

wederkerig, maar niet symmetrisch. Gods liefde voor mensen is zo menselijk dat wederkerigheid mogelijk is en blijft tegelijk zo goddelijk dat volledige symmetrie is uitgesloten.

Met behulp van de elementen die wij in de verschillende vormen van menselijke liefde hebben gevonden kunnen we Gods liefde als volgt omschrijven: Gods liefde is zijn eeuwige wil, dat wil zeggen zijn vrije keuze en zijn verlangen, om met mensen een wederkerige persoonlijke relatie aan te gaan waarin hij zichzelf aan hen geeft om hen blij en gelukkig te maken, en waarin hij zorgend, steunend en dragend bij hen aanwezig is in alle momenten van hun leven, zodat zij hun geluk en bestemming vinden in de liefde van God en van elkaar. Bij deze omschrijving kunnen allerlei vragen worden gesteld. Twee vragen die ook Brümmer aan de orde stelt, wil ik in het vervolg bespreken. De eerste is: wanneer Gods liefde een verlangen is, wat is dan de aard van dat verlangen? De tweede luidt: wanneer de liefde tussen God en mens een wederkerige persoonlijke relatie van verbondenheid is, kan zij dan samengaan met rechten en plichten?

HET VERLANGEN VAN GOD

Bij de vraag naar de aard van Gods verlangen gaat het om de overeenkomsten en de verschillen tussen goddelijk verlangen en menselijk verlangen. Menselijk verlangen of begeren is, heel algemeen gezegd, iets voor je zelf willen hebben wat je niet hebt en wat aantrekkelijk voor je is geworden. In deze omschrijving zitten drie gegevens die het problematisch maken om verlangen of begeren aan God toe te schrijven. Het eerste is dat je iets begeert voor jezelf; door het bezit van het begeerde hoop je er zelf beter van te worden. Het tweede is dat begeerte zich uitstrekt naar iets dat je niet bezit; begeerte komt voort uit een ervaren gemis of tekort. Het derde is dat begeerte wordt gewekt door iets aantrekkelijks; begeren is iets dat je ondergaat door iets dat je aantrekt.

Op grond van het eerste gegeven heeft men een scherpe tegenstelling gemaakt tussen verlangen als nemende liefde, *eros*, en gevende liefde, *agapè*. Volgens deze tegenstelling is een ander nemen om daar zelf gelukkig van te worden totaal iets anders dan jezelf aan de ander geven om de geliefde gelukkig te maken. Gevende liefde en nemende liefde sluiten elkaar uit. Verlangen is nemende liefde. Gods liefde is *agapè*, gevende liefde en kan daarom geen verlangen zijn. Tegen deze redenering kan worden ingebracht dat er geen absolute tegenstelling tussen gevende en nemende liefde bestaat. In de liefde vindt een dialectische beweging plaats van nemen en genomen worden, van bezitten en bezeten worden, van jezelf zoeken en jezelf verliezen aan de ander, waarin het zelfverlies aan de beminde de overhand krijgt op de zelfbetrokkenheid van de minnaar. Juist door zichzelf aan de beminde te verliezen wordt de minnaar zelf gelukkig (vgl. Jüngel 1977:438-442). Dit betekent dat gevende liefde verlangen naar de ander niet hoeft uit te sluiten. Ook erotisch verlangen kan op deze wijze deel uitmaken van gevende liefde (De Knijff 1987:288-289; Ter Horst 1992:77). Sterker nog, zonder enige vorm van verlangen kan gevende liefde niet bestaan. Hoe zou een minnaar zich werkelijk aan de beminde kunnen geven zonder naar de beminde te verlangen? Daarom sluit het feit dat wij Gods liefde in de zending van Jezus Christus als gevende liefde leren kennen, niet uit dat God verlangt naar de mensen die hij liefheeft.

Het tweede gegeven, dat begeerte samengaat met gemis en tekort, suggereert dat wij aan God een tekort toedichten wanneer wij hem verlangen toeschrijven, een gemis dat alleen kan worden vervuld wanneer zijn liefde wordt beantwoord. Wanneer Gods verlangen een dergelijk gemis impliceert, zou dat betekenen dat God pas door het antwoord van zijn beminden tot een vervulde liefdesrelatie en tot volle liefde zou kunnen komen. God zou dan in en door zijn liefdesrelatie tot anderen meer van liefde worden vervuld dan voorheen. Dit is in strijd met de onuitputtelijke volheid van liefde die God als de drie-ene in zichzelf is (Barth 1942:313-318; Lewis

1984:116; Schwöbel 1997:98). Dat God zelf volkomen volheid van liefde is, betekent omgekeerd echter niet dat wij hem elke vorm van verlangen dienen te ontzeggen. Alleen een verlangen dat voortkomt uit een tekort is bij God ondenkbaar. Wanneer God verlangt kan dat alleen een verlangen zijn dat voortkomt uit volheid en uit overvloed. Hoezeer menselijke liefde voor haar vervulling ook afhankelijk moge zijn van het antwoord van de geliefde, Gods volkomen liefde is van die beantwoording niet afhankelijk. Wanneer wij ons proberen voor te stellen hoe God werkelijk naar anderen kan verlangen zonder voor zijn liefde van hun antwoord afhankelijk te zijn, kunnen de beelden van een overvloeiende bron en een fontein ons op weg helpen. Deze beelden verhelderen hoe Gods verlangen naar anderen voortkomt uit de volheid van zijn eigen liefde.⁵ Omdat het goddelijk verlangen voortkomt uit volheid, is het geen behoefte aan wederliefde. Wanneer iemand behoefte heeft aan de liefde van een geliefde, kan zij alleen liefhebbend blijven door de liefde van de ander. Haar liefde is dan een potentie die in en door een wederkerige liefdesrelatie wordt gerealiseerd. De liefde van de drie-ene God is echter geen potentie die pas gerealiseerd wordt in en door een wederzijdse liefdesrelatie met zijn schepselen. Zij is altijd al ten volle werkelijkheid in de drie-ene God zelf (Barth 1932:507-510).

Op dit punt verschilt mijn begrip van Gods liefde aanmerkelijk van dat van Brümmer. Brümmer maakt geen onderscheid tussen verlangen uit volheid en verlangen uit gemis. Verlangen is bij hem altijd een behoefte, ook het verlangen van God. Dat God in zijn liefde naar mensen verlangt, betekent voor hem dat God mensen nodig heeft voor zijn eigen identiteit en waarde. Voor de stelling dat Gods liefde mensen nodig heeft, voert Brümmer verschillende argumenten aan (Brümmer 1993:241-242). Een mens die mij liefheeft verleent mij identiteit en waarde; als een ander mij niet nodig heeft, ben ik niets (1). Bij de liefde van God is dit niet anders (2). Als God ons niet nodig heeft, zijn wij overbodig (3). Geen van deze drie argumenten vind ik overtuigend. Ben ik als mens werkelijk niets waard als er geen ander mens is die mij nodig heeft? En als dat bij mensen al het geval zou zijn, op grond waarvan zou het dan bij God ook zo moeten zijn? En zijn wij werkelijk overbodig, als God ons niet nodig heeft voor zijn eigen identiteit en waarde? Op grond van het Bijbels getuigenis over Gods zelf-openbarende liefdedaden vind ik het aannemelijker dat ik iemand ben en dat ik waardevol ben doordat God mij liefheeft met zijn volkomen goddelijke, zijn overvloeiende en scheppende liefde. De liefde waarmee ik op mijn beurt Gods liefde beantwoord, is niet op dezelfde wijze overvloeiend en scheppend als Gods liefde voor mij.

Het derde gegeven uit de algemene omschrijving van menselijk verlangen is dat ons verlangen wordt gewekt door wat ons aantrekt. In het verlangen worden wij naar een ander toe bewogen door de aantrekkelijkheid van die ander. Wat de beminde aantrekkelijk maakt in de ogen van de minnaar verschilt sterk van geval tot geval. Maar hoe men de aantrekkelijkheid van een bepaalde beminde voor een bepaalde minnaar ook nader kan omschrijven, zij zal altijd bestaan in iets dat goed is in de ogen van de minnaar. Wie liefheeft kijkt met welgevallen naar de beminde. Het is voor mensen buitengewoon moeilijk, zo niet onmogelijk om iets afstotelijks en weerzinwekkends te beminnen. Wanneer het welgevallen van de minnaar aan de beminde, die goed is in zijn ogen, de kern is van Gods liefde voor mensen, dan is Gods liefde voor zondaren onmogelijk (Barth 1942:312-313). God kan zondaren dan alleen liefhebben, nadat zij goede mensen zijn geworden. Paulus zegt echter nadrukkelijk dat God ons zijn liefde heeft bewezen, toen wij nog zondaren waren, en dat hij ons heeft gerechtvaardigd door de dood van Christus (Romeinen 5,8). Luther trok daaruit terecht de conclusie dat God de goddeloze rechtvaardigt en dat Hij zijn liefde bewijst aan slechte mensen (vgl. Jüngel 1998:58-61). Willen wij met Paulus

⁵ Deze beelden herinneren aan de notie van het *bonum communicativum sui* (zie Meijering 2006:46).

Wanneer deze notie wordt losgemaakt van het neoplatoonse emanatiedenken kan zij worden gebruikt om Gods liefde te begrijpen als onuitputtelijk en overvloeiend.

Gods rechtvaardigend handelen in de dood van Christus verstaan als een zelf-openbarende daad van zijn liefde, dan kunnen wij welgevallen aan de goedheid van de beminde niet als de kern van goddelijke liefde beschouwen. God bemint, zo stelt Luther terecht, zondaren, bozen, dwazen en zwakken en hij maakt hen rechtvaardig, goed, wijs en sterk door zijn liefde. Zondaren zijn mooi omdat ze worden bemind, ze worden niet bemind omdat ze mooi zijn.⁶ Precies op dit punt ligt het grote verschil tussen goddelijke en menselijke liefde. De liefde van de mens wordt gewekt door wat beminnenswaardig is. De liefde van God treft het beminnenswaardige niet aan in de ander, maar schept het.⁷ Gods liefde maakt mensen mooi en aantrekkelijk. Gods liefde is scheppend. Dat is het grote verschil tussen de liefde van God en de liefde van mensen.

LIEFDE EN VERBOND

Wie een ander liefheeft wil bij de ander zijn om wie die ander zelf is, en hij wil door de ander bemind worden om wie hij zelf is. Er is geen ander en geen hoger doel dan dat deze liefde gebeurt. Voor wie liefheeft is de beminde geen middel om een doel te bereiken, maar doel in zichzelf. Ook de liefdesrelatie is geen middel om een doel te bereiken, maar een doel in zichzelf. Dat is anders wanneer twee personen een contract met elkaar sluiten en bepaalde rechten en plichten ten opzichte van elkaar op zich nemen om bepaalde doelen te bereiken. Het doel van een dergelijke, zakelijke relatie ligt niet in de persoon van de ander; de ander en de relatie met hem is slechts een middel om een doel te bereiken.. Brümmer heeft de verschillen tussen een relatie van persoonlijke verbondenheid en een relatie van rechten en plichten geanalyseerd en op basis van deze analyse beargumenteerd dat de liefdesverhouding tussen God en mens het beste begrepen kan worden als een relatie van persoonlijke verbondenheid en niet als een relatie van rechten en plichten (Brümmer 1993:164-173, 191-205). Het is in dit kader onmogelijk om op alle onderdelen van zijn argumentatie in te gaan. Wel wil ik een vraag stellen bij de tegenstelling tussen contract en verbondenheid waarop heel zijn redenering berust. Moeten we naast deze twee vormen van relatie niet als derde vorm het Bijbelse verbond onderscheiden? Met andere woorden: is het verbond niet een eigensoortige relatie tussen mensen en tussen God en mens?

Een volle persoonlijke liefdesrelatie tussen twee minnaars vraagt om wederzijdse beloften van trouw en wordt door die beloften een verbond (Van Genneep 1972:76, 86; Ter Horst 1992:54, 63; De Kruijff 2008:112-113). Brümmer spreekt over menselijke trouw alleen als risico: mensen kunnen, in tegenstelling tot God, ontrouw worden. De belofte van trouw speelt in zijn overwegingen geen rol. Dat lijkt mij een tekort. De beloften maken een liefdesrelatie tot een volle relatie, een verbond. Beloften scheppen ook zekere verplichtingen, en waar verplichtingen zijn, bestaan ook zekere rechten. De term 'rechten' wekt echter gemakkelijk associaties met 'eisen' (claims). Eisen betekenen inderdaad het einde van persoonlijke liefde. Om de associatie met 'eisen' in dit verband te vermijden, kunnen we de term 'rechten' vervangen door 'gerechtvaardigde verwachtingen'. Wanneer geliefden zich in liefde aan elkaar verbinden en elkaar trouw beloven, mogen zij gerechtvaardigde verwachtingen jegens elkaar koesteren. Dit is niet in strijd met hun liefde als persoonlijke verbondenheid.

Dit geldt ook voor de liefde tussen God en mens. Het Oude Testament noemt de liefde van God de oorsprong van het verbond tussen God en zijn volk, maar dit sluit niet uit dat dit verbond bepaalde verplichtingen kent (Brueggemann 1997:414-425). De liefdesverhouding tussen

6 Amor Dei in homine vivens diligit peccatores, malos, stultos, infirmos, ut faciat iustos, bonos, sapientes, robustos ...Ideo enim peccatores sunt pulchri, quia diliguntur, non ideo diliguntur quia sunt pulchri (Luther 1518, xxviii).

7 Amor Dei non invenit sed creat suum diligibile, Amor hominis fit a suo diligibili (Luther 1518: xxviii). Vgl. Lewis 1984:117, 119.

God en zijn volk is tegelijk een rechtsverhouding, zonder dat dit iets afdoet aan de liefde. In zijn verhouding tot mensen, waarvoor Gods verhouding tot Israël model staat, is God tegelijk liefhebbend en rechtvaardig. Hoe tegengesteld liefde en rechtvaardigheid ons soms ook kunnen toeschijnen, in God en in Gods relatie met mensen gaan zij hand in hand. Paulus stemt overeen met de oudtestamentische grondovertuiging dat Gods liefde en rechtvaardigheid onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden zijn. Een sprekend voorbeeld daarvan is zijn gedachtegang in Romeinen 5, waarin hij in één adem de dood van Jezus voor zondaren vertolkt als een bewijs van Gods liefde en als een rechtvaardigend en rechtvaardig oordeel (Romeinen 5,6-11). Op grond van deze Bijbelse verbanden moeten we de volle liefdesrelatie tussen God en mens verstaan als een liefdesverbond waarin over en weer gerechtvaardige verwachtingen bestaan.

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KEY WORDS

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Verbond

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Beyond kenoticism: Why the suffering God had to become man¹

ABSTRACT

From its very beginnings Christianity has believed that the redemption of humanity was dependent upon Incarnation and cross, while simultaneously maintaining the impassibility of the Father. Only in and through the Incarnation could God suffer. In the last century, belief in the impassibility of God has become a minority position; the majority position has become that God is passible. The cross of Christ is then mostly seen as a revelation of that passibility, important but not essential to human salvation. In this paper I argue that belief in God's passibility does not necessitate us to give up the idea that the cross of Christ is constitutive of our salvation. On the contrary, once we have abandoned the limited interpretation of redemption as mere forgiveness and restored the original ideal of redemption as a radical healing of human nature, we can gain some insight why God had to become human to transform human nature from the inside out, as He has done in the Incarnation. Drawing on Aquinas and on C.S. Lewis, I suggest that the idea of good infection and the model of the church as the body of Christ can give us some insight in how the Incarnation and passion of Christ can be effective for all of us.

INTRODUCTION

Cur Deus homo? Why did God have to become a human being? Most traditional answers to this question refer to Jesus' suffering and death, and claim that one way or another God had to become man *in order to suffer and die*. Thus it is sometimes claimed that in this way Jesus could give satisfaction to God the Father, that in Jesus God took the punishment for our sins upon Himself, or that God by paying a ransom redeemed man from the clutches of the devil (Beilby & Eddy 2006, Hughes 1949, Mackintosh 1920, Scott 2007). These answers have in common that they make clear why both the Incarnation of the Son of God and His suffering and death were necessary. In the Incarnation and in Jesus' suffering and death God worked the salvation of man. All of the above theories agree on this, that man cannot redeem himself, and that in and through the suffering of the God-man God worked our redemption and our salvation. Thus the Incarnation has a constitutive, *salvific* function.

The above answers to the question why God became man have in common that they assume that God is by nature impassible (*impassibilis*), and that only the Incarnation allows God to undergo the suffering that was needed for our redemption. In our time this assumption that God is impassible is no longer widely shared.² Under the influence of a complex of factors the conviction has grown – first and foremost in the British theology (Brierley 2001), and after that in Christian theology in other parts of the world – that God is not impassible, but capable of

1 I would like to thank Gerrit Brand, Brian Leftow and Robin LePoidevin for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper.

2 This is not to say that it is entirely without support. Recent studies in support of God's impassibility include Weinandy 2000; Gavriluk 2004; Keating & White (eds.) 2009.

suffering. If God is capable of suffering, however, then not only the traditional doctrine of the impassibility of God must be abandoned, but the traditional answers to the question why God became man must be revised as well. If God is by nature prone to suffering, then God need not become man in order to be able to suffer and thereby to pay the price for our sins. The question why God became man, is then usually answered as follows. When God forgives our sins, this means that God because of His love for us human beings wants to preserve His relationship with us, and therefore accepts the suffering that we have inflicted on Him by sinning. Who forgives, pays. God's suffering is the price he pays for forgiving and saving us. This has been revealed to us already in the Old Testament (think of Hosea), but only in the suffering and death of Jesus it is revealed to the full extent. The Incarnation reveals us our salvation, and the price God is willing to pay for it. Therefore, we call this the revelatory or illustrative view of the Incarnation: In the incarnate Son, God shows the price that He is willing to pay for our salvation.

Note that on this view Jesus' suffering and death express the price that God pays, but *are not* that price. This means that on the illustrative view of the Incarnation, both the Incarnation and the suffering and death of Jesus were not necessary for salvation. God has chosen this path as best revealing the price that He pays, but there are obviously other – albeit less perfect – revelations of the same price and the redemption gained by it. The Incarnation, suffering and death of Christ thus are no longer essential to Christianity. They are valuable illustrations of something that was already there, not less than that, but not more either. This consequence of the idea that God suffers, is deeply disquieting to many: it seems to reduce the core of Christian faith to an optional extra. It is no longer clear why the Son of Man must suffer. Therefore those who claim that God already prior to and independent of the Incarnation suffers (and therefore is passible) are confronted with the task to show *why the Incarnation is still needed*. That is what I will try to do in this contribution. By doing so, I follow in the footsteps of Vincent Brümmer, my Ph.D. supervisor, who both first introduced me to the idea that God might be passible and first taught me to think about the question that I will discuss here.

I will proceed as follows. First I will explain how according to traditional, orthodox theology the impassible Son could suffer while remaining impassible. I will then show how the influence of kenotic Christology led to the idea that God incarnate did not remain impassible. Subsequently I will sketch how this kenoticism has radicalized into passibilism, according to which God is passible also apart from the Incarnation. I will not only describe this position but endorse it as well, and finally try to answer why, if God is passible, God should become man.

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW: HOW THE IMPASSIBLE SUFFERED IN JESUS

In the 21st century, when we talk about the Scandal of the Cross we mean by this that in the Roman empire crucifixion was a deliberately cruel and degrading form of punishment. That the Son of God was killed in this way is experienced as offensive and even scandalous. For the Church Fathers Jesus' death on the cross was scandalous in still another way: they were not only shocked by the nature of Jesus' suffering and death, but also by the mere fact of it. In the cultural climate of Hellenism and in the philosophy of the time, feelings and emotions were intrinsically objectionable.³ The Greek term for emotion *pathos* and its Latin equivalent *passio* are etymologically cognate with "passive". This is no accident: The ancient Greeks thought that emotions – "passions" – are *caused* by outside forces. Emotions are irrational experiences by which the mind is passively "swayed". People "undergo" emotions, emotions "happen to"

3 See, e.g., Wolterstorff 1988. Wolterstorff shows how Augustine qualifies the view of emotions as intrinsically objectionable in his anthropology, but fails to apply these qualifications in his doctrine of God.

them, “strike” them, “overwhelm” them. One would be better off without them. This certainly applied to suffering. *A-patheia* (impassibility) was pursued as an ideal, since it made possible an undisturbed operation of the rational mind. These anthropological views also influenced the doctrine of God. Whatever is disapproved of in human beings, cannot be ascribed to God. Thus the human ideal of apathy also became a characteristic of God (Frohnhofen 1987; Mozely 1926).

On the basis of the unconditionedness (Greek *autarkeia*, Latin *aseitas*) of God, the Church fathers came to the same conclusion: God cannot have feelings or emotions. God exists *a se* – through Godself – that is to say creation is dependent on God both for its beginning and for its continuing existence, and therefore God cannot be dependent upon creation. But if God is independent of the world, God cannot suffer. One always suffers *from* or *under* something. Now God is perfect and therefore cannot suffer from some aspect of Godself. If God would suffer, this suffering would have to be caused by some outside force. But that would make God dependent on something apart from God, whereas theology wants to assert that everything that is not God is dependent upon God. Therefore God cannot suffer, nor can God experience any other emotions. This does not imply that the inner life of God does not have a “feeling tone”: Christian theology has often described an immutable blissfulness to God (Aquinas: I 26; Randles 1900; Creel 1986:1, 132-139, 144-146, 163-165).

This blissfulness is the point of departure for another argument against divine passibility, in which it is argued that if God is not blissful, human beings cannot reach salvation (Sart 1992:59-65). Thus, St Augustine argues, fellowship with God is the supreme good. Happiness can be found in this fellowship (Augustine: 4,5,13, and 18; cf. Brümmer 1993:118-126). But what if Godself is not perfectly happy? How can supreme happiness consist in a relationship with someone who suffers from unhappiness? Thus the denial of God’s blissfulness also throws doubt upon the possibility that human beings find happiness in fellowship with God.

Summarizing: both their views on the human emotional life and their beliefs about God’s unconditionedness and blissfulness provided reasons for early Christians to hold that God must be impassible. The concurrence of these three reasons explains how this belief could become a deep-rooted conviction.

It can easily be understood why the doctrine of divine impassibility led to tensions in early Christian theology. For if the following three statements are true,

1. God is impassible
2. Jesus is God
3. Jesus has suffered

combined they lead to a fourth statement that – if not contradictory – is highly paradoxical:

4. The impassible suffered.

(2) and (3) find much support in the New Testament. Thus Jesus claims in St John’s Gospel that He and the Father are one (10:38) and that who has seen Jesus, has seen the Father (14:9; cf. 1:18). In the same Gospel the crucifixion belongs to the essence of Jesus’ mission (12:27; cf. 15:13). It does neither say that the unity of Father and Son is broken at the crucifixion, nor that we cannot see the Father on the cross.

This explains why (4) is not a construction of a theologian in search of a problem, but an adequate rendering of the position of St Cyril of Alexandria (†444)⁴ and of the mainstream of the Christian tradition. How could St Cyril and the theological tradition following him adopt this paradox? How could they claim that in Christ the impassible God suffered without losing His impassibility? Traditionally, theologians answer these questions by referring to the doctrine of

4 It is far from certain that St Cyril literally used this formula. See Weinandy 2000: esp. 202–203. Anselm I 8 also defends the classical position.

communicatio idiomatum: the perfect interchange of the properties of God and man in Christ. The hypostatic union of the human and the divine nature in the Person of Christ is such that the attributes of both natures can be truly ascribed to this one Person. Thus Christ is omnipotent – since omnipotence is an attribute of the divine nature – as well as passible – since passibility is an attribute of the human nature. Since it is the same subject – Christ – Who is God and man, the man in Christ shares the properties of God and *vice versa*. That is why we can say that St Mary is the “mother of God” (*theotokos*). If the man Jesus was the son of Mary, the doctrine of *communicatio idiomatum* allows us to say that the Logos incarnate was the son of Mary, and thus that Mary was the mother of God. But the same person who was born of Mary suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and died. So if we can say that Mary is the mother of God, we can also say that God suffered and died. There is one proviso: the *communicatio idiomatum* only applies to the conjunction of concrete and concrete, not to the conjunction of abstract and abstract. The divine nature does not share in the attributes of the human nature and vice versa. If God suffered in Christ, this does not mean that the divine nature suffered. It remained impassible. Jesus’ divine nature does not share in the attributes of his human nature – and *vice versa*. It is only by His union with the flesh that the Logos incarnate, though His divine nature remains impassible, can suffer.

The assertion that the impassible Logos, without losing His impassible nature, can suffer by His union with the flesh, is often judged to be incoherent. However, a simple analogy can show that it is not. Of itself an MP3 player is mute (has a mute “nature”), even when its batteries are full et cetera. It can produce electric signals only, and it needs an amplifier with loudspeakers to translate those signals into sounds. In a similar way, if the divine nature is impassible, the incarnate Logos might suffer through the Flesh during the Incarnation, without thereby losing His essential impassibility. Thus there is no contradiction involved in the assertion that the impassible divine Logos became incarnate and suffered.

Before embarking on a discussion of an alternative position, I would like to note that the traditional view of the suffering of Jesus that I have just sketched sits well with the traditional motives for Incarnation as they have been put forward by St Anselm and others.

BRITISH KENOTICISM: HOW THE IMPASSIBLE LOGOS GAVE UP HIS IMPASSIBILITY⁵

On the classical interpretation of the Incarnation, Jesus’ divine nature remained impassible all through His suffering and death. Nowadays, many are no longer convinced by this position. One of the arguments against it is that it does not do justice to Scripture. A key Bible text in this connection is the Christ hymn of Philippians 2:6-8 (WEB):

6 who, existing in the form of God,
didn’t consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a servant,
being made in the likeness of men.
8 And being found in human form,
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
yes, the death of the cross.⁶

⁵ On the subject of this section and the next, see Meessen 1989.

⁶ On the notoriously difficult translation and interpretation of this hymn, see Martin 1967; cf. Marshall 1968.

On a terminological note, where the English reads “emptied himself”, the Greek has *heauton ekenoosen*. *Ekenoosen* is etymologically cognate to *kenosis*; hence the application of *kenosis* (self-emptying) to Jesus’ Incarnation. Hence also the term “kenotic theology” for a theology that claims that the self-emptying of Jesus went so far that in the Incarnation He emptied Himself of His divine attributes.⁷ This implies that the incarnate Logos gave up His impassibility.

St Paul seems to assert that Christ, while aware of the fact that He was by right equal to God, when becoming man gave up His divinity and without reservation took the role of a slave. If one reads the text thus, the crucifixion loses its paradoxical character: the Logos who suffered on the cross had surrendered His impassibility already at the Incarnation. Here, one might say, the crucifixion becomes the ultimate consequence of the Incarnation.

Kenotic theology has ancient roots, that go back at least as far as Luther’s *theologia crucis* (Ngien 1995), which was further developed in the schools of Tübingen and Gießen. A full-blown kenotic theology, however, was developed only under the influence of Hegel in the German theology of the nineteenth century.⁸ German kenoticism also influenced British theology; here, I will concentrate on British kenoticism.⁹ One of the British kenoticists is the undeservedly forgotten theologian Robert Paterson. In his *The Philosophy of the Atonement* he revisits St Anselm’s age-old question: Why did God have to become man? In that connection Paterson says the following:

God ... sacrificed Himself we say, denied Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. Our Saviour was “God manifest in the flesh”; and it was not the half of Him, so to say, or the one side merely of His complex personality that suffered. I prick my finger. It is not the lower half of me, the material organism, which suffers. I suffer. The mind, the soul, the spirit, the real *ego* or self suffers. And I could not conceive of our blessed Lord’s Divine nature of personality looking calmly on unmoved, untouched by one feeling of grief of sorrow or pang of regret, while the lower and human nature or personality, in indissoluble union of one consciousness, suffered the agony and bloody sweat of Gethsemane and the most terrible distress of the Cross. To me, I say this is wholly unbelievable. ... (I) In a grandly sympathetic manner the Divinity suffered with the humanity. Indeed, even the Father Himself suffered in the suffering of the Son. Of Jehovah the Scripture does not hesitate to say, with reference to Israel, “In all their afflictions He was afflicted”. How much more then in the peculiar afflictions of His Beloved? The conclusion is, that the Divine person in closest union, in oneness of consciousness, with the human personality of the suffering Jesus, could not possibly escape all pain and grief and sorrow. ... Well then, God, in assuming human nature, humbled Himself: in and through the assumption of it He suffered with and for man (Paterson 1892:18-20).

This quotation is typical of British kenoticism (Smedes 1953). Contrary to the tradition affirming the impassibility even of the suffering Logos, it is here affirmed that the *incarnate* Logos at least is not longer impassible. This need not imply a more rigorous denial of God’s impassibility, in which the divine nature itself is passible.

Does kenotic theology lead to new answers to the question why God had to become man? One might expect that it does. If God is by nature impassible but empties Himself of this impassibility

7 Less radical forms of kenoticism assert that the incarnate Logos did not give up His divine attributes but only the use of them.

8 The most important names are: Ernst Sartorius (1797-1859), Karl Theodor Albert Liebner (1806-1871), Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810-1877), Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875), Franz Hermann Reinhold Frank (1827-1894) en Wölg. Friedrich Geß (1819-1891). See, e.g., Isaac Dörner 1994:49–81.

9 British kenoticists include Frank Weston (1871-1924), Clarence E. Rolt (1881-1981), William Temple (1881-1944), Charles Gore (1853-1932), Bertrand R. Brasnett (1893-1988), and the group from which *Lux Mundi* originated. On Rolt, see Brierley 2001: 221-223.

in the Incarnation, the suffering of the Logos brings a “new experience”¹⁰ to God. One might say that by suffering God learns something that He did not know before: How pain feels.¹¹ From this, some British theologians have drawn the conclusion that only by the Incarnation has God become omniscient. As David Brown has it:

Some children have the misfortune to be borne without the ability to experience pain and so unless they are educated in time about the consequences of their actions they end up by doing themselves permanent damage, even accidentally killing themselves. However, if they survive to adulthood, then they will have acquired a good knowledge of the consequences of pain, but even so they will remain without any experiential knowledge of what it feels like to be in pain. Similarly it seems to me with God. Of course, without the Incarnation he already had perfect knowledge of the consequences of pain, but only the Incarnation could have brought him knowledge of what it feels like to be one of us (Brown 1989: 55-56).

Here the assumption of passibility becomes an independent motive for Incarnation: to be omniscient, God *must* become man.

FROM KENOTICISM TO PASSIBILISM: WHY GOD MUST BE PASSIBLE

The idea that only by the Incarnation God became omniscient has never received much support. Theologians who assume that omniscience and impassibility are incompatible, will generally deny God’s impassibility even apart from the Incarnation: The divine nature itself is passible.¹² This is in fact a radicalization of kenoticism, which is no longer limited to Christology but extended to the doctrine of God: We may speak of a kenosis of God the Father as well.¹³ What are the grounds for this radicalization? A central argument runs as follows: If Jesus merely *were* God, we might through the doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum* reconcile His suffering with the impassibility of God. But Jesus also is the most definitive and most perfect *revelation* of who God is. “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9 WEB: cf. 1:18). If, moreover, the cross is essential to Jesus’ mission (as suggested in the Gospel of St John), it is strange to deny that the cross has something to say to us about the Father. This becomes even stranger when one realises that suffering is characteristic not only of the end of Jesus’ life, but of the whole of it (Heidelberg Catechism Sunday 15, Answer 37; Karl Barth), and that the gospels therefore are “passion narratives with extended introductions” (Martin Kähler). That precisely the fact that Jesus is taken to be God’s ultimate self-revelation leads to the introduction of *kenosis* into the doctrine of God, can be seen from many texts. I give two examples. The first comes from a book by North-American theologian Douglas John Hall:

If it is really God who is revealed in and through the crucified one, then how can we continue to speak about the divine “impassibility” at all, or at least without subjecting it to a thorough Christological overhaul! (Hall 1986:215)

That the same conclusion was drawn already at the beginning of the twentieth century can be shown from the following passionate quote from another North-American theologian, Charles Allen Dinsmore:

10 Thus Jürgen Moltmann at a certain stage of his work. For a brief but good description and analysis, see Fiddes 1988:8-9.

11 On the question whether one must have suffered oneself in order to know how pain feels see Sarot 1991a:89-92; Nagasawa 2008.

12 Thus the “Doctrine Commission of the Church of England” 1987, which claims that “Christians, at least in the mainstream traditions, do not say that God as God has to go through suffering in order to learn, develop or mature” (159), while it asserts that “the issue of the suffering of God is confronted, and belief in an impassible God is discarded” (ix).

13 The idea of a *kenosis* of the Father was already suggested in Fairbairn 1897: 484, 552.

In Jesus of Nazareth the Eternal Word felt the pangs of the cross. But that three hours' pain was not a spasm ending in unbroken joy. It was symbolical of a perpetual feeling. What Jesus experienced in spiritual revulsion from sin, and his suffering on its behalf, is a revelation of an unchanging consciousness in God. As the flash of the volcano discloses for a few hours the elemental fires at the earth's centre, so the light on Calvary was the bursting forth through historical conditions of the very nature of the Everlasting. There was a cross in the heart of God before there was one planted on the green hill outside of Jerusalem. And now that the cross of wood has been taken down, the one in the heart of God abides, and it will remain so long as there is one sinful soul for whom to suffer (Dinsmore 1906: 232-233).¹⁴

We have seen above that the rejection of divine impassibility in contemporary theology has become so strong, that the Anglican Church distances itself from it in official doctrinal documents. This doctrinal development cannot be explained from Christology only. It is also based on novel exegetical insights into various Old Testament texts¹⁵ and on the fact that in light of the amount of suffering in the world, a co-suffering God is in the eyes of many more credible than a blissfully impassible God.¹⁶ A final argument in favour of a suffering God is that in contemporary theology – and in contemporary popular faith – more than in earlier stages of Christian faith and dogma, love has become the defining characteristic of God. And love is not love, it is argued, when it does not at least involve a vulnerability to pain.¹⁷ Here, I merely sum up these arguments without analyzing them, in order to focus on the question: If God was suffering anyhow, why should he have become man?

In my discussion of these questions I focus on two theologians: Eli Stanley Jones (1884–1973) en Vincent Brümmer (*1932). Jones was an American Methodist missionary to India who authored 28 books. His is a narrative theology *avant la lettre*: He articulates valuable theological insights by means of an exposition and analysis of specific examples. In *Christ and Human Suffering* he tells the following story.

When two young men were guilty of immorality in the Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi it broke his heart. He had preached purity to India, and yet impurity had invaded his own Ashram. Out of sheer sorrow of spirit he began to fast. For six days he fasted. When after this ordeal those boys stood before Gandhi and begged to be forgiven and restored to fellowship, could he do it? Yes, he could offer them forgiveness now, for it would no longer be a cheap forgiveness. It had the stain of the blood of his own suffering upon it (Jones 1933:182).

And he concludes from this analogy:

If God offers us forgiveness on the basis of the Divine omnipotence, ... then I am sure that we cannot take it. It lacks moral quality. It is cheap. But if He offers us forgiveness on the basis, not of the Divine omnipotence, but of the Divine self-sacrifice – if He offers it in a nail-pierced hand, then our moral sense will let us take it (Jones 1933:183).

The Incarnation and suffering of the Logos remain important for the atonement:

(T)his outward cross that was lifted up in history is a sign of that inward cross that lies upon the heart of God. We who are bound by our senses could not see the inward cross upon God's heart unless and until it was lifted up before our senses. The Italian painter was crudely right, then, when he pictured the nails driven into the hands of Jesus as going through the wood and into the hands of the Father at the back (Jones 1933:168).

14 On contacts between American and British passibilism, see Brierley 2001:229. A British example of the same argument can be found in: Hughes 1924:95, 102.

15 The best study is still Heschel 1962; on the interpretation of key text 1 Samuel 15, see Sarot 2001.

16 On this argument, see Sarot 1991b.

17 On this argument, see Sarot 1992: 80-91.

Thus the cross reveals the atoning suffering of God, that began already before the Logos became incarnate. Does this not render Incarnation and cross superfluous? For Jones, this is not the case: we could not see the wounded heart of God before it was made visible to us at Golgotha. On this issue, Vincent Brümmer is even more outspoken:

Christ's suffering is not merely the paradigmatic *revelation* of God's atoning forgiveness. Such a revelation is also a necessary condition for this forgiveness to achieve reconciliation. ... Through sin ... we have become estranged from God. ... (T)his estrangement has led to ignorance. Not only do we not know God; we do not even know who God is. For this reason we have lost the ability to seek reconciliation with God. We cannot seek divine forgiveness, for we do not know whether God is longsuffering enough to forgive. In fact, we cannot repent, for we do not know whom we have offended. And since we are unable to repent, God's forgiveness cannot be effective. In the words of John Burnaby, "there can be no effective forgiveness unless the wrong-doer repents of his wrong-doing, knows whom he has offended, and comes back to him with a changed mind ..." (Brümmer 1993:2002; cf Brümmer 2006:413).

In short, forgiveness presupposes repentance. One cannot forgive someone who still approves of his offense(s). Such a person does not even realize that he is in need of forgiveness. In order to become aware of this, a person must know (1) that he has given offense, (2) whom he has offended (3) what the offense consists of. This knowledge human beings no longer have and must be revealed to them. Moreover, Brümmer suggests, human beings will not ask for forgiveness if they do not know that God is prepared to forgive. This willingness to forgive is revealed only at the cross.

At first sight, Brümmer seems to succeed in showing why Incarnation and cross are essential to human salvation, even if God is passible by nature. He shares with the illustrative view of Incarnation and cross the idea that these are revelations of God's purposes; for Brümmer, however, they are not *mere* revelations but revelations that are necessary for human salvation.¹⁸ If one compares the history of Christianity with the history of Judaism, however, Brümmer's view loses much of its plausibility. While Christian theologians have almost unanimously asserted the impassibility of God until the nineteenth century, Jewish thinkers have through the ages drawn attention to God's suffering. We have seen above that Biblical scholars nowadays affirm that the dominant image of God in the Hebrew Scriptures is passible. God is depicted as having an anthropomorphous inner life, as loving (Is. 63:9), rejoicing (Zeph. 3:17) repenting (Gen. 6:6), suffering (Is. 63:7, Ex. 3:7-8) and having compassion (Ex. 34:6), but also as being jealous (Ex.20:5), being angry (Hos. 11:9) and hating (Am. 5:21). It is certainly not the case that only in the narrative part of the Hebrew Scriptures feelings and emotions are ascribed to God, so that one might claim that this happens only to embellish the stories, not to make statements about God. On the contrary, emotion terms take pride of place also in more general, confessional statements about God like Ex. 34:6-7 (WEB):

Yahweh! Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth, keeping loving kindness for thousands, forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin; and that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the children's children.

This text, which in various forms is repeated time and again in the Hebrew Scriptures, is not presented as conclusion drawn by human beings from the way in which God has acted

¹⁸ Still, if one distinguishes with Knitter 2003: 53 between an "ontological fix" in which God does something about what's wrong with the human situation and an "epistemological fix" in which God makes us known what was wrong to begin with, for Brümmer Incarnation and cross figure in the "epistemological fix" only.

throughout salvation history, but as a direct self-revelation of God. It follows, that the passibility of God belongs to the core of the message of the Hebrew Scriptures (Fretheim 1984:24-29). If, however, God's passibility, God's pity and God's willingness to forgive had been revealed already in the Hebrew Scriptures, the question rises why the Incarnation and suffering of the Logos were still necessary. This question is underscored by the fact that through the centuries, Jews have asserted the suffering of God. In this connection, especially the Rabbinic traditions deserve to be mentioned: They unhesitatingly affirm God's passionate involvement with His chosen people, His suffering, His distress, even His tears (Kuhn 1968 and 1978; Chalier 2003). And if Biblical exegetes nowadays recognize the passionate Nature of YHWH in the Hebrew Scriptures, the first impulse to this insight came from a Jewish thinker, Abraham Joshua Heschel (Heschel 1936 and 1962). On the other hand, Christian theologians unanimously asserted the impassibility of God until the nineteenth century; movements that are now often seen as precursors to contemporary passibilism such as patripassianism, theopaschitism and Luther's theology of the cross, in fact unwaveringly asserted the divine impassibility.¹⁹ Historical evidence, therefore, speaks against the idea that Incarnation and cross are needed to reveal the price that God is willing to pay for forgiving human beings. This message was received more powerfully in Judaism!

Thus the doubts about the illustrative view of the Incarnation with which I began this paper are reinforced: If Incarnation and cross are revelations of the price the compassionate God is willing to pay for our redemption, and revelations of the inner Trinitarian life of God as it is even apart from the Incarnation, the least we should say is that they are inefficient revelations. Their revelatory function cannot have been their only function. This means that there must have been another reason for the Incarnation and suffering of the Logos. What more can we say about that reason?

WHY THE SUFFERING GOD HAD TO BECOME MAN²⁰

Western theology has often narrowed atonement to forgiveness. Humanity has sinned against God and needs God's forgiveness. Man must confess his guilt, but that does not suffice. Satisfaction must be made (St Anselm), an act of voluntary suffering was needed (St Thomas Aquinas), or someone had to pay the penalty for the sins of human beings in an act of penal substitution (Calvin) – and in this way forgiveness is obtained and atonement achieved either for humanity (St Thomas Aquinas) or for a limited number of elect (Calvin). In either case, atonement involves suffering and God takes this suffering upon Godself – on traditional theology, at the cross, and on the passibilist alternative, already before and apart from the cross. If atonement is limited to forgiveness, a passibilist theology must lead to the conclusion that Incarnation and cross are not constitutive of atonement, but merely reveal it. But is it correct to limit atonement to forgiveness? The English term at-one-ment may be interpreted as pointing in that direction: it is a term we use for repairing broken relationships: after atonement, the two that were separated are one again, and their relationships is restored.

Redemption, however, involves more than the forgiveness of sins and the restoration of a broken relation. Redemption is not merely about the recovery of a relationship, but about the recovery of a man himself, whose very being has been tainted by sin and its consequences.

19 See Sarot 1990 and 1996. Patripassianism (also called modalism) was a Trinitarian heresy: Praxeas and other patripassians insufficiently distinguished between Father and Son while safeguarding the Father's impassibility. *Theopaschitism* is about the same *Theos* as that mentioned in *Theotokos*: God the Son. It was, according to theopaschitism, God the Son who suffered in the flesh. On Luther's theology of the cross see, e.g., McGrath 1985.

20 For this part of my paper I owe inspiration to an unpublished lecture by Kathryn Tanner: Tanner 2003. This does not mean that I take the position I defend here from Tanner.

Human will, knowledge and abilities all suffer under the effects of sin; yes, the whole of creation suffers from these. Many of the church fathers argue that it is to recovering true humanity, humanity as it was intended, and not merely to atonement, that the Incarnation and suffering of Jesus are essential. The idea is that, just like sin and imperfection are somehow contagious and have not infected some people only, but all, the sinlessness and perfection of Jesus are contagious as well, and are in principle capable of 'infecting' all humanity. The church fathers have often articulated this idea in a way that is no longer acceptable to contemporary humanity. Thus Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century) personifies death and suggests that at the death of Jesus, death along with the bait of flesh swallowed the hook of His divinity. Thus death was divested of its power, for where life is, death cannot be (Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* 24, p. 494).

However, the same thought can be articulated in different ways as well. Gregory of Nazianzus asserted that in the Incarnation Christ bears "all of me together with everything belonging to it in Himself, so that in Himself He may exhaust the bad, as fire does wax, or as the sun does the mists of earth, and that I may participate in His nature by the blending".²¹ Or, again in the words of Gregory of Nyssa, "Although Christ took our filth upon himself, nevertheless he is not himself defiled by the pollution, but in his own self he cleanses the filth, for it say, the light shone in the darkness, but the darkness did not overpower it".²² These texts suggest that Jesus, by assuming human nature, cleansed and healed it from the inside.

In my view, these texts help us to understand why the suffering God had to become man. Forgiveness was possible apart from Incarnation and cross. People forgive one another, and God is a forgiving God already in the Hebrew Scriptures. Forgiveness, however, does not suffice to withdraw human beings from the power of sin and evil. That requires a healing that goes through and through and reaches the innermost nature of man. Unlike forgiveness, this healing cannot be effected by a mere external action. It requires a much more intimate entrance of God into human nature than forgiveness, and this is precisely what happened in the Incarnation. Of course, we should not interpret the effects of the Incarnation in terms of instant-efficacy, as if the Incarnation by itself would suffice to cause immediate and complete healing. That would make the cross redundant, and we know that it was not. By going through the various stages of human life from birth to death, Jesus sanctified and healed them. Here also, God's grace works in a historical process: "The Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him" (Lk 2:40 NASB). On this interpretation, the redemption of man is no reaction of the Father to the work of the Logos, but the Father brings about our redemption through the Logos. This, then, is a fully constitutive interpretation of Incarnation and cross, and no mere illustrative one.

Of course, this interpretation does not answer all questions. Ultimately, it fails to explain *how* God redeems human beings from within; it does not offer a step-by-step description of the way in which God brings about our redemption. This is only what could be expected, however, since "God's atoning self-identification with us in our sinful humanity is ultimately beyond human comprehension" (Torrance 1997:163). Though full comprehension is beyond human reach, C.S. Lewis and Thomas Aquinas can help us to take some further steps towards it. Lewis introduced the idea that our redemption can work from within because by becoming Christians we start to share in the life of Christ. We are transformed by "good infection":

Now the whole offer which Christianity makes is this: that we can, if we let God have His way, come to share in the life of Christ. If we do, we shall then be sharing a life which was

21 Gregory of Nazianzus IV 6; my own translation, prepared with reference to the translation by Charles G. Browne and James E. Swallow in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd series vol. 7.

22 Gregory of Nyssa, *Antirrheticus aduersus Apollinarium* 26, quoted by Thomas F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh 1988), 162.

begotten, not made, which always existed and always will exist. Christ is the Son of God. If we share in this kind of life we ... shall love the Father as He does and the Holy Ghost will arise in us. He came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has – by what I call “good infection” (Lewis 1948: 27-28).

To share in the life of Christ so that He can infect us with the good – how should we picture that to ourselves? Here, I propose, St Paul’s idea that the Christian community is the body of Christ, and that Christ is the Head of this body, may be helpful. In 1 Corinthians 12 St Paul both emphasises that all Christians together are Christ’s body, and that individual Christians are parts of that body with distinct functions: the community needs all of its members like a body does so. Each member is indispensable, and this especially applies to the weakest members, that should be treated with special honour. At various places, Paul identifies Christ as the Head of this body (Eph. 1:22, 4:15, 5:23, Col. 1:18). As we all know, the functioning of the Head is essential to the body: If anything can infect the body with the good, its Head can. The Body of Christ is crucified (Col. 1: 18-22) and resurrected (1 Cor. 6:14-15) with its Head. Thus, by being members of Christ we can be redeemed. In the words of Thomas Aquinas:

Christ’s Passion causes forgiveness of sins by way of redemption. For since He is our head, then, by the Passion which He endured from love and obedience, He delivered us as His members from our sins, as by the price of His Passion: in the same way as if a man by the good industry of his hands were to redeem himself from a sin committed with his feet. For, just as the natural body is one though made up of diverse members, so the whole Church, Christ’s mystic body, is reckoned as one person with its head, which is Christ (Aquinas, *STh* IIIa 49,1 c., Dominican tr. 1920).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From its very beginnings Christianity has believed that the redemption of humanity was dependent upon Incarnation and cross, while simultaneously maintaining the impassibility of the Father. Only in and through the Incarnation could God suffer. In the last century, belief in the impassibility of God has become a minority position; a majority of Christians believe, and theologians maintain, that God is passible. The cross of Christ is then mostly seen as a revelation of that passibility, important but not essential to human salvation. Being convinced that God is passible, but not being content with a merely illustrative or revelatory function for the cross of Christ, in this paper I argued that belief in God’s passibility does not necessitate us to give up the idea that the cross of Christ is constitutive of our salvation. On the contrary, once we have abandoned the limited interpretation of redemption as mere forgiveness and restored the original ideal of redemption as a radical healing of human nature, we can gain some insight why God had to become human to transform human nature from the inside out, as He has done in the Incarnation. Even if God healed human nature from the inside out in Christ, as I have argued, it remains difficult to see in what way this healing extends itself to the whole of humanity. Drawing on C.S. Lewis and Thomas Aquinas, I have suggested that the idea of good infection and the model of the church as the body of Christ can help us to gain at least a burgeoning insight in the ways in which the Incarnation and passion of Christ can be effective for all of us.

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KEY WORDS

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TREFWOORDE

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Divine eros: a Christian defence of pagan love

Dedicated to Vincent Brümmer, to whom my thought on this topic is heavily indebted.

ABSTRACT

Two contrasting intuitions exist among Christians about the nature of divine love: the intuition that God loves people because of who they are, and the intuition that God loves people in spite of who they are. The former finds its conceptual voice in the idea of divine eros, and the latter in divine agape. In this paper I criticise some Protestant expressions of agape and Catholic attempts to assimilate agape and eros. I then argue in favour of divine eros, challenging the objections that God's love cannot involve need, desire, sexuality and conditionality. Finally, in dialogue with Vincent Brümmer's *The Model of Love*, I pre-empt two objections to the form that my argument for the conditionality of divine love takes.

INTRODUCTION

Christian theology inherited from Judaism the belief that God's relationship with the world is characterised by love. It inherited from Platonism the idea that love is essentially eros, attraction or the desire to be united with the beloved. Eros is the driving force, or, in modern terms, the proto-emotion on which all other emotions are based. The logical conclusion of the amalgamation of the Jewish and Platonic ideas is that God's relationship with the world is rooted in eros. However, this contains problems for Christian theology because of the uncomfortable associations of eros with need, sexuality, and conditionality.

One response to this problem is to exclude eros from God. This response, which is characteristically Protestant, can be found in Søren Kierkegaard, Anders Nygren, and Karl Barth. It has a precedent in the older Augustine, who comes to regard erotic experience as self-deceptive and self-destructive (Tracey 2005: 91 – 92). A second response is to try and combine eros and agape. That response, which is more typically Catholic, is put forward by Pope Benedict XVI, drawing on Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite. It also has roots in the younger Augustine's view of *caritas*: a synthesis in which agape transforms but does not eliminate eros (Tracey 2005: 91). In what follows, I will argue that both responses are flawed, and that we should attribute eros alone to God. I will then note that eros entails that need, sexuality and conditionality are elements of divine love, and argue that these attributes are not theologically problematic.

DIVINE AGAPE – NYGREN AND BARTH

The first response holds that divine love is agape alone, and excludes eros from God. According to Nygren, agape and eros are irreconcilable opposites. Agape is self-giving, descending, unconditional, unmerited, freely given, God-given, and value-creating (value is created in the object by the subject's love, rather than existing 'objectively' in them). In contrast, eros is self-motivated, ascending, merit-centred, egocentric, conditional, needy, human, and value-

recognising (value exists objectively in the beloved, and the lover, in loving the beloved, is simply recognising and responding to that value) (Nygren 1939: 165). Agape is Christian love and eros is pagan love. All attributions of eros to God in Christianity (e.g. in the mystics) are projections of human, pagan love on to God.

The anthropological corollary of this is that human eros is a mark of human imperfection, and is prone to becoming sinful. For instance, for Barth, eros is characterised by need and lack, and is particularly susceptible to distortion. An example of such a distortion is homosexuality, which (according to Barth) is the tragic corruption of emotional and physical desire (Barth 1949: 165 – 166). Eros is rightly ordered only by the in-breaking of the Holy Spirit, springing from God's overflowing and super-abundant agape, which graciously allows us to realise the appropriate (heterosexual) ethical expression of our eros. While there is no *necessary* connection between agape and the anti-homosexuality we find in Barth, suspicion of both homosexuals and women found in many Christian expressions of agape are unsurprising. Because agape is gift-love, it requires a recipient who is passive. This plays into conventional expectations of men as active and women as passive, and so both reinforces ideas about what women ought to be like, and leads to reflections on the complementarity of the sexes to the exclusion of same-sex loves.

Barth and Nygren's view is problematic because agape, taken on its own, is deeply damaging. Ultimately agape destroys both the integrity and the freedom of the beloved, since it leaves them perpetually in a position of need and never able to fulfil their need to give in return (see Brümmer 1993: 149 – 181). John MacMurray makes this point when he writes:

If in my relation with you I insist on behaving generously toward you and refuse to accept your generosity in return, I make myself the giver and you the recipient. This is unjust to you. I put you in my debt and refuse to let you repay the debt. In that case I make the relation an unequal one. You are to have continual cause to be grateful to me, but I am not to be grateful to you. This is the worst kind of tyranny, and is shockingly unfair to you. It destroys the mutuality of the personal by destroying the equality which is its negative aspect. To maintain equality of persons in relation is justice; and without it generosity becomes purely sentimental and wholly egocentric. My care for you is only moral if it includes the intention to preserve your freedom as an agent, which is your independence of me. Even if you wish to be dependent on me, it is my business, for your sake, to prevent it (MacMurray 1998: 189 – 190).

In other words, absolute and unqualified agape is not supremely gracious but, rather, supremely egotistical. The idea that God's love is pure agape, which involves that God gives but does not receive in turn, is ultimately deficient because it debilitates rather than edifying or liberating the beloved. In contrast, eros is at least potentially gracious because it both recognises the value of the beloved and responds to the need of the beloved to be needed in return. This is a far cry from the needy, mean and grasping desire eros has been portrayed as by many Christian writers. Therefore the first response, which attributes pure agape to God, should be rejected.

DIVINE AGAPE AND EROS – POPE BENEDICT XVI

The second response, represented by Benedict, affirms eros in combination with agape. The question that confronts us with this response is 'what would an amalgamation of eros and agape look like?'. Given the mutually exclusive way in which Nygren describes agape and eros, it is difficult to see how they might be assimilated. Admittedly, this is partly a semantic question: if one departs from Nygren and does not define agape and eros as starkly antithetical, then they are at least potentially more compatible. Benedict agrees with Nygren in characterising eros as ascending love, and agape as descending (Benedict, 2006, 1.7). However, Benedict argues that

if we create an antithesis between agape and eros, and so separate them entirely, then the Christian conception of love is cut off from the reality of human life. He finds a helpful picture of divine love as exemplifying both agape and eros in the Hebrew prophet Hosea's depiction of God's relationship with Israel. God's intense passion for his people is described in erotic terms, claims Benedict, in hinging on the metaphor of marriage and betrothal. However, it is also agapeistic, since it is both freely-given and forgiving. The latter is shown in God's response to Israel's idolatry. In committing idolatry, Israel has, in figurative terms, committed adultery. In terms of pure justice, God's response should be condemnation, but, instead, God's agapeistic love is demonstrated:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst (Hosea 11:8 – 9).

The problem with Benedict's claim arises when we read the Book of Hosea as a whole and in the context of ancient Israelite society. In this context, what Hosea describes as love does not look at all like eros, not simply on Nygren's caricature of it, but also on more general understandings of it (i.e. as attraction or the desire to be united with the beloved). At first glance it may seem to be eros because it involves heterosexual marriage, which is the paradigmatic form of sexual and therefore erotic love as far as the Catholic Church is concerned. However, far from depicting the personal desire that is essential to eros, Hosea in fact reflects inextricably the contemporary societal masculine hegemony designed to safeguard the husband's honour and lineage. The 'love' described in Hosea is a claim to possess the other. This is not eros because it is not personal – in other words, it is not based on the value of the beloved or rooted in a desire for her. Rather, it is possessive, and concerns the affirmation of Hosea's (and YHWH's) honour.

Therefore, Benedict's attempt to combine eros and agape is not successful. Perhaps because of traditional Christianity's suspicion of sexuality and relationality, the attempt to combine agape and eros results in eros being compromised or eradicated. The second response is unsatisfactory, then, because the way that God's love is depicted once it is combined with agape is very different from the sexual, desiring, personal love characteristic of human eros. In other words, the second response collapses more or less into the first. Underlying both is the same uneasiness about desire, sexuality, relationality and the body. It is therefore unsurprising that both are used oppressively, either because they perpetuate heterocentric or patriarchal norms.

DIVINE EROS: NEED, SEXUALITY AND CONDITIONALITY

I argue that we should prefer divine eros while affirming that eros involves need, sexuality and conditionality, and reject agape altogether. This entails that we have to attribute need, sexuality and conditionality to divine love. I now shall argue that doing so is not problematic, taking each property in turn.

First, need. Desire implies want, need and lack. It implies that the subject is not sufficient in and of herself, and needs someone else to make her 'complete'. Incompletion is at odds with a Platonic view of perfection. A perfect being would be complete, self-sufficient, and have absolute aseity. Therefore, need has generally been precluded of God. However, modern philosophers and theologians have challenged this model of perfection, arguing that it makes God arelational. The idea of 'self-sufficiency' is only one model of perfection, it is argued, and, furthermore, it is a rather limited and unattractive one at that. To be perfect in the sense of self-sufficient is to embody the kinds of approach to relationships criticised in the MacMurray passage quoted above.

Furthermore, to be self-sufficient is not simply debilitating to those around one: it is also to be lacking since the self-sufficient person cannot be genuinely intimate with others. She cannot know another person as a kind of 'other self': as someone who is both significantly different from herself, but with whom she shares the joys and hopes and fears of the other, which she can understand and share by having joys and hopes and fear of her own. It is therefore a condition that is both privileged and deeply impoverished. Brümmer expresses this impoverishment well when he writes that "...the kind of God entailed by this view of divine aseity is not the kind of God who can relate in loving fellowship to persons beyond himself. On the contrary, it would be a narcissistic God who in solitary self-sufficiency eternally contemplates and loves himself" (Brümmer 1993: 237). Ultimately, this ceases to be love and becomes mere beneficence for "it treats the beloved as an object of care rather than a personal partner in fellowship." (Brümmer 1993: 224)

The opposite model of perfection to this involves intimacy and relationality and so also vulnerability and need. A realisation of the limitations of self-sufficiency has led many, if not most, theologians to prefer passibilism (divine emotionality) over and against the traditional doctrine of impassibility. For example, Paul Fiddes has argued that God is vulnerable-in-love: that God chooses to be vulnerable in order to love and relate fully to creation. This model of perfection seems to be more abundant, and less limited, than the one classical theism has to offer. If it is correct, then there is no problem with saying that God's love involves a kind of need. Moreover, that God needs us seems to be entailed in the Christian belief that creation, and people in particular, can be a source of joy for God. If God delights in us, then God must also desire us, and if God desires us it seems God has a (freely chosen) need that we (can) fulfil.

Second, sexuality. Central to the idea of divine sexuality (at least as I am arguing for it) is that having sex is simply one expression of our sexuality. Contrary to the Freudian identification of sexuality with libido, to equate sex with erotic fulfilment is 'to mistake a sign for the thing it signifies' (Halperin, 2005: 53). A happy and fulfilled celibate (whether or not we think such people exist) would not be an asexual person. Equally, one could imagine or (depending how unfortunate we have been) remember sex that is or was not erotically fulfilling. Sexuality is expressed not only in sex, but also in our body language, our conversation, our humour, our relations with those around us (whether or not they are sexual partners), our ways of being in the world. Analogously, we can affirm God's sexuality without having to claim that God has sex, or wants to have sex. While, as corporeal beings, human sexuality is expressed in bodily ways, there seems to me to be no contradiction between saying that a being such as God is both sexual and incorporeal.

This of course raises the question of what sexuality is if it is not, as we tend to think, simply the physical drive for sex. I suggest that sexuality is best defined as (physical and/or mental) attraction towards other beings and towards particular other beings. Of course, this means that sexuality is very close in meaning to my definition of eros as attraction or the desire to be united with the beloved. In fact, it implies that to say that 'a being with eros is also a sexual being' is a tautology. This is consistent with other definitions of eros. For example, Glenn Most points out that the original meaning of eros is 'sexual desire', and not the vaguer and more modern term 'love' which is 'cloven between sensuality and idealization'(Most, 2005, 33). However, as it is the desexualisation of eros when it is combined with agape (which, we have seen in Benedict's case, has the unwelcome consequence of leaving eros non-desiring and impersonal) that I am opposing, the conclusion that an erotic being must also be a sexual being does not worry me.

Third, conditionality. One argument often used in favour of agape as opposed to eros is that eros, as conditional, favours people who embody values that are desirable, virtuous, or

attractive, to people who do not embody these values. Nygren takes as an example of this Aristotle's statement that:

He who lives according to reason is the special object of God's love. For if the gods, as is commonly believed, take thought for our human affairs, we must rationally conclude that they take most pleasure in that which is best and most nearly related to themselves, that is, in our reason, and that they reward those who live according to reason. It is clear that this is most of all the case with the wise man. Therefore it is he who is most loved by God. (cited Nygren 1939: 159)

The question of whether God favours the wise man (in Greek thought, as Nygren characterises it), or the morally good man (in Jewish thought, as Nygren characterises it), is unimportant. Because eros is conditional love that responds to a value in the beloved, it follows that God would favour people who embody a large amount of a particular virtue (whether wisdom or moral goodness) to people who do not. This, Nygren observes, is problematic in terms of Paul's insistence that 'God chose the foolish things of the world' (1 Cor. 1:27). Perhaps even more problematically for Christian theology, it implies that eros is at odds with the Christian belief in God's love for sinners. This is in contrast to agape, which is unconditional and unmerited, and which is, as Nygren describes it, 'essentially the Divine will to forgive' (Nygren, 1939: 158). That God's love is unconditional, therefore, seems to be at the heart of the Gospel.

Against this, it could be pointed out that agapeic love - that is, love that is *unconditional* and creates value in the beloved that does not otherwise exist, is a senseless and arbitrary form of love. This is because there would be no reason for God passionately and self-sacrificingly to love human beings any more than for God passionately and self-sacrificingly to love bookcases or shoes or motor cars. Therefore, there must be some value, quality or characteristic in the beloved on which God's love is based. Responding to Nygren's concerns, it does not follow from the idea that God's love for humanity is rooted in some value that human beings possess that we must therefore conclude that God prefers wise or morally good (or handsome or musical) people to foolish or morally bad (or plain or tone deaf) ones. The value or 'condition' on which God's love is based might simply be some universal quality all humans have, and not less ubiquitous qualities such as wisdom or moral goodness possessed by only some human beings. That there is such a quality might already be suggested in Christian theology by the idea that all people are created in God's image - though what being created in God's image means is a matter of much debate.

Does this view of divine conditionality take into account the extent of God's love, and willingness to forgive, sinful humanity, that is at the heart of the Gospel? I think it can, provided we distinguish unconditional love from unmerited love. Unmerited love means that the lover loves the beloved in excess of what the beloved deserves, and that the lover persists in loving the beloved, even when the beloved acts badly. Much human love is unmerited to some extent, but we would want to say that God's love for us is more unmerited still - there is nothing we could do that would stop God from loving us. Unconditional, as distinct from unmerited, love means that the love is not based on any qualities and characteristics of the beloved, and to assert that there is nothing intrinsically desirable in the beloved that inspired that love. I want to say that we should reject the unconditionality (though not the unmeritness) of God's love, and that God's love is a response to real qualities and characteristics that we have that are lovable.

Fundamentally, this question about unconditionality is a question about whether God's love responds to a value in the beloved (eros), or whether it creates value in the beloved by loving them (agape). While critical of the impersonal nature of Nygren's characterisation of divine love, Brümmer agrees with Nygren to some extent by arguing that the lover bestows value on the

beloved by looking on the beloved as an irreplaceable individual (Brümmer 1993: 235). Love does this because it means that:

my person, my individual *daimon*, not only matters to me but also to someone else apart from me, and that therefore receives a significance which it is beyond my power to bestow on it myself. Your love bestows value on me which I would not otherwise have. It does not merely recognize a value which I already have apart from this recognition. (Brümmer 1993: 235).

This view has an intuitive plausibility to it because we usually feel far more valuable if and when we know we are loved. However, Brümmer's view seems to go further than simply how we feel, to claim that we are *in fact* more valuable if and when we are loved. This seems to entail the problematic conclusion that the much-wanted and loved child is in fact more valuable than the unwanted and neglected child, rather than that both children are equally valuable, but the much-loved child is more fortunate in having her value recognised by her family. This is a serious problem for a Christian conception of love.

Against this, it could be replied that God loves the unwanted and neglected child just as much as the much-loved child, and so the unwanted child is still valuable even though she is not loved by her family. However, this does not seem to meet the problem, since the much-loved child would still be made even more valuable than the unwanted child by her family's love. Alternatively, it could be answered that God loves the unwanted child *more than* the much-loved child, in order to compensate for the lack of human love in the child's life. However, if God's love is infinite for each and every person then that claim is also extremely problematic. Therefore, we should reject the idea that love bestows any value on the beloved, in favour of the idea that love recognises the beloved's intrinsic loveliness. Love sees the value of the other, but it does not create it. Both the much-loved child and the unwanted child are intrinsically valuable. Both are loved by God, but the unwanted child misses out on something she deserves – to be loved and valued by other human beings.

PRE-EMPTING TWO OBJECTIONS

So far, I have argued that God's love is unmerited but not unconditional, since it is based on real qualities and characteristics of the beloved. I have suggested that this is consistent with the Gospel's affirmation of God's love for those who are usually regarded as unlovable, on the basis that the qualities or characteristics that are the basis of God's love are qualities and characteristics shared by the whole of humanity. I will now pre-empt two possible objections to my argument that arise in conversation with Brümmer's *The Model of Love*. Notably, these are objections to my particular representation of conditional divine love (as based on some quality all humans share), rather than to the conditionality of divine love *per se*.

First, Brümmer argues that we do not love people as instantiations of characteristics, but, rather, as particular people. As he puts it:

Since I do not love you *because* of your characteristics, my love for you does not entail that I should similarly love everybody else who has the same characteristics, nor that I should stop loving you if you should no longer have these characteristics. My love for you is a love for *you* and not for your characteristics apart from you. I could also love you in spite of disapproving of your characteristics. The only thing which my love for you excludes is that I should be indifferent to your characteristics" (Brümmer, 1993: 152).

If Brümmer is correct, it seems that God could not be said to love humanity on the basis of some quality or characteristic shared by all human beings, because then God would love people as instantiations of a particular quality or characteristic, rather than loving the people themselves.

I think that Brümmer is right to highlight the personal nature of love, and the fact that we love people as more than a sum of their parts, or an instantiation of a particular set of characteristics. However, if we took this point to extremes, Brümmer's point would become too essentialist in making a stark distinction between the person themselves, and their characteristics and qualities. If we were to remove from a person all their characteristics and qualities, it is difficult to see what would be left of them – how they would still be in any sense the same person that they were (or even a person at all).

A sharp distinction between the person and their characteristics is subject to the same criticism as 'love the sinner but hate the sin' approaches, which can be psychologically simplistic in wanting to make a clear dividing line between people (on the one hand), and their desires, dispositions, and habits (on the other). We do love the beloved as a person and not as an instantiation of their characteristics – but ultimately there is no decisive boundary between that person and their characteristics. A person who loved a drug addict may say "I don't know where the person I loved is any more" if the desires, dispositions and habits involved in drug addiction have become so overpowering (as often happens) to consistently override or destroy other elements of that person's character. To say that is not to say that the beloved is replaceable. It is not only the beloved's characteristics, but also the way they are expressed and embodied by that person, and the shared experiences in the history of the relationship, that make the beloved unique, and irreplaceable in the eyes of the lover.

A second possible objection to conditional divine love concerns the fact that I have argued that God's love is rooted in some characteristic or quality shared by the whole of humanity, rather than in different qualities and characteristics in different individuals, depending on who we are. Again, this leaves me open to the very serious charge that the divine love I depict does not enable each and every person to be unique and irreplaceable in God's sight. That God's love takes into account and celebrates differences between people is an important theological emphasis. As Brümmer puts it:

God's love is not an equalizing love. It does not treat us as though we were all equal in his sight and therefore able to replace each other in his affection. The whole point about persons is precisely that they are not equal. One is not as good as another. No human being is worth less than another in God's sight. However, this is not because they are all worth the same, but because each one of them is irreplaceable. In this way God's love for us is not impartial but partial in the sense in which 'partiality is a matter of looking to see what the special individuality of the other person really is and attending positively to it. God can have this kind of special love for each of his creatures' (Brümmer 1993: 211 – 212, quoting Oppenheimer 1983: 135).

Brümmer argues that God loves specific things about each person, suggesting that the loveable qualities are not shared by everyone, but are different in each person.

These two – loving qualities or characteristics shared by all people, and loving individual differences - are, I think, not in fact incompatible. A mother may love all her children because they are her children, thus having some quality or characteristic that ensure her love. But she may love very different things *about* her children because they are very different people. In fact, Brümmer uses the parent analogy to point out that the alternative to loving one child more than others is not to love one's children as though they are identical. If people did love their children identically, then one child would be substitutable for another – whereas most people believe that each of their children is irreplaceable (Brümmer 1993: 210). The quality shared by all humans which is the condition of God's love for them may be something as basic as the potentiality for a relationship (which sets them apart from bookcases and motor cars and shoes). That does not prevent God from also loving particular things about each particular person, just

as we love particular things about children, family and friends, which may not be the *basis* of our love for them, but which mean that they are not replaceable or lacking in uniqueness for us.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I began by considering two views of divine love, the first of which construes divine love as pure agape, and the second of which seeks to combine agape and eros. I argued that the first view of love is debilitating of the beloved, and negates the Christian belief in the value of all persons. I argued that the second view fails to provide a plausible account of eros-agape love, and that eros collapses into agape. I claimed that both views reflect Christian suspicion of sexuality and of conditionality, and that both tend to perpetuate oppressive (heterocentric and/or patriarchal) norms. I then argued that eros offers us a more helpful model of divine love, and that need, sexuality and conditionality are compatible with Christian concerns about God's nature and relationality. The implication of this for our view of human nature and, concomitantly, for our ethics, is that human eros, sexuality, and relationality (including the need and value-recognition inherent in human love) are a reflection of divine eros, sexuality, relationality, desire and need. They are not properties that pertain only to created and physical entities, and should therefore not be regarded as inherently inferior.

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KEYWORDS

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Gereformeerde identiteit vandag? Ontwikkelings en rigtings

ABSTRACT

The paper pays tribute to the honouree by offering a case study of one of the key themes of Brümmer's later research, namely the identity of traditions. It provides an overview of diverse answers to questions about Reformed identity. In a first section, it is argued that this rich diversity of responses to the identity question is in itself already typically Reformed, since it is caused by several Reformed characteristics. The second section sets the scene for the different answers with a brief overview of the contemporary Reformed landscape. The final four sections then serve as reminders of four well-known but different ways of approaching the question. The third section discusses issues regarding the Reformed community as a confessional tradition. The fourth section focuses on Reformed doctrine. The fifth section considers the Reformed way of life and the final section deals more specifically with the question whether there is something like a characteristic Reformed ethics.

1. GEREFORMEERDE IDENTITEIT?

Vincent Brümmer het self deur die jare toenemend 'n belangstelling ontwikkel in konseptuele vrae rondom tradisie – rondom die aard van tradisies, waarin die identiteit van tradisies ten diepste geleë is, waarin die kontinuïteit van tradisies sou bestaan, wie die legitieme verteenwoordigers en dus uitleggers van tradisies is, waar en hoe die grense van tradisies bepaal kan word, en vele verwante vrae.

In die inleidende “Meanders in my Thinking: A Brief Intellectual Autobiography” in sy *Collected Essays. Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith* vertel hy self van dié ontwikkelinge.¹ “After 1976 ... I defended the view that systematic theology itself could be seen as a form of conceptual analysis exploring the assumptions and implications of basic doctrinal concepts in the Christian tradition.”²

Toenemend sou hy ook, vertel hy, daarmee begin rekening hou dat die geloof nie 'n geslote denksisteem is waarvan die inhoud as konsepte beskou en geanaliseer kan word nie, maar eerder 'n lewende tradisie. “During the 1980s ... I also began to realize that the meaning (of the Christian Faith, DJS) is not timelessly fixed ... not a closed system of thought but a tradition in which the heritage of faith is continually being reinterpreted to keep it relevant and adequate to the ever-changing demands of life.”³

Met dié groeiende insig sou ook sy siening van die taak van die teologie ander beklemtonings begin ontvang. “The task of the theologian is therefore not to describe a fixed system of thought

1 Die betrokke opstel is 'n verwerking van die oorspronklike “Kronkels in mijn Denkweg,” in Gijsbert van den Brink, Luco J. van den Brom & Marcel Sarot (Reds), *Wijsgerige Theologie in Beweging*, Utrecht: Rijksuniversiteit, 1992, 7-27. Dit is daarna in verwerkte vorm in Engels gepubliseer as “Meanders in my Thinking: A Brief Intellectual Autobiography” in sy *Collected Essays. Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 3-27.

2 Brümmer 2006, 17.

3 Brümmer 2006, 18.

like an ideology, but to produce creative proposals for re-conceptualising the heritage of faith in ways that are adequate and relevant to the lives of believers.”⁴

Verskeie van die terme in hierdie beskrywings (van tradisie en van die taak van teologie) sou sleutel terme in sy denke en werk word, wat hy toenemend sou bedink en verduidelik, maar ook telkens by wyse van illustrasie sou toepas.

Hy wy dan ook sy afskeidsrede in Utrecht aan die einde van 1997 aan hierdie tema, onder die opskrif “The identity of the Christian tradition.” Oudstudente organiseer daarby ’n internasionale konferensie in gesprek met hom oor dié tema, wat gepubliseer word as *Identity and Change in Religious Traditions*.⁵

In dié rede gaan hy veral in op die feit dat lewende tradisies pluralisties en veranderlik van aard is. Dit geld ook van meet af van die Christelike tradisie, as ’n lewende tradisie. Reeds reg vanaf die begin – soos die neerslag in Nuwe Testamentiese geskrifte toon – is daar klaarblyklik sowel veelvoud as nuutheid, en albei aspekte is integraal tot die aard van hierdie tradisie. Die tradisie en die geloof leef daarvan.

Hierdie tradisie is gevolglik “not timelessly immutable but constantly require(s) translation, re-conceptualisation and re-interpretation in order to maintain their relevance and adequacy, as well as their intelligibility and credibility.” In sy afskeidsrede gaan hy dan op die (moontlike, dog omstredende) betekenis van hierdie vier terme verder in, te wete relevansie, toereikendheid, verstaanbaarheid en geloofwaardigheid.

In die lig van dié teoretiese raamwerk dink hy dan na oor die hermeutiese uitdagings verbonde aan só ’n siening van die geloof as ’n lewende tradisie en aan die uitdagings vir die teologie wat daaruit volg. Hy vra waarin die eenheid en die identiteit van so ’n (veelvoudige en veranderende) tradisie dan kan bestaan, en oorweeg verskillende moontlike antwoorde, te wete een of ander soort siening van essensie, een of ander soort kontinuïteit en een of ander soort verband met die oorsprong van die tradisie.

Sy gevolgtrekkings word duidelik saamgevat. “We can now conclude that the unity and identity of the Christian tradition can be found in the narrative continuity of the historical process of interpretation that starts in the Bible itself and refers to the connected series of events telling of the impact of Jesus Christ, who is acknowledged by believers to be the fixed origin of the tradition as well as the paradigmatic locus of meaning for human existence. *The heritage that is passed down from generation to generation in this tradition is however by no means timelessly immutable, but requires constant translation, re-conceptualisation and re-interpretation in the light of the ever changing demands of life confronting participants in the tradition*” (my kursivering, DJS).⁶

In dié lig kan hy ook die taak van die teologie beskryf. “(T)he Christian heritage is handed down to us in fluid form, retaining the ability to change and to become new versions of itself. *For this reason the Christian tradition is not dead but alive. It is the task of theologians to keep it so by creatively sustaining and developing our understanding of the original exemplar’s achievement in ways that remain relevant, adequate, intelligible and credible in the ever changing context where we humans are called upon to live and move and have our being*” (my kursivering, DJS).⁷

4 Brümmer 2006, 18.

5 Marcel Sarot & Gijsbert van den Brink (Reds), *Identity and Change in the Christian Tradition*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999. In dié bundel verskyn sy opstel op bladsye 23-42. Dit is eger ook opgeneem in Brümmer, *Collected Essays. Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 375-390.

6 Brümmer, *Collected Essays. Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 389.

7 Brümmer, *Collected Essays. Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian Faith*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, 390.

Sy huidige navorsing kan beskou word as 'n gevallestudie van dié soort benadering, op 'n klein skaal. Hy is naamlik besig om die soms dramatiese teologiese ontwikkelinge aan die Stellenbosse Seminarie vanaf die laat 19de tot die vroeg 20ste eeu te beskryf. Hy doen dit in die vorm van só 'n narratief, rondom die vraag hoe – wat hy noem – tradisies van “vroomheid” en van “regsinnigheid,” op komplekse wyses verteenwoordig en verwoord deur verskillende invloedryke figure, telkens met mekaar in spanning was, en hoe dié voortslepende stryd die identiteit van die tradisie aan hierdie inrigting voortdurend en opnuut sou beïnvloed.

In huldiging van sy lewenswerk word die volgende gedagtes aan hom gewy, eweneens as 'n soort gevallestudie van hierdie aard, te wete rondom die vraag hoe die identiteit van die Gereformeerde identiteit en tradisie vandag wêreldwyd beskryf sou kon word, met Brümmer se insigte en oortuigings in ag genome.

Die vraag na Gereformeerde identiteit is immers blywend 'n aktuele en 'n uiters ingewikkelde vraag. Oor ongeveer 'n dekade vind daar tans verskeie herdenkings wêreldwyd plaas van gebeurtenisse, figure en dokumente wat almal vroeg reeds fundamentele bydraes gemaak het tot die beweging wat as die Gereformeerde gemeenskap sou ontwikkel en groei.

In 2009 was daar oraloor herdenkings van Calvyn se geboorte, ook in Suid-Afrika. Kongresse is gehou, navorsing is gedoen en publikasies het verskyn. In 2011 is die ontstaan van die Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis (of Confessio Belgica) in herinnering geroep, en weer eens het verskeie gebeurtenisse daaromheen plaasgevind, hier plaaslik, maar ook in Brussel, naby die ontstaansoord van dié invloedryke dokument. In 2013 sal die ontstaan van die Heidelbergse Kategismus onthou word, sonder twyfel dié vroeë Gereformeerde belydenis dokument wat die mees ekumeniese resepsie en werkingsgeskiedenis sou ontvang, tot vandag. Op vele maniere en in wye kringe het dié geskrif geloof, spiritualiteit en lewe beïnvloed en help stempel. In 2017 word die gebeure van Wittenberg gebruik as oriëntasiepunt om die hele Reformasie aan te koppel. Uiteraard sal die Gereformeerde tradisie en gemeenskap dan slegs as onderdeel van 'n groter historiese beweging ter sprake kom, maar sonder twyfel sal die aandag tog ook weer wees op dié bydrae te midde van die groter kerklieke en sosiale ontwikkelinge. In 2018-2019 behoort die Sinode van Dordrecht en die – tegelyk omstrede én hoogs gerespekteerde – Leerreëls aan die beurt te wees, ten minste in die kerke gebore vanuit dié enger Nederlandse omgewing.

Tydens dié prosesse word die vrae onvermydelik telkens weer gestel rondom die Gereformeerde identiteit – of daar inderdaad so iets is en waarin dit sou bestaan. Die antwoorde op dié soort vrae word gekompliseer deur die talryke ontwikkelinge wat al sedert die aanvangsjare plaasgevind het, maar ook deur die vele rigtings wat sou groei en tans steeds naas mekaar bly bestaan – van vroomheid, oortuiging, gestalte en lewe.⁸

Dit is algemeen bekend dat dit baie moeilik is om Gereformeerde teologie te omskryf, vanweë redes wat te doen het met die aard van Gereformeerde teologie self. Terselfdertyd fassineer dié vraag Gereformeerdes dikwels, en die interne gesprekke oor die identiteit van die tradisie hou nooit op nie. Hierdie pogings begin dikwels met 'n verduideliking van waarom dit so 'n onmoontlike taak is, en in dié proses beskryf hulle alreeds belangrike eienskappe van die Gereformeerde geloof en teologie.⁹

8 Die kern van hierdie bydrae berus op 'n opstel wat oorspronklik op uitnodiging vir die *The Expository Times* geskryf is, as deel van 'n reeks oor kofessionele en hedendaagse teologiese tradisies en strominge. Die oorspronklike titel was “Trends and Directions in Reformed Theology,” *The Expository Times* 122, Vol 7 April 2011, 1-14. Ander bydraes in die reeks het byvoorbeeld handel oor liberale teologie, pluralistiese teologie, postliberale teologie, feministiese teologie, Anglikaanse teologie, Radikaal Ortodokse teologie, Katolieke teologie (Fergus Kerr), politieke teologie (Tim Gorringe), analitiese teologie (Oliver Crisp), en Ortodokse teologie, met 'n afsluitende oorsig deur David Fergusson.

9 Sien byvoorbeeld die drie insiggewende oorsigte met opstelle, Michael Welker en David Willis (reds.), *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998;

Hulle onderstreep die enorme uiteenlopendheid van die Gereformeerde tradisie. Daar was die kenmerkende sosiale, linguïstiese, *kulturele*, politieke diversiteit sedert die begin in die 16de eeu. Daar was die bewuste *konfessionele* uiteenlopendheid sedert die vroegste tye, sonder enige poging om 'n universele belydenis daar te stel. Daar was die *hermeneutiese* diversiteit as gevolg van die belangrike rol wat die Skrif as finale gesag in alle sake rakende geloof en lewe speel, wat dikwels beskryf is as die *sola scriptura*-beginsel wat die Gereformeerde geloof meer as enige iets anders kenmerk. Daar was die *eklesiologiese* diversiteit as gevolg van die gebrek aan sterk gesag- of hiërgargiese strukture. Daar was die *historiese* diversiteit, omdat Gereformeerde kerke so geneig is om diep betrokke te raak by bepaalde sosiale en kulturele kontekste. Daar was 'n *etiese* diversiteit, omdat die Gereformeerde geloof tipies daarna strewende om vergestaltung te vind in die morele, openbare en politieke lewe, en daarom onvermydelik deel word van baie nuwe ontwikkelings en nuwe werklikhede.

In 'n poging om gevolglik te onderskei wanneer die grense van legitieme pluraliteit oorskry word, word die Gereformeerde geloof daarom ook gekenmerk deur voortdurende selfondersoek oor vroeë rondom identiteit en *grense*. Natuurlik is grense met betrekking tot ál hierdie vorme van diversiteit voortdurend getrek – byvoorbeeld *kulturele* grense, wat sosiale, linguïstiese en politieke grense (hetsy gebaseer op nasie, *volk* of ras) sou insluit, soms selfs deur ander uit te sluit; *konfessionele* grense, wat dikwels (slegs) groepe se eie belydenisdokumente as ortodoks, waar en gesaghebbend sou beskou; *hermeneutiese* grense, wat op afdoende interpretasies van die Skrif aanspraak maak en maklik tot standpunte van stelligheid, onfeilbaarheid en fundamentalisme sou lei; *eklesiologiese* grense, wat talle verdelings en afskeidings tussen nuutgestigte kerke teweeg sou bring; *historiese* grense, wat dikwels ernstige konflikte en verdelings binne en tussen kerke sou veroorsaak; *etiese* grense, wat op geestelike, morele, etiese en politieke verskille gebaseer is. Die tradisie is om presies al dié redes selfs al beskryf as *bound to differ* – geneig om te verskil, bestem om te verskil, selfs aan mekaar verbonde deur al dié onderlinge geskille en verskille.¹⁰

Die beskrywing “Gereformeerd” verwys egter ook alreeds na 'n verdere kenmerk wat die verhaal nog selfs ingewikkelder maak, naamlik 'n *selfkritiese bewussyn* wat voortdurend na nuwe vorme van gehoorzaamheid soek en juis dáárom tot sy eie steeds veranderende, vernuwendende, transformerende aard bydra. Hierdie eienskap word goed opgesom in die populêre gesegde dat “'n Gereformeerde kerk gedurig reformeer in ooreenstemming met die Woord van God”. Dit is inderdaad só dat verreikende en ingrypende historiese skuiwe binne die kerke wat tot hierdie tradisie behoort, waargeneem kan word. Die tradisie is besonder gevoelig vir konteks en historiese ontwikkelings. Die Gereformeerde geloof is dikwels verantwoordelik gehou – hetsy geprys of geblameer, geloof of verwy! – vir sy bydrae tot belangrike historiese veranderings, byvoorbeeld tot die ontstaan van moderniteit en die moderne lewe, maar terselfdertyd is dit self in die proses diepgaande beïnvloed en getransformeer deur hierdie historiese krisisse en ontwikkelings.¹¹

Wallace M Alston en Michael Welker (reds.), *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003; Wallace M Alston en Michael Welker (reds.), *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007.

10 Wesley A. Kort, *Bound to Differ*; University Park: Pennsylvania State, 1992.

11 Sedert die stellings van Max Weber en Ernst Troeltsch het geleerdes oor die invloed van Protestantisme, en spesifiek die Calvinisme, nagedink met betrekking tot die ontstaan en vorming van die moderne wêreld – die wêreld van die vryemark-ekonomie; van demokratiese kultuur en die openbare lewe; oor die skeiding van kerk en staat in die liberale politieke lewe; oor 'n sekulêre tydperk; oor die oppergesag van die reg en die onafhanklikheid van die regterlike stelsel van sowel staat as godsdiens; die wêreld wat op hedendaagse vryhede gebou is; oor die kernwaardes van menswaardigheid en menseregte; oor verreikende rasionalisasie en die verspreiding van opvoeding, wetenskap, navorsing en kennis as basis

Die gevolg is dat die verhaal van die Gereformeerde geloof in enige spesifieke gemeenskap vandag nie net 'n verhaal van uiteenlopendheid, selfs van stryd en konflik is nie, maar ook van verandering, selfs waar sommige hartstogtelik probeer om vas te kleef aan ononderbroke kontinuïteit. Daarom is dit in beginsel onmoontlik om konsensus oor enige beskrywing van Gereformeerde teologie te bereik. Enige skets sal uiters subjektief bly en oop vir kritiek, meningsverskil en teenoorgestelde aansprake. Die Gereformeerde verhaal is inderdaad 'n verhaal van vele verhale.

2. DIE GEREFORMEERDE LANDSKAP?

Alreeds sedert die vroegste begin was die Gereformeerde tradisie 'n komplekse en uiteenlopende, selfs ambivalente, beweging. Dit het tegelykertyd in verskeie Switserse stede en gemeenskappe ontstaan en ontwikkel (Zürich 1519; Basel 1528; Genève 1535/36), rondom 'n verskeidenheid invloedryke leiers – wat Johannes Calvyn (1509-1564) in Genève insluit, maar óók vormende figure soos Zwingli, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Beza en baie ander. Dit is in baie verskillende lande ondersteun en het 'n verskeidenheid plaaslike vorms aangeneem.¹² Dit was 'n belydenistradisie sonder enige sentrale gesagstrukture wat eenvormigheid oor geloofsake, beleid en lewe kon bepaal. Selfs die geloofsbelydenisse – en die plaaslike kerkordes wat dikwels hierdie geloofsbelydenisse weerspieël het – was uiteenlopend en plaaslik.

Vandag het dit die verhaal geword van ontwikkelings in baie verskillende lande en kontinente, byvoorbeeld Switserland, Frankryk, Italië en Duitsland; maar ook Nederland en België en baie kerke wêreldwyd wat deur die Nederlandse kerklewe en teologie beïnvloed is; Brittanje, veral Skotland, en weer eens baie kerke onder die invloed van die kerklewe en teologie in hierdie samelewings; kerke in verskeie streke in Sentraal- en Oos-Europa, wat veral Hongarye en nog verskeie ander insluit; die Verenigde State van Amerika en Kanada en hulle invloedryke teenwoordigheid in baie dele van die wêreld; baie kerke in Afrika, insluitende Wes-, Sentraal- en Suid-Afrika; kerke, insluitende groot en groeiende kerke in baie samelewings in Asië en Australasië, byvoorbeeld Indonesië en Korea, benewens baie ander; en sommige streke in Latyns-Amerika. Twee-derdes van alle Gereformeerde Christene vandag woon in Asië, Afrika en Latyns-Amerika.¹³

Dit is eenvoudig onmoontlik om die verhaal van Gereformeerde teologie op 'n manier te vertel wat reg sal laat geskied aan hierdie rykdom, kompleksiteite en dubbelsinnighede. Die meeste van hierdie kerke is lid van die Wêreldgemeenskap van Gereformeerde Kerke (WGGK) wat die resultaat is van die samesmelting tussen die Wêreldbond van Gereformeerde Kerke (WBGK) en die Gereformeerde Ekumeniese Raad (GER) in Junie 2010 te Grand Rapids. Hierdie liggaam sluit meestal kerke in met Calvinistiese, Presbiteriaanse, Kongregasionalistiese en Verenigde agtergronde, maar ook verskeie ánder met uiteenlopende historiese agtergronde,

vir die gemeenskapslewe; oor 'n sterk sin vir moraliteit, roeping en verantwoordelikheid wat manifesteer in alledaagse arbeid en openbare dienslewering. Weer eens is die meeste van hierdie historiese stellings kontroversieel en betwis, maar dit maak die beskrywing van Gereformeerde teologie net nog ingewikkelder.

12 Vir kort maar ingeligte inleidings, sien byvoorbeeld die toepaslike opstelle in Carter Lindberg (red.), *The Reformation Theologians*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, veral 155-266 en David Bagchi en David C. Steinmetz (reds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge Universiteit, 2004, veral 80-193.

13 Sien Jean-Jacques Bauswein en Lukas Vischer (reds.), *The Reformed Family Worldwide: A Survey of Reformed Churches, Theological Schools and International Organizations*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, veral die baie leersame opstel deur Vischer, "The Reformed Tradition and its Multiple Facets", 1-33.

waar onder byvoorbeeld ook die Waldensiane en Boheemse Broeders. Hierdie kerke deel nie enige gemeenskaplike belydenistradisie of enige gesagstruktuur wat identiteit en eenvormigheid sou kon waarborg nie.

Die spesifieke verhale van hierdie verskillende kontekste dra slegs verder by tot die gevarieerde en komplekse prentjie.¹⁴ Die vormende ontwikkelings en gebeure en die verteenwoordigende en invloedryke figure en denkers vorm deel van hierdie verskillende verhale – name uit latere generasies, soos Francis Turretin (1623-1687), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Charles Hodge (1797-1878) en Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921), Karl Barth (1886-1968) en Emil Brunner (1889-1966), Reinhold (1892-1971) en H Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), John (1886-1960) en Donald Baillie (1887-1954), Thomas F (1913-2007) en James Torrance (1923-2003). Net hierdie kort en baie arbitrêre lys name – wat bewustelik aktiewe Gereformeerde teoloë vanoor die hele wêreld uitsluit – demonstreer alreeds die wye verskeidenheid posisies en tradisies binne die Gereformeerde geloof.

Bram van de Beek se vertelling oor die hoofstroom Gereformeerde Kerke in Nederland bied 'n insiggewende voorbeeld.¹⁵ Hy beklemtoon die noue verband tussen Gereformeerde teologie en die hedendaagse kultuur. Dit was die belangrikste kwessie op verskillende tye van ontwikkeling in Nederland in die 19de en 20ste eeu. Die reaksies op 'n bepaalde tydperk kon wyd verskil, wat die kompleksiteit van die verhaal verklaar, maar hierdie sensitiwiteit vir die tydsgees bly konstant in sy vertelling. Die Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk het hom altyd as 'n nasionale kerk gesien, redeneer hy, selfs nadat politieke veranderinge 'n offisiële einde hieraan gebring het. Aan die begin van die 20ste eeu het die leidende Gereformeerde teoloë (Kuyper, Bavinck, later Schilder en nog later Berkouwer) nie uit hierdie kultureel goed-aangepaste kerk gekom nie, maar uit die meer kofessionele kerke wat in die 19de eeu weggebreek het. Hy verdeel die 20ste eeu in drie tydperke. In die eerste tydperk, tot by die einde van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog, het “die mees fassinerende teoloë uit daardie tyd” (Noordmans, Gerretsen) buite die akademie en buite “die georganiseerde oortuigings van daardie tyd” gewerk. Dit is insiggewend hoe Van de Beek hulle as die ware verteenwoordigers van die Reformasie beskryf. Hulle verteenwoordig “'n kritiese stroom” wat veral “in krisistye” tot “nuwe kreatiwiteit” kan lei. “Actually they are the treasurers of the heritage of the Reformation ... Figures like (they) are Reformed in a deep, persisting undercurrent. Theirs is a Reformed theology which never gives us rest in ourselves”. In 'n tweede tydperk, van 1945 tot 1980, verander die prentjie drasties. Die baie bekende Nederlandse Hervormde teoloë uit die 20ste eeu het nou hulle bloeytydperk beleef (wat Miskotte, Kraemer, Visser 't Hooft, Hendrikus Berkhof, Van Ruler, Van der Leeuw en Ter Schegget insluit). Volgens hom is “hulle almal aangevuur deur dieselfde visie: 'n verchristelike gemeenskap volgens

14 Sien byvoorbeeld twee nuttige versamelings opstelle oor Gereformeerde teologie in baie verskillende lande, *Acta Theologica*, Volume 12, nr. 1, Julie 1992, spesiale uitgawe, red. S D (Fanie) Snyman, met opstelle oor Amerika (deur Migliore), Australië (De Waard), Kanada (Van Dam), Nederland (Velema), Skotland (T A Hart) en Suid-Afrika (Smit); ook George Harinck en Dirk van Keulen (reds.), *Vicissitudes of Reformed Theology in the Twentieth Century, Studies in Reformed Theology Volume 9*, Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2004, wat naas baie ander, artikels insluit oor Switserland (deur Zangger), Duitsland (Plasger), Brittanje (Sell), Transilvanië (Gudor en Foka van de Beek), Neo-Calvinisme in Noord-Amerika (Bolt), Presbiterianisme in die Verenigde State (D G Hart) en Korea (Kim).

15 Bram van de Beek, “A Christianized Society according to Reformed Principles”, *Vicissitudes* (sien vorige noot), 69-86. Dis reeds op insiggewend dat die bundel ook ander opstelle oor ander Gereformeerde kerke in Nederland bevat (Van Keulen; Kamphuis), wat ook die geval is met die meeste ander opstelle, omdat hulle die verhaal van baie kerke in 'n spesifieke samelewing moet vertel, dikwels met uiteenlopende vormende gebeure, invloedryke figure, kernontwikkelings en leidende teoloë. Allan Sell vertel byvoorbeeld die verhaal “to cover the writings of scholars who belonged, or belong, to one or other of the fifteen Reformed Churches or unions currently to be found in the British Isles, or their predecessor bodies”, 130.

Gereformeerde beginsels". Sy (kritiese) punt is duidelik. Baie van hulle was in die sending en getuienis vir die koninkryk geïnteresseerd, in sosiale en politieke betrokkenheid, in hernuwing, selfs verbetering van die wêreld, in die aktiwiteit van die (destydse) ekumeniese beweging. Hy merk op dat dit nie "sonder rede" was dat die stigtersvergadering van die Wêreldraad van Kerke in Amsterdam was nie. Tog kan daar skynbaar skille tussen hulle heers. Hulle kan 'n optimisties wees (met Berkhof se *Christian Faith* as die "kroonjuweel") of duidelik krities (met 'n neiging tot sosialisme), maar diep binne-in stem hulle saam dat die kerk weet wat goed is vir die wêreld. Baie mense sou hulle as (tipies) Gereformeerde beskou (en dit lyk of hulle saamstem met die latere Barth van die 1946-brosjyre oor *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*), maar Van de Beek verskil diepgaande van hierdie populêre siening. Gedurende al hierdie tydperke, redeneer hy, het die Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk eintlik maar net die veranderinge in die Nederlandse kultuur en gemeenskap nagevolg en weerspieël. Presies dieselfde sou noemenswaardig in 'n derde tydperk, wat in die laaste twee dekades van die vorige eeu begin het, gebeur, toe die kerk 'n klein en onbeduidende minderheid in Nederland geword het. Volgens hom is die kerk nou met 'n volledig nuwe situasie gekonfronteer, een wat hy vir meer as 'n millennium nie geken het nie, en een waarvan hy nie weet hoe om dit te hanteer nie. In hierdie situasie van radikale Nederlandse sekularisasie en 'n dieppliggend ateïstiese moderne kultuur, kies Van de Beek self vir 'n teologie wat die kerk as vreemdelinge in die wêreld beskou, as uitheemse inwoners. Hy beweer weer dat so 'n benadering mag lyk asof dit wegbeweeg van tradisionele Gereformeerde teologie, maar dit verteenwoordig inderwaarheid die *werklike* Gereformeerde tradisie: "in hierdie posisie draai ek weg van tradisionele Nederlandse Gereformeerde kulturele- en sosiale teologie, (maar) in hierdie teologie kom die klassieke ondertoon van die Reformasie weer eens te voorskyn". In sy vertelling kom die problematiek om Gereformeerde teologie te beskryf duidelik na vore, want elke figuur en groep in die verhaal beskou hulle as die ware erfgename van die Gereformeerde gees, hoe teenstrydig hulle posisies ook al mag wees.

Baie meer verhale sou natuurlik vertel kon word oor Gereformeerde teologie en ander historiese kontekste waar Gereformeerde, Presbiteriaanse en Kongregasionalistiese kerke en teoloë belangrike rolle gespeel het – insluitende byvoorbeeld Switserland en Duitsland, Hongarye, Transilvanië en ander plekke in Oos-Europa, Brittanje en veral Skotland, die Verenigde State van Amerika en Kanada, Suid-Afrika en verskeie ander Afrika-lande, Korea en verskeie ander Asiatiese lande. Maar om die historiese prentjie net meer volledig te skets sal nog nie die vraag na die eienskappe van die tradisie self beantwoord nie.

3. DIE GEREFORMEERDE BELYDENISTRADISIE?

In die soeke na sulke eienskappe is die Gereformeerde tradisie dikwels beskryf as 'n *belydenistradisie*. Geloofsbelydensisse het 'n uiters belangrike rol gespeel in die definiëring van die tradisie, en was deurslaggewend waar Gereformeerde kerke in hulle onderskeie omgewings hulle as lede van die katolieke kerk gesien het en hulle begrip van die een evangelie vir hulle tyd en omstandighede probeer verwoord en beliggaam het.¹⁶ Van die begin af het die tradisie 'n veelvoud aan belydenisdokumente. Dit het kenmerkend geword om met veelvuldige belydenisdokumente te lewe. Die veelvuldigheid aan dokumente is boonop vergesel deur 'n

16 Vir 'n standaard versameling van sommige van die vroegste Gereformeerde belydenisse, sien E F Karl Müller, *Die Bekenntnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, Leipzig: A Deichert, 1903; vir 'n meer onlangse versameling, Georg Plasger en Matthias Freudenberg, *Reformierte Bekenntnisschriften*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005. Vir waardevolle inleidings tot die komplekse ontwikkelings van hierdie belydenisse, sien Lukas Vischer, "The Reformed tradition and its multiple facets", in Jean-Jacques Bauswein en Lukas Vischer, *The Reformed family worldwide: A survey of Reformed churches, theological schools and international organizations*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 1-33.

veelvuldigheid aan standpunte oor hulle aard en gebruik – ’n veelvuldigheid wat dikwels tot dispute en konflikte gelei het. Merkwaaardige verskille in standpunte en praktyke wat betref belydenisdokumente kan gesien word tussen – byvoorbeeld – die Switserse, Duitse, Hongaarse, Skotse en Nederlandse kerke, verskille wat slegs vermenigvuldig word as Gereformeerde kerke in Afrika, Asië, die Amerikas en die Presbiteriaanse en Kongregasionele wêreldes ook in ag geneem word. Dit bring die vroeë rondom die bindende aard van Gereformeerde belydenisse na vore.

Onder normale omstandighede – vir die meeste Gereformeerde kerke – besit belydenisdokumente ’n relatiewe gesag, met die klem op albei die terme. Hulle het gesag, want hulle verteenwoordig die manier waarop vroeëre geslagte die Woord van God verstaan het. Hierdie gesag is egter relatief, eerstens omdat sulke belydenisse in beginsel altyd onderworpe is aan die finale gesag van God se Woord, tweedens omdat hulle histories is, en derdens omdat hulle die produkte van feilbare mense is, en daarom in beginsel altyd hersien kan word. Hierdie erkenning van hulle relatiewe gesag en dus hersienbare aard word deur sommige as kenmerkend van die Gereformeerde posisie beskou. Al drie hierdie redes verteenwoordig tipiese Gereformeerde oortuigings.

In die eerste plek is Gereformeerde belydenisse altyd onderworpe aan die gesag van God se Woord. Hulle dra geen gesag in en uit hulleself nie, en verder ontvang hulle ook nie gesag vanuit enige eksterne bronne of faktore van gesag, byvoorbeeld die gesag van die kerkleiers wat hulle uitspreek nie, of die kerklike gesag wat hulle aankondig nie, of die kerklike vergaderings wat hulle aanvaar nie. Soms word hulle *norma normata* genoem ter onderskeiding van die *norma normans*, genormeerde norme in teenstelling tot die normerende norm, of ook “ondergeskikte standaarde”. Baie sluit ’n eksplisiete uitnodiging in om hulle te meet aan die boodskap van God se Woord en ’n belofte dat hulle hersien, aangepas of verwerp sal word wanneer dit aangetoon kan word dat dit nodig is.

In die tweede plek is Gereformeerde belydenisse histories en kontekstueel van aard. Hulle moet op ’n verantwoorde manier geïnterpreteer word – met respek vir hulle historiese konteks en sosiale en kulturele agtergrond, sensitiwiteit vir die grammatikale en konseptuele instrumente waaroor die oorspronklike skrywers beskik het, versigtige insig in die spesifieke teenstrydighede waarbinne en die posisies waarteen hulle in die eerste plek geskryf is, ’n gevoel vir die retoriese doelstellings, dryfkrag en impak van die oorspronklike argument. Hulle is nie a-historiese dokumente met tydlose en ewige stellings nie. Telkens wanneer dit geïgnoreer is, het dit gelei tot standpunte en praktyke wat fundamentele Gereformeerde oortuigings weerspreek en selfs verloën het – die waarheid het maklik die akkuraatheid van stellings geword; geloof het intellektuele gehoorsaamheid aan gesaghebbende dokumente, vergaderings, besluite of figure geword, die kennis van die geloof het intellektuele inligting oor historiese feite en korrekte formuleringe geword, sekerheid het rasonale gevolgtrekkings geword wat op onweerlegbare aksiome gebaseer is, gesag het in die eerste instansie institusioneel en wetlik geword, Gereformeerde belydenisse het self denkstelsels geword wat gebruik kan word om mense wat nie aan hulle presiese uitdrukkings en formuleringe trou is nie, te dissiplineer. Baie Gereformeerde kerke is deur sulke konflikte uitmekaar geskeur. Vir hoofstroom Gereformeerde vroomheid het belydenisse egter intense eksegetiese en interpretasie nodig. Dit is juis as historiese en kontekstuele dokumente, teen die agtergrond van hulle eie debatte, versoekinge, konflikte en worstelinge dat hulle hulle gesag vir die hede behou.

In die derde plek is Gereformeerde belydenisse die produkte van feilbare menslike aktiwiteit, wat beteken dat dit nodig mag wees vir korreksies, hersiening en selfs vervanging. Die belydenistradisie waarsku self dikwels teen oorskating van enige vorm van menslike besluitneming, standpunte, vergaderings en dokumente – wat hulleself uiteraard insluit. Dit geld ook vir die kerkvergaderings waar hierdie dokumente bespreek en aangeneem is, vir al die teoloë

in die tradisie, en vir alle leiersfigure, skole, besluite – alles feilbare werk van mense. Dit beteken nie dat hierdie belydenisse bloot as die persoonlike menings van hulle wat daarby betrokke was of bloot die perspektief van ’n bepaalde kerk, gelowiges or gemeentes gesien moet word nie, intedeel. Die tradisie is nie geïnteresseerd om “Gereformeerde” of “Calvinistiese” standpunte en leringe daar te stel en te verdedig nie. Diep bewus van hulle eie menslike beperkings en perspektiwiteit, beweer hulle steeds dat hulle *die* evangelie bely vir hulle eie bepaalde konteks. Gereformeerde belydenisse is daarom altyd aan die algemene katolieke kerk gerig, hulle strewende altyd na ekumenisiteit. Daarom gee hulle die geleentheid vir response van die broeders en susters, nie om die belydenisdokumente as hulle eie te aanvaar nie, maar om aan te dui dat hulle dieselfde oortuigings het ten opsigte van die evangelie, of nie. Dit is wat die verdere resepsieproses so belangrik maak – nie altyd die aanvaarding as belydenisdokumente met enige status nie, maar primêr ontvangs in die vorm van erkenning, van studie, nadenke, bespreking, kritiek, gebruik, en as bron van inspirasie met die oog op verdere aksie.

Saam beskou, impliseer hierdie drie eienskappe dat dit onder spesifieke omstandighede vir die kerk nodig mag word om opnuut te bely. Onder abnormale omstandighede, wanneer hulle gekonfronteer word met radikale uitdagings aan die evangelie, mag sulke Gereformeerde kerke daarom voel dat hulle belydenis self, die integriteit en geloofwaardigheid van hulle getuienis op die spel is.¹⁷ Saam met ander Protestantse kerke beskryf Gereformeerde kerke sulke abnormale omstandighede van uitdaging en krisis met die uitdrukking *status confessionis*, wat aandui dat ’n oomblik van waarheid aangebreek het waarin die waarheid van niks anders as die evangelie self op die spel is nie. Die WBGK het ’n beskrywing van ’n *status confessionis* gegee tydens die vergaderings in Seoul en Debrecen.¹⁸ Soms mag kerke tydens ’n *status confessionis* die behoefte hê om hulle geloof opnuut uit te druk, hoewel dit nie noodwendig hoef te gebeur nie. In die 20ste eeu het dit by ’n paar geleenthede en in verskillende omstandighede gebeur (byvoorbeeld *Barmen* in Nazi-Duitsland en *Belhar* in apartheid Suid-Afrika).¹⁹

Deur die eeue was daar inderdaad ’n aantal pogings om die pluraliteit te verminder, deur of sekere Gereformeerde belydenisse met mekaar in ’n enkele stel leringe te verenig, of deur die inhoud van die hoofbelydenisse te vergelyk en te verminder na ’n gesaghebbende versameling Gereformeerde lerings en oortuigings, of selfs om een universele Gereformeerde belydenis te skryf en om maniere te vind om ’n soort algemene gesag aan so ’n belydenis toe te ken. In die laat 19de eeu, tydens die vroeë jare van die (latere) WBGK, is sulke voorstelle dikwels gemaak, maar altyd na besprekings verwerp.²⁰ Nie een van hierdie pogings het enige ernstige belangstelling of ondersteuning in Gereformeerde kringe ontlok nie. Hulle het almal die eintlike aard van Gereformeerde wees weerspreek, waarvan die saamleef met kessionele kompleksiteit en dinamiek ’n deurslaggewende deel vorm.²¹ In 1925 het die WBGK weer die vraag oorweeg of dit nodig en moontlik was om ’n universele (gemeenskaplike) Gereformeerde geloofsbellydenis aan te neem, en Barth is om sy mening gevra. Sy antwoord was ’n radikale afwysing. Een gemeenskaplike belydenis is nóg nodig nóg moontlik, het hy geredeneer, en ’n

17 Vir ’n versameling belydenisdokumente uit alle kontinente, Lukas Vischer (red.), *Reformed Witness Today. A collection of confessions and statements of faith issued by Reformed Churches*, Bern: Evangelische Arbeitsstelle Oekumene, 1982.

18 Sien Milan Opocenský (red.), *Debrecen 1997. Proceedings of the 23rd General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (Presbyterian and Congregational)*, Genève: WBGK, 1997.

19 Oor Barmen, sien Karl Barth, *Texte zur Barmer Theologischen Erklärung*, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984; Eberhard Busch, *Die Barmer These 1934-2004*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004. Oor Belhar, sien PJ Naudé, *Neither Calender nor Clock*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010.

20 Sien Odair Pedroso Mateus, “Towards an Alliance of Protestant Churches? The confessional and the ecumenical in the WARC constitutions I,” *Reformed World*, Vol 55/1, 2005, 55-70.

21 Sien bv. Jan Rohls, *Theologie reformierter Bekenntnisschriften*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1987.

beskrywing voorsien van Gereformeerde belydenisse wat wyd versprei het en invloedryk geraak het. 'n Poging deur die wêreldliggaam om 'n universele gesaghebbende belydenis af te kondig sou net mooi omtrent elke aspek van die Gereformeerde geloof, vroomheid en lewe weerspreek.

Daarom kan die Gereformeerde tradisie nie sy toevlug neem tot baie van die vorme van eenheid wat ander Christelike en selfs ander Protestantse tradisies mag hê nie – geen sentrale gesag nie, geen hiërargiese struktuur nie, geen magisterium vir leringe nie, geen korpus met onfeilbare leringe nie, geen gemeenskaplike kanon met Bybelse interpretasies nie, geen kontinue en onveranderlike liturgiese tradisie nie, geen charismatiese leierskap nie, geen basiese etniese of nasionale lojaliteit nie, geen gemeenskaplike stel godsdienstige simbole of nalatenskap met kulturele praktyke nie, geen kenmerkende soort godsdienstige ervaring nie, geen spesiale soort spiritualiteit nie, selfs nie eens een gemeenskaplike en universele boek met belydenisse nie. In plaas daarvan is dit 'n tradisie wat op 'n radikale manier daarop aanspraak maak dat dit daarna strewende om slegs deur “die Bybel alleen” te lewe – en dan toegee dat dit geen finale interpretasie van daardie Bybel het en geen finale gesag wat enige interpretasie kan waarborg nie, slegs 'n plurale, meersinnige en dinamiese belydenistradisie.

Dit is des te interessanter omdat die Gereformeerde tradisie die eenheid van die kerk, wat inderdaad *die sigbare eenheid van die kerk* genoem word, baie ernstig opneem. Die tradisie was uitermate aktief in die 20ste-eeuse ekumeniese beweging en is diep besorg oor die onenigheid binne sy eie tradisie en binne die Christendom as geheel. Dit mag na 'n groot teenstrydigheid lyk, want die tradisie wys bewustelik so baie omtrent vanselfsprekende strategieë om een of ander vorm van sigbare eenheid te verkry van die hand. Die enigste pad wat dit bereid is om in te slaan, naamlik die belydende en lerende aard van die kerk, kan inderdaad lyk of dit onenigheid baie meer dien as wat dit sigbare eenheid kan bevorder. Gevolglik is die Gereformeerde tradisie diep tot sigbare eenheid verbind, maar dit worstel voortdurend met die konkrete beliggaming van hierdie eenheid. Die belydenisse het meestal in situasies van onenigheid, konflik en dreigende skeuring en verdeling ontstaan, en was meestal pogings om 'n manier van sigbare eenheid vanuit hierdie konflikte te vind – soms was hulle nie suksesvol nie, en is die verdelings in geloof en lewe verdiep; baie dikwels was hulle egter inderdaad nuttig, en het hulle helderheid gebring en na hernude eenheid in geloof en lewe gelei, en deur verskeie prosesse van erkenning en aanvaarding meer en meer gelowiges verenig, soms daadwerklik oor die grense van etnisiteit en ras, sosiale status en stand, land en kontinent, tyd en ruimte.

4. GEREFORMEERDE LERING?

Is dit miskien moontlik om die eienskappe van die Gereformeerde tradisie in terme van lering te omskryf? Dit is gereeld probeer, maar weer eens was dit 'n benadering met baie slaggete. Brian Gerrish waarsku byvoorbeeld teen die soeke na tipies Gereformeerde dogmas wat as “sogenaamde Gereformeerde kenmerke” beskou word. Wat die mees kenmerkende aan die Gereformeerde geloof is, sê hy tereg, is nie wat eie daaraan is nie, maar wat dit gemeenskaplik met ander katolieke en evangeliese gemeenskappe het. Hy haal ter illustrasie die voorwoord tot die *Brief Statement of Faith* van die Presbiteriaanse Kerk van die Verenigde State van Amerika (PCUSA) aan: “The faith we confess unites us with the one, universal church. The most important beliefs of Presbyterians are those we share with other Christians, and especially with other evangelical Christians who look to the Protestant Reformation as a renewal of the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Dus wil Gereformeerde mense nie eiesoortige Gereformeerde leringe hê nie. Maar het hulle tog wel “essensiële leerstelling”, kenmerkende sake wat hulle eie aard beklemtoon?²²

22 Sien Brian Gerrish, “Introduction: Doing Theology in the Reformed Tradition”, in Gerrish (red.), *Reformed Theology for the Third Christian Millennium*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003,

Baie bekende lyste kom by 'n mens op, maar hulle weerspieël meesal baie spesifieke standpunte wat sekerlik nie deur alle ander Gereformeerde teoloë gedeel word nie. Gerrish onthou byvoorbeeld die sogenaamde Vyf Punte van Calvinisme (soms afgekort tot TULIP, 'n spesifieke Noord-Amerikaanse interpretasie van die Dordtse Leerreëls), die vyf wesenlike leerstellinge van die Algemene Vergadering van Amerikaanse Presbiteriane in 1910, tydens die fundamentealistiese geskil, en die vyf temas uit die huidige Grondwet van die PCUSA, naamlik die soewereiniteit van God en vier verwante temas (verkieasing tot redding en diens; 'n verbondslawe met gedisiplineerde besorgdheid vir orde; rentmeesterskap by die gebruik van God se gawes; die roeping om vir geregtigheid te werk).

Baie ander pogings om die basiese Gereformeerde leerstellige beklemtonings vas te lê, sou bygevoeg kon word. Die WBGK self het in 1982 'n besprekingsdokument vir sy lidkerke gepubliseer wat *Called to witness to the gospel today* geheet het. Die basiese verklaring was dat Jesus Christus Heer en Redder is. Deur hernude nadenke oor die Gereformeerde tradisie het hulle die heerskappy van Christus, die Skrif alleen, die sentrale rol en aard van aanbidding, prediking en die nagmaal, vryheid tot dissipelskap, en die kenmerkende orde van die kerk en die geordende bediening volgens Gereformeerde insig, bespreek. Hulle het toe in aparte afdelings op die aard van gemeenskap in Christus (insluitende die aard van die kerk as katolieke, maar ook verskeie ander sosiale kwessies van insluiting and uitsluiting, soos rassisme) gefokus, en op die getuieis van die kerk vir die evangelie in 'n bedreigte en verdeelde wêreld (insluitende kulturele diversiteit, vrede en geweld, rykdom en mag, en menseregte). Al hierdie temas kom inderdaad gereeld weer in gesprekke oor Gereformeerde identiteit voor – maar die deurslaggewende vrae oor watter standpunte eintlik ingeneem word, bly bestaan, en daaroor was die Gereformeerde gemeenskap dikwels diep verdeel. 'n Mens hoef maar net te dink aan die gesag en interpretasie van die Skrif, die aard van die nagmaal en die funksie van kultuur, etnisiteit en ras in Gereformeerde kerke.²³

Baie teoloë het ook hulle eie gesprekke oor kenmerkende Gereformeerde leerstellige beklemtonings gevoer. Ses voorbeelde is voldoende, almal van hoogaangeskrewe Gereformeerde teoloë.²⁴ Lukas Vischer, wat lank 'n leidende Gereformeerde stem in die ekumeniese wêreld was,

1-12. Vir die langer, oorspronklike dokument, sien Brian Gerrish, "Tradition in the Modern World: The Reformed Habit of Mind", in Willis en Welker (reds.), *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 3-20.

23 *Called to Witness to the Gospel Today*, Studies from the WARC I (Genève; WBGK, 1982).

24 'n Insiggewende oorsig is steeds die bundel uitgesoekte opstelle wat deur Donald K. McKim geredigeer is, *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992; Eugene: Wipf & Stock 1998. Sien ook Donald K. McKim (red.), *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992, en Donald K. McKim (red.), *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001. Die Institute for Reformed Theology by Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, het geleerdes van buite die tradisie genooi om hulle sienings omtrent Gereformeerde identiteit te gee, en het baie interessante response ontvang. Randall Zachman, 'n Episkopale geleerde oor die Reformasie, steun op Calvyn en Zwingli, asook op Edwards, Schleiermacher en Barth in sy aanspraak dat die vrygewigheid van God, die self-skenkende goedheid van God en die daaruit voortvloeiende skoonheid van God (wat gesien word in die skepping en die mensheid) "die sentrale insig" is "wat die Gereformeerde tradisie bo alle ander Christene voorhou vir hulle ernstige aandag" (in sy "The Generosity of God: The Witness of the Reformed Tradition", Lente 2006; ook sy "The Challenge and Promise of Reformed Theology", Lente 2001). Dennis Tamburello OFM beklemtoon die sentraliteit van Christus, veral die dubbele genade van regverdigmaking en heiligmaking, sowel as die vereniging met Christus, en daaruit voortvloeiend die begrip van die sakrament, die bewustheid van die Heilige Gees en die klem op dankbaarheid (in sy "Christ at the Center: The Legacy of the Reformed Tradition", Winter 2004. Al hierdie skrywes is op die webblad van die Instituut en in The Bulletin of the Institute for Reformed Theology beskikbaar).

fokus op ses temas – maar wys in elke geval na misverstande, teenstrydighede en “veelvuldige voorbeelde van vooroordeel en verwinging” – naamlik *solus Christus* (maar die koninkryk van God en sy allesomvattende geregtigheid kan uit die oog verloor word), die lewende Woord (maar die sakramente word dikwels in die agtergrond geskuif), *sola scriptura* (met fundamentalisme wat die Gereformeerde tradisie soos ’n skaduwee volg), die klem op gemeentes en die bediening van alle gelowiges, sinodale kerkstrukture, en die oortuiging dat die evangelie op alle gebiede van die lewe van toepassing is.²⁵

Gerhard Sauter begin met ekklesiologie (die erediens en die administrasie van die kerk), en verwys dan (meer formeel) na die rol van die Bybel en die rasonele aard van Gereformeerde teologie voordat hy (meer materieel) die bewustheid van God se soewereiniteit bespreek, die “ongewone verreikende lering van die Heilige Gees, veral van sy grenslose teenwoordigheid” en uiteindelik die “moeilike en lastige verwantskap tussen eskatologie en geskiedenis”.²⁶

Eberhard Busch begin met die “een Woord van God” as fundamentele Gereformeerde oortuiging en bespreek dan verbondsteologie, evangelie en wet, gebed en werk (’n beroep op God doen en ons roeping), die waarskuwing teen afgodediens, die kerk as gemeenskap van broeders en susters, die bediening van Jesus en die bediening in die gemeente, en die diensbaarheid ter wille van reg en vrede – en die blywende invloed van *Barmen* in sy verstaan van hierdie temas is onmiskenbaar.²⁷

Michael Welker demonstreer die tipiese Gereformeerde benadering as hy die “Gereformeerde profiel” in terme van die klassieke viervoudige sola formula, naamlik Skrif alleen, Christus alleen, geloof alleen en genade alleen skets, maar in elke geval bied hy ’n baie kreatiewe, kontemporêre herinterpretasie van die dryfkrag en omvang van elke formule.²⁸

Jane Dempsey Douglass, ’n voormalige president van die WBGK, beskryf Gereformeerde teologie as “katolieke nadenke wat gefokus is op wat God doen en hoe God ons roep om deel te neem aan God se werk”, as “wat gedoen word in, met en vir belydende Christelike gemeenskappe en vir die wêreld.” Volgens haar is dit “nie ’n geskrewe liggaam wat in die verlede afgehandel is nie, maar ’n tradisie wat teologie op die Gereformeerde manier doen, sekerlik in voortsetting van die klassieke Gereformeerde teoloë en die belydenisse, maar steeds in wording, steeds onvoltooid, en wat tot aan die einde van die tye so sal wees.”²⁹ Met verwysing na die leerstellige taak van Gereformeerde kerke *vandag*, wys sy op die noodsaak om die solidariteit van Christus met die mensdom opnuut te oordink, die solidariteit van die mense van Christus en die solidariteit van die menslike familie wat volgens die beeld van God geskep is.³⁰ Dit is duidelik dat sy bewustelik ’n denkwysie beskryf eerder as die leerstellige inhoud van die tradisie.

Vanuit ’n Suid-Afrikaanse perspektief bespreek John de Gruchy sentrale Gereformeerde oortuigings in sy Warfield-lesings, wat dubbelsinnig *Liberating Reformed theology* genoem word. Hy gebruik sy landgenoot Lekula Ntoane se woord, “a cry for life”, as motto vir die Gereformeerde geloof en die bevrydende potensiaal daarvan. Hy behandel dan die Gereformeerde siening van die Skrif (en bevryding van die tirannie van tradisie, gewoonte en filosofie), die siening van

25 Lukas Vischer, “The Reformed Church and its Witness Today”, in *Confessing Jesus Christ in Dialogue*, Genève: John Knox, 1986, 19-34.

26 Gerhard Sauter, “Observations on the Current State of the Reformed Theology”, op die webblad van die Institute for Reformed Theology, Herfs 2004.

27 Eberhard Busch, *Reformiert. Profil einer Konfession* (Zürich: TVZ, 2007).

28 Michael Welker, “Reformation Theology and the Reformed Profile”, *The Bulletin of the Institute of Reformed Theology*, Winter 2003, nr. 1. Sien ook Berndt Hamm en Michael Welker, *Die Reformation. Potentiale der Freiheit*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

29 Jane Dempsey Douglass, “What is ‘Reformed Theology’?”, *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, 1990.

30 Jane Dempsey Douglass, “A Theme for Today’s Reformed Theologians”, *The Bulletin of the Institute of Reformed Theology*, Lente 2000.

God (en bevryding van afgodediens, wat die “tirannie van menslike krag is wat optree asof dit goddelik is”), die siening van soteriologie (en bevryding deur genade alleen van die tirannie en verskrikking van slegte godsdienste), die siening van die kerk (en bevryding van die tirannie van menslike tradisie en onwaarheid) en die siening van die rol van die kerk in die samelewing (met die politieke taak van die kerk in diens van bevryding van tirannie en anargie).³¹

Ten spyte van al die verskille is dit duidelik dat sommige van hierdie leerstellings temas herhaalbaarlik in baie van die diskussies voorkom, sodat hulle inderdaad in die geheel as ’n korpus oortuigings van besondere belang vir die Gereformeerde geloof beskou kan word. Dit is egter ook duidelik dat etiese temas, die praktiese implikasies vir die Christelike lewe, ook telkens weer opduik. Daarom is dit miskien beter om nie na die Gereformeerde identiteit in besondere leringe te soek nie, maar om dit liever te sien as ’n manier om ’n Christelike gemeenskap in die wêreld te wees, *coram Deo*. Hierdie formule sluit aan by wat John Leith aan die hand doen in sy nuttige *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, want dit vestig die aandag op wat hy die omvattende etos van die Gereformeerde tradisie noem, wat teologie sekerlik ook insluit, maar ook organisatoriese vorme, liturgie en kultuur. Miskien moet ’n mens sê Gereformeerde vroomheid is ’n bewustheid van in die geskiedenis lewe en in die wêreld voor die aangesig van die lewendige God.³²

Gerrish formuleer ’n soortgelyke oortuiging op ’n ander manier. In plaas van ’n lys “permanente dogmas”, redeneer hy, moet ’n mens aandag gee aan die tipies Gereformeerde “gewoonte van ingesteldheid”. Hy bespreek dan vyf kenmerke van die Gereformeerde gewoonte van ingesteldheid, naamlik dat dit eerbiedig is (*deferential*, respekvol, vol eerbied, as beskrywing van die tipies Gereformeerde verstaan van tradisie); basies krities (nie onnadenkende nabootsing nie); óóp (vir wysheid en waarheid waar dit ook al te vinde is, en daarom ook vir volledig vrye wetenskaplike ondersoek en vir “wat vir die kerk gesê word” deur die buitewêreld van geleerdheid); prakties (omdat waarheid “lei tot” goedheid, impliseer dit dat stigting, heiligmaking en transformasie belangrik is, eerder as spekulasie en nuuskierigheid), en evangelies. Opsommend beweer hy daarom: “Reformed theology is an ongoing conversation into which the ‘fathers’ of the Reformed church are drawn, deferentially but not uncritically; in which openness to sacred and secular learning brings continual new light, always with an eye to the practice of piety and the transformation of human lives, both individually and socially; and in which, finally, the focus returns again and again to the gospel.”³³

5. GEREFORMEERDE LEWE?

Die Gereformeerde tradisie is duidelik ook bekend vir sy klem op die Christelike lewe, op moraliteit en etiek, vanaf die persoonlike tot by die politieke. In die meeste van hierdie beskrywings kom die integrale verband tussen geloof en lewe na vore. Calvyn self het alreeds die begin van verskeie kenmerkende trajekte binne die Gereformeerde lewe verteenwoordig. Hy was besorg oor die implikasies van die geloof vir die lewe, van lering vir etiek. Sy vernaamste boek was immers oor onderrig in die Christelike lewe, dit wil sê in vroomheid en die volle praktiese implikasies vir die Christelike lewe. Sy besorgdheid was dat die evangelie suiwer verkondig moes word maar “ook gehoor” word. Hy was in die eerste plek ’n pastor, en deur sy baie aktiwiteite en geskrifte – gereelde preke, kommentare, lesings, Bybelstudies, duisende briewe, traktate en pamflette, maar ook deur sy betrokkenheid in die openbare lewe, plaaslike en internasionale politiek,

31 John W de Gruchy, *Liberating Reformed Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991. Hy verwys na Lekula Ntoane, *A Cry for Life. An Interpretation of ‘Calvinism’ and Calvin*, Kampen: Kok, 1983.

32 John H Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition*, Atlanta: John Knox, 1978.

33 Gerrish, “Tradition in the Modern World: The Reformed Habit of Mind,” in David Willis & Michael Welker, *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 3-21.

gemeenskapsdiens, armoedeverligting, gesondheidskwessies, opvoeding en regsake – het hy probeer om diens te lewer aan wat hy gesien het as die Christelike lewe.

Ten diepste was sy oortuiging dat ons nie aan onself behoort nie 'n vorm van kennis wat sowel volledige vertroosting bied as wat dit volledige eise stel. Party mense beskou hierdie oortuiging as die opsomming van Gereformeerde etiek. Dit is die onderwerp van die *Heidelbergse Kategismus* (1563), die sleutel tot die *Teologiese Verklaring van Barmen* (1934), die openingsmotief in die *Brief Statement of Faith* (1993) van die PCUSA en die herhalende refrein van die Debrecen-litanie (1997) wat deur die WBGK opgestel is met die oog op ekonomiese onreg en ekologiese vernietiging. Weer eens het hierdie oortuiging baie omstrede geraak. Vrae oor selfliefde, selfontkenning en selfopoffering, hetsy persoonlik en individueel of gemeenskaplik en kollektief, byvoorbeeld wat betref nasie en land, het dikwels tot intense debatte gelei. Gereformeerde etiek is dikwels daarvan beskuldig dat dit 'n pessimistiese antropologie en 'n ongesonde minagting vir selfvervulling en geluk het. Vrae en konflikte oor evangelie en wet, die sogenaamde derde gebruik van die wet, regverdigmaking en heiligmaking, genade en dankbaarheid, geroepenheid en roeping, vryheid en verantwoordelikheid, het kenmerkend geword. Gereformeerde etiek is dikwels van moralisme en wettisme beskuldig.

Calvyn het hierdie vertroosting en eise op 'n Trinitariese manier ontwikkel, wat tot 'n komplekse beskrywing van die Christelike lewe lei. Etiese temas verskyn in verskillende teologiese kontekste in sy werk, wat aanleiding gee tot latere debatte, omdat verskillende historiese figure ná hom verskillende trajekte uit sy werk beklemtoon het. Ten minste drie sulke kontekste in sy omvattende werk het invloedryke resepsie-geskiedenis belewe.

Eerstens behandel hy, in die kern van sy gesprek oor ons kennis van God as genadige en soewereine Vader, God se morele wet, en redeneer hy dat die morele wet opgesom is in die Tien Gebooie (*Institusie II*, 8). Hy soek na positiewe bedoelings agter elk van die gebooie, en pas hulle op etiese kwessies van sy tyd toe. In die Gereformeerde geskiedenis sou hierdie benadering invloedryk word. Dit sou ook kontroversiële vrae oor benaderings tot etiek vanuit natuurwette stel en die noodsaaklikheid vir die Skrif in ons pogings om die goddelike morele wet te onderskei en leer ken. Van spesiale belang sou sy bewerings oor die waardigheid van alle mense, ongeag wie hulle is, wees, want ons herken die beeld van God en ons eie vlees tegelykertyd in almal van hulle.

Tweedens beskryf hy die Christelike lewe as hy ons kennis van God die Verlosser in Jesus Christus bespreek. Hier verbind hy regverdigmaking en heiligmaking (*Institusie III*, 6-10) met mekaar. Alreeds in sy eie tyd is hierdie afdelings apart gepubliseer en het hulle 'n belangrike bron en inspirasie vir Gereformeerde etiek geword, vir baie mense eenvoudig *die* mees informatiewe en gesaghebbende beskrywing van die Christelike lewe wat beskikbaar is.

Derdens het hy 'n invloedryke uitbeelding van "Christelike vryheid" gegee (*Institusie III*, 9), oorspronklik bedoel as inleiding tot sy diskussies van kerklike regeringsvorme sowel as burgerlike regering. Sowel sy begrip van die sigbare vorm, struktuur en orde van die kerk as sy begrip van politieke en openbare lewe rus daarom op sy begrip van vryheid, en weer eens sou dit vormende tradisies in Gereformeerde etiek word. In navolging van Luther se twee stelling (oor die vryheid van 'n Christen-mens), voeg hy 'n verreikende derde stelling by wat oor die *adiaphora* handel, en argumenteer hy ten gunste van vryheid om neutraal te wees teenoor baie menslike, kulturele, kerklike en godsdienstige verpligtinge, dit wil sê, vir die vryheid om neutraal te wees teenoor die neutrale. Baie van die teenstrydighede in Calvyn se nalatenskap sou gaan oor die vraag oor wat as neutraal beskou kan word. Dié selfkritiese houding (van die *semper reformanda*) sou dikwels Gereformeerde gelowiges van gevestigde praktyke en institusionele vorme bevry wat deur andere as goddelik bestem en onveranderlik beskou is. Barth sou evangeliese etiek as 'n etiek van vryheid beskryf.

Hierdie drie verskillende benaderings het gevolglik tot die veelduidige en omstrede resepsie-geskiedenis bygedra. Sommige sou 'n etiek primêr op die basis van die morele wet bou en begrippe soos natuurwette, algemene openbaring en algemene genade gebruik, sommige sou op meer persoonlike etiek konsentreer, dikwels individualisties, met die klem op dissipelskap, oordenking, gebed en selfverloëning, nog andere sou ten gunste wees van sosiale etiek en openbare verantwoordelikheid in politiek, ekonomie, opvoeding, die regsweese, publieke opinie en kulturele vorming.

Dit is alreeds duidelik waarom enige kort historiese oorsig onmoonlik is. 'n Paar verteenwoordigende illustrasies – neigings, episodes, figure – kan wel dalk tipiese ontwikkelings en kenmerke belig. Sedert die vroegste tye het onderrig 'n vormende rol in die Gereformeerde vroomheid en lewe gespeel, hetsy deur kategismusse, preke en geskrifte. Die toepassing van die Tien Gebooue as 'n morele wet was gewild. Verklarende preke was waarskynlik die belangrikste dissipline en praktyk van Gereformeerde etiek. Andre Bieler het byvoorbeeld 'n vermaarde studie van Calvyn se sosiale en ekonomiese denke gemaak deur sy preke te ontleed.³⁴

Die eerste etiek in die nalatenskap van Calvyn is deur 'n regsgeleerde, Lambertus Danaeus (1577) geskryf. In baie opsigte het dit 'n insiggewende illustrasie geword van wat later sou gebeur. Die humanistiese agtergrond wat alreeds in Calvyn teenwoordig was, is nou selfs verder ontwikkel, saam met verskillende filosofiese invloede, vanuit Aristoteles sowel as die Stoïsimisme – kenmerkend van humanistiese en filosofiese invloede later. Die veranderende houding van die tyd, naamlik 'n sterk bewustheid van sosiale krisis en 'n besef van die sosiale orde wat uitmekaar val, en gevolglik die dringende noodsaak vir 'n nuwe sosiale orde en heropbou, speel 'n deurslaggewende rol in die noodsaak vir so 'n Gereformeerde etiek – soos wat dikwels weer in die geskiedenis sal gebeur as sosiale krisisse om nuwe en selfkritiese etiese projekte vra. In die werk self kombineer sy regsopleiding en belange met fundamentele teologiese besluite en oortuigings – weer tipies van latere ontwikkelings.³⁵ Gereformeerde denke sou op belangrike maniere bydra tot die skeiding tussen kerk en staat en die ontwikkeling van 'n regstelsel en regterlike mag wat op menswaardigheid en menseregte gebaseer is,³⁶ en onafhanklik van die invloed van die institusionele kerk en godsdiens is.³⁷

Sedert die begin van die moderne tydperk en Schleiermacher se meer filosofiese etiek het die nuttige onderskeid tussen drie etiese benaderings – wat onderskeidelik op goedheid (waardes, morele oortuigings), deugde (karakter, morele agentskap) en pligte (norme, reëls, beginsels, besluite) fokus – gewild geword. Verskillende etiese tradisies en etici binne die Gereformeerde geloof sou verskillende voorkeure hê en gevolglik op verskillende maniere ontwikkel. Sommige fokus op breër visies en sienings van die wêreld, andere konsentreer op die persoonlike lewe van gelowiges as morele agente, sommige konsentreer op morele besluite en die rol van norme en reëls. Elke tradisie sou die Skrif dienooreenkomstig lees. Afhangende van 'n mens se eie agtergrond en ervaring vereenselwig baie mense Gereformeerde etiek met enige een van hierdie drie benaderings tot etiek en die dienooreenkomstige rol van die Skrif, maar in werklikheid was al drie van hulle dominant in die Gereformeerde geskiedenis, soos wat deur verskillende gemeenskappe gedemonstreer is.

'n Paar illustrasies sal voldoende wees. In Nederland het Kuyper 'n omvattende lewens- en wêreldbeskouing ontwikkel wat 'n blywende impak op die kultuur en spesifieke subkulture in baie dele van die wêreld sou hê.³⁸ In Suid-Afrika was hierdie nalatenskap byvoorbeeld belangrik

34 André Bieler, *Calvin's Economic and Social Thought*, Genève: WARC, 2006.

35 Christoph Strohm, *Ethik im frühen Calvinismus*, Berlyn: De Gruyter, 1996.

36 John Witte, *The Reformation of Rights*, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007.

37 Christoph Strohm, *Calvinismus und Recht*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008.

38 Peter S Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

in die regverdiging van die wêreldbeeld van apartheid en die politieke stelsel sowel as in die stryd téén hierdie ideologie.³⁹ Op dikwels uiteenlopende maniere het invloedryke publieke teoloë en etici in Noord-Amerika, soos Reinhold Niebuhr, H Richard Niebuhr, Paul Lehmann en meer onlangs James Gustafson almal hulle bydraes gelewer vanuit die tradisie van Gereformeerde etiek. Gustafson neem byvoorbeeld drie ideologiese leerstellings uit die Gereformeerde tradisie, naamlik die bewustheid van 'n magtige Ander (in Calvinistiese terme die soewereiniteit van God), die sentraliteit van vroomheid of godsdienstige toegeneentheid in die morele lewe (vir hom die Calvinistiese toegeneentede van afhanklikheid, dankbaarheid, verpligting, berou, moontlikheid en rigting), en die erkenning dat alle menslike aktiwiteit georden behoort te word met betrekking tot dit wat onderskei kan word omtrent die doelstelling van God (dit is waarom hy sy etiek “teosentries”noem, in die laaste instansie gebaseer op “teologie as ’n manier om die wêreld te vertolk”).⁴⁰ Vanuit die Duitssprekende Gereformeerde wêreld het Barth weer ’n groot invloed uitgeoefen. Hoewel sommige, as hulle aan sy vroeëre werke dink, sy etiek as ’n vorm van arbitrêre besluitneming beskou, kan dit meer paslik verstaan word as ’n omvattende poging om die siening van die “morele ontologie” van die Skrif ernstig op te neem.⁴¹ Van Engeland af tot in die Verenigde State het die Puritanisme ’n vormende openbare krag geword; uit verskeie Europese gemeenskappe het verskeie vorme van Gereformeerde Piëtisme na baie ander kontinente versprei; terwyl die komplekse verskynsel van Evangelikalisme op baie maniere verstaan moet word met betrekking tot Gereformeerde wortels en invloede. Vandag het Gereformeerde, Calvinistiese en neo-Calvinistiese almal baie gesigte.

6. GEREFORMEERDE ETIEK?

Hoewel dit moeilik en kontroversieel is in die lig van die uiteenlopendhede, is dit miskien legitiem om te veralgemeen en ’n paar gemeenskaplike kenmerke van Gereformeerde etiek op te noem.

Eerstens is dit alreeds tipies dat etiek so sentraal is. Die belangstelling in die Christelike lewe – in dissipelskap, in heiligmaking, in die derde gebruik van die wet, in die respek vir menswaardigheid, in roeping, in gelofte, in gemeenskapslewe, openbare verantwoordelikheid, politieke deelname, in kwessies van vryheid en geregtigheid, in demokratiese lewe en sosiale welsyn, in kultuur, geleerdheid, opvoeding – behoort integraal tot die Gereformeerde gesigspunt.

Dit is in die tweede plek kenmerkend dat hierdie passie vir etiek voortvloei uit teologiese, leerstellige, geloofs- of belydenisoortuigings. Daar is opmerklieke uitsonderings, maar die geheelprentjie is eerder dat lering en geloof integraal verbind is. Dit dra daartoe by dat etiese sienings so uiteenlopend is. Hulle is gebaseer op uiteenlopende sienings van God en uiteenlopende maniere om die Skrif te verstaan. Barth en Gustafson bied dramatiese voorbeelde. Terwyl Gustafson volledig met Barth saamstem oor die deurslaggewende belang van die lering van God vir etiek, verskil hy radikaal van Barth se eiesoortige siening van God (naamlik dat Hy in Christus openbaar is en daarom Drie-enig is en redding bewerk). Die spektrum van teologiese moontlikhede is ryk en kompleks – vanaf klem op God as Skepper en wetgewer, tot klem op Jesus Christus, tot klem op die werk van die Heilige Gees, en binne elkeen van hierdie beklemtonings is die moontlikhede om hulle op verskillende maniere te verstaan weer eens omtrent onbeperk – en weer eens word die Skrif gebruik op al hierdie uiteenlopende maniere om die beeld van God te ondersteun en daarmee etiese perspektiewe en oriëntasie te verskaf.

39 Allan A Boesak, *The Tenderness of Conscience*, Stellenbosch: SunMedia, 2005; Dirk J Smit, *Essays on Being Reformed. Collected Essays 3*, Stellenbosch: SunMedia, red. Robert R Vosloo, 2009, veral 185-294.

40 James M Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, 2 bundels, Chicago: Universiteit van Chicago, 1981-1984.

41 John Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Derdens verwys die begrip “Gereformeerd” na die selfkritiese bewustheid en die voortdurende gewilligheid dat opnuut ondersoek moet word en indien nodig getransformeer moet word in die lig van die Skrif. Hierdie selfbegrip het Gereformeerde etiek diepgaande historiese en kontekstueel gemaak. Dit reageer op nuwe uitdagings in die geskiedenis en kan dramaties deur sulke uitdagings verander word. Etiese oortuigings en praktyke word as tydelik beskou, vir nou en voorlopig, nooit finaal en ewig nie, gebaseer op huidige insig. Dit het tot gevolg dat begrippe soos verantwoordelikheid (Richard Niebuhr), geroepenheid (“hier en nou”), die waarneming van God se wil (die vroeë Barth), die lees van en reaksie op die konteks (Lehmann) dikwels populêr is – almal begrippe wat die historiese verantwoordelikheid om waar te neem en te reageer onderstreep, eerder as begrippe van gehoorsaamheid aan gesag of lojaliteit aan dit wat reeds vooraf besluit is.⁴²

Vierdens is dit kenmerkend dat die deurlopende hernuwing volgens die Skrif na die hernuwing van gelowiges kan verwys, na die kerk of na die samelewing. Om praktiese implikasies deur te trek vir al drie – vir die persoonlike lewe, vir die sigbare struktuur en lewe van die kerk, en vir die sfeer van politieke en openbare lewe – was altyd integraal vir die Gereformeerde geloof en etiek. Die boodskap van die Skrif kan op baie verskillende maniere verstaan word ten einde die nodige oriëntasie vir die beliggaming te verskaf, hetsy in die individuele lewe, in die kerk of in die samelewing. Populêre Gereformeerde motiewe sluit die heerskappy van Jesus Christus oor die hele werklikheid in, soms geformuleer as die sogenaamde profetiese rol van die kerk. So ’n profetiese houding is dikwels gedemonstreer deur betrokkenheid by die bevordering van sosiale geregtigheid, en is tipies van die WBGK sedert sy stigting tot met die bekende Accra-Verklaring (2004) insake globale ekonomiese onreg en uitsluiting en wydverspreide ekologiese vernietiging.

In die laaste plek word Gereformeerdes meermale beskryf as “mense van die Boek” om die belangrikheid van die Skrif in hierdie tradisie te onderstreep. Die twee belangrikste praktyke in die tradisie was waarskynlik die weeklikse erediens waar die Skrif en in die besonder uitleg en onderrig inderdaad ’n sentrale plek ingeneem het, asook die oordenkende lees, bestudering en bespreking van die Skrif, hetsy privaat, as gesin, of saam met ander. Die Skrif word as gesaghebbend beskou, dikwels beskryf as die “Woord van God”, en dit sluit die Ou Testament ook in. Deur die gesag van die hele Skrif vir die geloof en lewe te bely, lê die Gereformeerde tradisie as geheel sekere onderskeidende aksente wat ’n bevestiging van die noodsaak vir interpretasie insluit; die beklemtoning van die belangrikheid van wetenskaplike eksegeese; aandag aan die Skrif as geheel; erkenning van ’n sekere vorm van skopus, gerigtheid of boodskap; respek vir die rol van tradisie; die baie ernstige opneem van die gemeenskap van die gelowiges; die siening van prediking, onderrig en studie as sentraal vir die opbou van die geloof; die beklemtoning van die openbaring van die Heilige Gees; en die beklemtoning van verskeidenheid sowel as eenheid in die Skrif.⁴³

TREFWOORDE

Gereformeerde identiteit
Gereformeerde belydenis
Gereformeerde leer
Gereformeerde lewe
Gereformeerde etiek

KEY WORDS

Reformed identity
Reformed confession
Reformed doctrine
Reformed life
Reformed ethics

42 Sien byvoorbeeld Doug Schuurman, *Vocations. Discerning our Callings in Life*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

43 Uit ’n belangrike rapport oor “Hermeneutics and Ethics”, Grand Rapids: Gereformeerde Ekumeniese Raad, 1992.

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Philosophical Theology and Rational Theology

ABSTRACT

Vincent Brümmer's philosophical theology project has been of utmost importance for philosophers of religion, and will continue to be so for the next generation of such scholars. In this essay I defend his position against the objections to philosophical theology raised by Eberhard Herrmann. But I further argue that philosophers of religion must go beyond philosophical theology and also engage in rational theology. Once we have established the meaning and coherence of certain religious beliefs and their connection to other religious beliefs, philosophers should go on to ask whether it is rational to accept these beliefs in the first place; and, if not, should consider what religious people might believe instead. Whereas philosophical theology attempts to test the coherence of doctrinal claims, their implications and their connection to other doctrinal claims, rational theology attempts to test the rationality and warrant of these doctrinal claims and to explore their connection to philosophical, scientific, political and moral claims.

Vincent Brümmer's ideas about philosophical theology and his research within the field have had great impact on many scholars around the world. He has been invited to Uppsala University on a number of occasions and in 1994 was awarded an honorary doctorate there. Brümmer was one of those key figures in contemporary philosophy of religion whom I had to read when a young PhD student. Very soon I understood why, and his ideas have influenced my writing and teaching ever since.

In this essay I shall focus on the task of philosophical theology and will try to develop an account of it in dialogue with Brümmer and also with one of his critics, Eberhard Herrmann. Herrmann was the adviser for my PhD thesis and the professor who, at the time when Brümmer received the honorary doctorate, held the chair in philosophy of religion at Uppsala University. He represented a viewpoint quite different from that of Brümmer. Herrmann thought that we ought to distinguish clearly between, on the one hand, philosophical theology and, on the other, philosophy of religion, whereas Brümmer took them to be more or the less the same thing. My own worry has been a rather different one: that Brümmer's account leaves out important epistemological questions which need to be addressed by philosophers of religion. But maybe my concern is unwarranted. Brümmer has, after all, suggested that his "contextual approach to the theism-atheism debate is quite compatible with the project which Stenmark calls 'religious epistemology'" (1999:94). I shall discuss this issue in the second half of the essay. To start with I want to explicate Brümmer's account of philosophical theology and then move on to Herrmann's objections.

BRÜMMER'S PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

What is Brümmer's view on philosophical theology and what alternative understandings of the enterprise and of philosophy of religion does he explicitly or implicitly reject? Brümmer maintains that the "task of philosophical theology is not to provide proofs of the truth (or falsity) of the Christian faith, or to find neutral rational grounds on which to justify accepting (or

rejecting) the Christian, or any other, faith. Instead the philosophical theologian asks semantic and hermeneutical questions about the meaning and interpretation of the faith: what are the implications and presuppositions of the fundamental concepts of the faith, and how could the claims of the faith be interpreted in a coherent and relevant way? In this sense philosophical theology has an essential contribution to make in the theological quest of faith seeking understanding" (1992:2).

It is not only philosophical theology that Brümmer seems to understand in this way. He explicitly says that: "Philosophical reflection aims at clarifying and limiting our conceptual options" (1992:27). Philosophers reflect on possible conceptual forms in order to establish whether or not they are coherent and relevant, and in order to see what the implications would be if we were to accept them. Therefore the aim of philosophy is not necessarily to force conclusions but rather to limit and clarify our conceptual options and in this way to contribute to making progress in our thinking.

The extent of this limitation depends on the range of criteria that we use. Brümmer exemplifies three levels of reflection (1992:28):

1. *Philosophical theology* is the attempt to determine which conceptual forms, doctrines or religious beliefs can be accepted without contradiction and which, positively speaking, might be coherent.
2. *Confessional theology* is the attempt to determine which conceptual forms, doctrines or religious beliefs can be accepted without becoming untrue to the community of faith.
3. *Personal theology or personal faith* is each believer's attempt to determine which conceptual forms, doctrines or religious beliefs he or she can embrace without losing his or her integrity.

Because the criteria used in philosophical theology (consistency and coherence) are accessible not solely to religious believers but to all members of the community of scholars, it has a proper place within the revered precincts of the university (2006:453).

Brümmer further contrasts philosophical theology to three other forms of theology (2006:454-57):

1. *Revealed theology* is the attempt to base religious beliefs and doctrines on divine revelation or grounds internal to faith.
2. *Natural theology* is the attempt to rationally prove religious beliefs by appealing to universally accepted or neutral grounds.
3. *Descriptive theology* is the attempt to describe religious beliefs and practices and test the truth of these descriptions (and not the beliefs and practices themselves).

Unlike revealed theology, philosophical theology treats revelatory or doctrinal claims merely as assumptions (and not as truths) when testing their coherence, implications and connection to other revelatory or doctrinal claims. Unlike natural theology, philosophical theology seeks to analyze the meaning of doctrine rather than attempting to prove its truth. And, unlike descriptive theology, philosophical theology tries to make an innovative contribution to the conceptualization of a religious tradition. However, like descriptive theology and religious studies, philosophical theology takes not God but religion, and in particular the doctrinal conceptions of God or faith, as its object of inquiry.

HERRMANN'S OBJECTIONS

Let me now contrast Brümmer's view with that propounded by Herrmann. Herrmann's view is that philosophical theology is a theological discipline, whereas philosophy of religion is a philosophical discipline, and therefore philosophers of religion should not be philosophical

theologians, which too often is the case. Philosophy of religion, in contrast to philosophical theology (which is the intellectual manifestation of a religious view of life by means of philosophical tools), belongs among the studies of religion (Herrmann 1995:14).

In fact, according to Herrmann, there is no place for philosophical theology at the university. He writes: "Theological reflection which explicitly or implicitly starts out from a given denominational or religious framework, aims at defending a definite point of view, rendering it more secure or at least undermining objections to it. ... The aim [of philosophical reflection], however, is more a matter of being able to raise certain questions which help us to understand how things are related, and to solve problems, rather than a matter of defending a particular viewpoint. In simple terms, we can express the difference like this: whereas in philosophy we concentrate on questions without knowing the answers in advance, in theology we adopt a position towards answers that have already been given" (2004:30). Herrmann maintains that we should not blend religious and philosophical arguments, a practice which is quite common in the philosophy of religion, but instead we should reason strictly philosophically without presupposing either theoretical adherence to a historically given religious tradition or personal religious commitment (2007:163).

To what extent would this kind of critique target Brümmer's philosophical theology? It is true that Brümmer's philosophical theology starts out, explicitly or implicitly, from a given denominational or religious framework. Often, as Brümmer points out, philosophical theologians are interested in analyzing the meaning of their own faith or the religious tradition to which they themselves belong (2006:459). In this regard Herrmann's characterization of philosophical theology as the intellectual manifestation of a religious view of life by means of philosophical tools seems to apply to Brümmer. But Brümmer also maintains that in principle anyone can analyze the meaning of the doctrines of any one of the religions of the world. So it is, at the most, a *conditional* intellectual manifestation of a religious view of life. However, I do think that we have a problem if too many philosophers focus on just one religion, or one particular conception of God. This has indeed been a problem, because the amazing revival of philosophical theology which we have seen since the 1980s (and in which Brümmer has played a key role) has focused almost exclusively on classical theism. So what we need to develop today is a multi-religious and multi-confessional philosophical theology. Moreover, Brümmer's conception of philosophical theology is compatible with such a development.

Now Herrmann seems to believe that there is something wrong in principle, or at least something unphilosophical, about starting either from a theoretical adherence to a historically given religious tradition or from a personal religious commitment. That is something which theologians might do, but which philosophers should not. Philosophers should instead concentrate on questions without knowing the answers in advance. They ought to raise certain questions which help us to understand how things are related, and to solve problems, rather than start from or defend a particular viewpoint.

Certainly we should agree with Herrmann that there is something unphilosophical about assuming at the outset that we know the truth. The genuine inquirer wants to get to the truth, whether or not that truth comports with what he or she believed when embarking on the investigation. If we do not genuinely seek the truth in this way, the risk we run is of becoming what Susan Haack has named the sham reasoner: "The *sham* reasoner is not primarily concerned to find out how things really are, but to make a case for some immovably held preconceived belief" (1996:298).

Is this a problem for Brümmer? As far as I can see, the only truth that Brümmer's philosophical theology is based on is that "a basic presupposition of philosophical theology" is "that coherent theo-logy or God-talk is possible" (1992:3). In fact, he tries to defend this truth against those

theologians who claim that God is “Wholly Other” and that in consequence the idea that we should interpret the claims of faith in a logically coherent way is illegitimate.

We can also contrast philosophical theology with *philosophical atheology*, which would be the attempt to show that the existence of any being that meets standard divine specifications is impossible or incoherent. A number of atheistic philosophers of religion are engaged in this kind of project today (Grim 2007 and Rundle 2007).

PROBLEMS WITH HERRMANN’S OBJECTIONS

Here we have come across a problem with Herrmann’s position, because it appears to undercut much work philosophers do, not merely within philosophical theology but also within philosophy of religion and, so I shall argue, within philosophy in general.

Herrmann seems to anticipate these consequences for philosophy in general because he also writes: “Something similar [as in philosophical theology] applies to various types of ideology where philosophical methods are subordinated to the aim of confirming one particular position and refuting competing alternatives. Very often philosophical questions revolve around things which are taken to be self-evident e.g. to treat the assertion ‘God exists’ as a statement of fact, a necessary precondition for being considered a believer according to many believers and also critics of religion. Metaphysical realism functions for a number of theologians and theistic and atheistic philosophers of religion as a precondition which is not open to debate” (2004:30-31).

Herrmann does not give us any names of philosophers who have proceeded in this way, but let me give some examples to illustrate the problem (if it is a problem). Thomas Morris writes in his introduction to a book in philosophical theology that it is “the shared assumption of these authors that religion, in particular the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition, is not just a domain of poetry, imagery, mystical transport, moral directive, and noncognitive existential self-understanding. Interacting especially with the philosophical developed tradition of Christian theology, they join the vast majority of the other leading contributors to contemporary philosophical theology in taking for granted *theological realism*, the cognitive stance presupposed by the classical theistic concern to direct our thoughts as well as our lives aright. It has been the intent of theologians throughout most of the history of the Christian faith to describe correctly, within our limits, certain important facts about God, human beings, and the rest of creation given in revelation and fundamental to the articulation of any distinctively Christian world view” (1988:3).

James Robert Brown gives us a description of a quite different group of philosophers (to which he himself belongs). Even if it is not easy to say exactly what naturalism is, Brown’s idea is that naturalists “are motivated by the thought that the natural world is all that there is and the scientific approach is the only way to comprehend it. There is no god, nor any corresponding religious understanding of the world. ... Naturalism is a [research] program. Its aim is to eliminate, or reinterpret, or somehow explain away all norms and other apparently unnatural entities” (2001:118-19). John Searle writes that there “is a sense in which materialism is the religion of our time, at least among most of the professional experts in the fields of philosophy, psychology, cognitive science, and other disciplines that study the mind. Like more traditional religions, it is accepted without question and it provides the framework within which other questions can be posed, addressed, and answered” (2004:34). Philip Kitcher maintains that the “challenge is to develop a well-articulated and convincing version of secular humanism. Meeting that challenge is, I claim, one of the central problems of philosophy today” (2010:1). These philosophers do not merely study naturalism (cf. descriptive theology), nor do they merely suggest ways to conceptually improve naturalism (cf. philosophical theology), they are, when they consider it relevant, naturalists, materialists or secular humanists in their philosophical reasoning.

Alvin Plantinga says in *Warranted Christian Belief* that he is engaged in two projects: “The first is addressed to everyone, believer and nonbeliever alike; it is intended as a contribution to an ongoing public discussion of the epistemology of Christian belief; it does not appeal to specifically Christian premises or presuppositions. I shall argue that, from this public point of view, there isn’t the faintest reason to think that Christian belief lacks justification, rationality, or warrant – at least no reason that does not presuppose the *falsehood* of Christian belief. The other project, however – the project of proposing an epistemological account of Christian belief from a Christian perspective – will be of special interest to Christians. Here the project is that of starting from an assumption of the truth of Christian belief and from that standpoint investigating its epistemology, asking whether and how such belief has warrant. We might think of this project as a mirror image of the philosophical naturalist’s project, when he or she assumes the truth of naturalism and then tries to develop an epistemology that fits well with that naturalistic standpoint” (2000:xiii-xiv).

In the other camp with Herrmann we have philosophers such as Michael Dummett, who writes: “Because I think there is this hierarchical order within philosophy, it would be wrong to allow any preconception of how things ought to come out to influence what one does lower down. You have to follow the argument and see where it leads. ... People take a whole set of views for granted, including a rather irritating scientism and materialism. Technical problems in semantics are of genuine relevance to philosophy, but they should always develop against a background of real philosophical puzzlement or wonder.”¹ Dummett is a Christian, but does not want to begin his philosophizing from a Christian preconception of how things are or should be; rather he wishes to follow the arguments wherever they might lead.

So what should we say? I would say that this range of contested approaches is simply how philosophy is done today! Some philosophers take a particular perspective or research program for granted in their philosophizing. They try to develop the program, apply it to new questions and sometimes defend it against objections, even if they are aware that not all philosophers embrace their perspective or research program (*philosophical approach 1*). Other philosophers do not subscribe to a particular perspective or research program. Rather they are interested in certain philosophical problems and do not beforehand have any clear ideas what the solution to these problems might be, or even within which theoretical framework the solution should be sought (*philosophical approach 2*).

This dispute might go very deep indeed and be grounded in different conceptions of the nature of philosophy. Plantinga, for instance, thinks that “philosophy is in large part a clarification, systematization, articulation, relating and deepening of pre-philosophical opinion. We come to philosophy with a range of opinions about the world and humankind and the place of the latter in the former; and in philosophy we think about these matters, systematically articulate our views, put together and relate our views on diverse topics, and deepen our views by finding unexpected interconnections and by discovering and answering unanticipated questions” (1984:268). So it should not surprise us that he is a spokesperson from philosophical approach 1.

On the other hand, maybe we need not take the issue to such a deep level, because it might rather be seen as a manifestation more of a methodological difference than of divergent accounts of what philosophy fundamentally is. If this is the case, we might in our work as philosophers sometimes use approach 1 and at other times approach 2. For instance, in my research on different models of rationality I did not have any real idea beforehand what model I would end up arguing for. But when I analyzed scientism I knew from the outset that (with great likelihood) I would reach the conclusion that it is a philosophically unsustainable view (Stenmark 1995 and 2001).

1 Dummett in conversation with Pyle (1999:6).

In conclusion, if we were to accept Herrmann's view, we would have to consider much of the work undertaken by contemporary philosophers to be unphilosophical, and this is a road we do not have to take. Rather, we might point out that it is important that philosophy in general, and philosophy of religion and philosophical theology in particular, are disciplines which are characterized by a diversity of perspectives and constitute an environment in which everything is open to question and critical evaluation, by anyone wishing to become engaged in the inquiry. Furthermore, there is nothing in Brümmer's account of philosophical theology that would not satisfy this requirement, even though it is clearly a species of philosophical approach 1.

RATIONAL THEOLOGY

My own worries about Brümmer's philosophical theology have been different in kind from Herrmann's. Sometimes I get the impression that philosophical theology is the only thing Brümmer thinks that philosophers of religion should do. More precisely, my worry has been that his account sets aside urgent epistemological questions which go beyond those conceptual issues which philosophical theologians legitimately should deal with.

Maybe the reason we seem to part company on this issue has to do with different understandings of the nature of philosophy? Brümmer, as we have seen, maintains that philosophical reflection aims at clarifying, limiting and improving our conceptual options. Philosophers reflect on possible conceptual forms in order to establish whether they are coherent and relevant, and in order to see what the implications would be if we accepted them. The aim of philosophy is to limit and clarify our conceptual options and in this way contribute to making progress in our thinking. But, and this is important, he does not, unlike certain other philosophers influenced by Wittgenstein, simply want to leave things as they are, but thinks that a central task for philosophers is also to suggest conceptual innovations. Yet, all in all, philosophy is conceptual analysis.

I see philosophy rather as an inquiry whose mission is to provide tenable answers to our "Big Questions" regarding human beings, the world, and our place within its scheme of things.² Philosophizing is a matter of truth estimation in the light of experience regarding these large issues which define its area of inquiry. Part of this is conceptual analysis, but, in my view, philosophy can and should also strive to give us knowledge, or at least rationally justified beliefs, about the answers to our Big Questions. Philosophy is a kind of truth-seeking and is, in that sense, like the sciences, although the methods used and topics explored are quite different. Though I want to hint at this, I am not going to explore these possible different understandings of philosophy any further in this essay, but shall now go directly to the epistemological issues.

Central tasks, as I see it, for philosophers of religion – besides doing philosophical theology – are as follows. The descriptive task (A) is to investigate how people (both on an individual and a collective level, in different religions, in different cultures, in different historical periods, and of different social status, colour, and sex) form, reject, revise, and replace their religious beliefs. In short, the aim is to explicate the epistemological norms of actual religious practices. The normative task (B) is to evaluate critically these norms and the cognitive behaviour of people in regard to religious matters, and, if necessary, to suggest ways of improving them. In essence, the task is to assess the rationality, justification, and general epistemic status of religion (Stenmark 1998:264 and 2004:52f).

2 Such as: What is the nature of reality, the purpose of the universe, and the meaning of life? Is there a God? Why am I here? Do I have a soul? What happens when we die? Do we have free will? Why should I be moral? What is morally right and what is wrong? What can we know about these things? What are the limits of our knowledge, or of scientific knowledge?

Brümmer has expressed misgivings about task (A). He maintains that “the task of philosophy in general and of philosophy of religion (or philosophical theology) in particular, is not to *describe* our various (religious) forms of thought, but to develop *innovative proposals* for keeping our conceptual forms coherent and credible as well as relevant and adequate for the changing demands of life. In fact, I would be inclined to say that the task of describing the variety and changes in our ways of thinking belongs to the historian and the social scientist and not to the philosopher” (1999:96). This negative response goes back, I think, to his evaluation of descriptive theology. Philosophical theologians should not describe the religious doctrines or beliefs but develop innovative proposals. The problem with this response is that I am not certain that the historian and the social scientist have the necessary expertise to explicate the epistemological norms of actual religious practices. I do not think they know enough about epistemology to ask the right kinds of question and to have the theories one needs to capture religious belief formation, revision and rejection. Maybe I am wrong here and, anyway, a fruitful cooperation between the philosopher on the one hand, and the historian and the social scientist on the other, might be the very best option!

What about task (B)? Just as Brümmer is critical against descriptive theology, he is equally so against natural theology. The task of philosophical theology is not to provide proofs of the truth (or falsity) of the Christian faith, or to find neutral rational grounds on which to justify accepting (or rejecting) Christian, or any other, faith. Brümmer writes that philosophical theology is clearly distinct from all natural theology, “in which an attempt is made to provide ‘a conceptual grounding for the faith such that its rationality and the irrationality of its denial can be demonstrated.’ We have argued that philosophical theology does not demonstrate what must be believed. It merely tries to limit the conceptual options to those that can be accepted without contradiction. In the end the decision as to which of the coherent options we are to choose has to be taken on other grounds (religious, ideological, personal, etc.) than those appealed to by philosophy. Faith cannot be derived from (or ‘based on’) philosophy” (1992:30). He thinks that philosophical theology should follow Wittgenstein in a refusal to make philosophy the provider of foundations and justifications (1992:2).

So natural theology attempts to demonstrate what must be believed about God on grounds acceptable to all people, but philosophical theology does not attempt to prove anything; it merely aims to delimit what beliefs about God and other religious matters people might hold without contradiction. Once we have these coherent sets of beliefs, which philosophers put forward as innovative proposals, the job of philosopher is over. Things from there onward become a matter of personal theology or personal faith.

But, and here comes my worry, is this not – even if we were to reject natural theology – to reduce fatally the scope of what philosophers of religion could and should do? Once we have established the meaning and coherence of certain religious beliefs and their connection to other religious beliefs, I think philosophers *should* go further and ask whether it is rational to accept these beliefs in the first place; and, if not, should consider what religious people might believe instead. The final decision whether we should accept any of these beliefs has, of course, to be taken by religious believers themselves. The epistemic proposals, as well as the conceptual proposals, which philosophers put forward, become a matter of personal theology or personal faith at the end of the day.

I am hereby arguing that philosophers of religion should not just do philosophical theology, but should also engage in *rational theology*. I suggest that we define this latter in the following way:

1. *Rational theology* is the attempt to assess, and if possible to justify, the rationality of religious faith, belief or commitment.

Whereas philosophical theology attempts to test the coherence of doctrinal claims, their implications and their connection to other doctrinal claims, rational theology attempts to test the rationality and warrant of these doctrinal claims and to explore their connection to philosophical, scientific, political and moral claims. Philosophical theology only delimits conceptual options; rational theology suggests which options (if any) we should pick and embrace.

The question now to be considered is whether Brümmer's arguments against natural theology also undermine rational theology, so that we, after all, are stuck merely with philosophical theology. Brümmer maintains that there are two particularly serious objections which natural theology faces.

The first is that the "more natural theology seeks to base its concept of God on universally compelling grounds the more abstract and empty does this concept become, whereas every attempt to fill in the concept of God in specific concrete ways requires an appeal to specific religious traditions that are not universally compelling ..." (2006:201). This is disastrous, because the concept of God, like all other concepts, derives its meaning from the form of life in which it is employed, and therefore, when divorced from this context, is either misconstrued or meaningless.

The second problem with natural theology which Brümmer points out is this: it must fail in principle in what it sets out to prove, since the claim that God exists is not the sort of claim that can be proved or disproved on universally compelling grounds. In Popperian terms, we can say that belief in God is a metaphysical presupposition and not a scientific hypothesis (2006:202). In Wittgensteinian terms, we could say that the existence of God is a tacit presupposition which is constitutive for the theistic form of life. Brümmer writes: "I logically cannot claim to live my life in fellowship with God without at the same time presupposing the existence of the God in whose fellowship I live, nor can I logically understand my experience of the world in terms of the agency of God without at the same time presupposing that there is a God in terms of whose agency my existence can be said to make sense. In this way Christians have traditionally claimed that for them the existence of God is not contingent but necessary. Thus J. N. Findlay is correct in pointing out that for believers partaking in the theistic form of life and understanding, God's 'non-existence must be wholly unthinkable in any circumstances'" (1999:93). There is thus a difference of principle between science and religion, since truth claims in the context of religion differ from truth claims in the context of science: the latter remain empirical hypotheses which are methodologically subjected to doubt and conjecture regarding their probability or relative likelihood; whereas in religion this is not so, or, one might go so far as to say, it is impossible for this to be so. It follows that a natural theology is completely misguided. But it also follows "that *within the context of the theistic form of life and understanding*, the claim that God exists is not only rational but also necessary" (1999:93).

Now rational theology neither demands that the concept of God must be abstracted from its context nor requires that the only reasons allowed in a discussion about the rationality of belief in God must be universally compelling. This is good, because few philosophers these days believe that the reasons one can offer for or against belief in God are coercive, that is, are such that they would or should force anyone who understands them to share them. These arguments are in this respect like almost all philosophical arguments. The Enlightenment project was in this sense harbouring an unrealistic dream. Philosophy is today understood to be a dialogue between people of differing perspectives. The goal is, as in the days of the Enlightenment, to attain agreement, but agreement (a shared foundation) is not a precondition for doing philosophy. There are in philosophy no, or very few, reasons that all rational people should be convinced by. But that should not stop someone from arguing that it is rational (or irrational) to believe in God and ask the rest of us why we do not consider the reasons advanced to be coercive.

Brümmer's second objection against natural theology does, however, seem to cause a problem for rational theology. His idea is that natural theology must fail in principle in what it sets out to prove, since the claim that God exists is not the sort of claim that can be proved or disproved, because God is a presupposition for the theistic form of life and that therefore God's non-existence is wholly unthinkable in any circumstances. With reference to rational theology, what causes the problem is not that rational theology must have the intention to prove or disprove the existence of God, but its assumption that it is reasonable also for believers to doubt the existence of God and to consider reasons for and against such a belief. Thus, such an enterprise presupposes that God's non-existence is *not* wholly unthinkable in any circumstances. Therefore, if Brümmer is right, philosophers of religion must be satisfied with the task of limiting what beliefs about God people can hold without contradiction (doing merely philosophical theology), because they cannot engage believers critically and constructively in a discussion about the presupposition of their religious form of life.

But is it actually the case that within the context of the theistic form of life, belief in God is not only rational but also necessary? Charles Taylor thinks that "belief in God isn't quite the same thing in 1500 and 2000" (2007:13).³ We have moved from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and unproblematic to a society in which such belief is understood to be one option among others, and possibly even a dangerous option. We are no longer certain (or as certain as we use to be) that God exists. People might believe in the same God, but they will typically not hold this belief as firmly as they used to do. Taylor also understands his own Christian faith in this way: "We [as religious believers] live in a condition where we cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals [of human flourishing], views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on. We cannot help looking over our shoulder from time to time, looking sideways, living our faith also in a condition of doubt and uncertainty" (2007:11). So, traditionally speaking, Brümmer might be right, but it seems that nowadays many religious believers really have started to think that it could be true that God does not exist (not only as a purely logical possibility but as a live-option – as an existential possibility), or even that there is a certain likelihood (albeit a low one) that this is the case.

But, within the context of the theistic form of life, *ought* it not to be the case that belief in God is understood not only as rational but also as necessary? Maybe Brümmer on this point is putting forward a reasonable innovative proposal. He would then invite us to see whether we could share his conceptual proposal.⁴ We should take this option seriously and consider the reasons he gives. I personally prefer not to set up an ideal religious believer or an ideal theistic form of life in this way, but to proceed on the assumption that there are many different, but yet legitimate, ways of being religious or Christian. And this is certainly something we can argue about within rational theology!

Brümmer's philosophical theology project has been of utmost importance for philosophers of religion, and will continue to be so for the next generation of such scholars. I nevertheless hope that they will not merely do philosophical theology, but will also engage in rational theology. This is because there are important epistemic questions that need to be addressed and which go beyond the conceptual issues which Brümmer has so successfully dedicated his academic life to solving. Whereas philosophical theology attempts to test the coherence of doctrinal claims,

3 Whereas Taylor seems to assume that this "titanic change in Western civilization" says something of specific reference to belief in God, Peter Berger thinks it applies to belief and certitude in general. His thesis is that the pluralistic situation relativizes competing belief and value systems and deprives them of their taken-for-grantedness. Plurality affects not just *what* people believe but *how* they believe (Berger 2010).

4 This has also been his explicit response to the charge that he has offered false or implausible descriptions of religious language games or theistic forms of life (Brümmer 1999:96).

their implications and their connection to other doctrinal claims, rational theology attempts to test the rationality and warrant of these doctrinal claims and to explore their connection to philosophical, scientific, political and moral claims.

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KEYWORDS

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Vroom en daarom rechtzinnig. Brümmer over het primaat van de geloofsbeleving

ABSTRACT

Pious and therefore orthodox. Brümmer on the primacy of faith experience

In a new (as yet unpublished) manuscript Vincent Brümmer's academic work takes a surprising turn, in that he moves from philosophical theology to historical theology. This paper shows that behind Brümmer's recent historical work (a sample of which has already been published in Brümmer 2010) a strong systematic concern can still be discovered: Brümmer wants to show how the theology of Nicolaas Hofmeyr (1827-1909), Andrew Murray (1828-1917) and their followers was largely determined by their spirituality (which focused on the experience of a personal relationship with God through Christ in the Spirit) rather than the other way around. As mystical theologians, and contrary to the contemporary (Kuyperian and Princetonian) confessionalists, piety was more important to them than orthodoxy – and this is indeed what we should learn from them. In response to this, I suggest that the relation between piety and orthodoxy is more of a synthetical than of an antithetical nature.

1. INLEIDING

De laatste jaren ontmoeten Vincent Brümmer en ik elkaar minder regelmatig dan in de tijd waarin ik promovendus en later medewerker bij hem was, maar telkens wanneer we elkaar treffen vertelt hij enthousiast over de laatste ontwikkelingen in zijn onderzoek. Van tijd tot tijd stuurt hij ook zijn *work in progress* daarover toe, en vraagt dan bij onze eerstvolgende ontmoeting belangstellend of ik dat al gelezen heb. De laatste keren moest mijn antwoord op die vraag ontkenkend luiden. Brümmer's recente onderzoek richt zich op de theologie aan de Universiteit van Stellenbosch in de 19de eeuw, en meer specifiek op de controverse die Andrew Murray en Nicolaas Hofmeyr daar na 1860 voerden met de Kaapse aanhangers van de zogenaamde "Moderne Richting" in Nederland. Het feit dat deze thematiek voor mijn gevoel wat verder van me afstond zal er wel mede debet aan zijn dat ik er gedurende geruime tijd niet toe kwam kennis te nemen van wat Brümmer hierover te melden had.

Nu er een feestnummer van NGTT samengesteld wordt ter gelegenheid van Vincent Brümmer's tachtigste verjaardag eind 2012, biedt dat echter een mooie gelegenheid mijn achterstand in te halen en mij alsnog te verdiepen in de resultaten van Brümmer's recente "navorsing". De thematiek daarvan roept immers bij nader inzien toch wel intrigerende vragen op. Brümmer heeft zich gedurende zijn werkzame leven ontwikkeld tot een in Europese kringen vooraanstaand godsdienstfilosoof c.q. wijsgerig theoloog in de analytische traditie. Het netwerk van geleerden dat hij bijeen wist te brengen en waarmee hij seminars, onderzoeksbijeenkomsten en congressen organiseerde omvatte – zo zie ik achteraf scherper dan destijds – zo ongeveer alle topfiguren uit het vakgebied van de analytische godsdienstwijsbegeerte en (wijsgerige)

theologie in Europa: D.Z. Phillips, Keith Ward, Richard Swinburne, Paul Helm, David Brown, Christoph Schwöbel, Ingolf Dalferth – om er slechts enkelen te noemen. Met al deze productieve en creatieve geleerden bracht hij ons als zijn leerlingen ook in rechtstreeks contact, en dat heeft onze PhD-opleiding en onze academische vorming als geheel zeer in positieve zin gestempeld.

Tegen deze achtergrond wekte het enige bevreemding dat Brümmer zich in zijn onderzoek de laatste jaren op kerkhistorische thema's ging richten. Hoe moesten we dit begrijpen? Is er sprake van een late carrièreswitch, waarbij de discipline van de kerk- en theologiegenschappen uiteindelijk meer bevrediging biedt dan de wijsgerige theologie? Of hebben wij van doen met een hoogleraar die zich na zijn emeritaat niet langer hoeft te bewijzen op zijn vakgebied, en daarom bij wijze van hobby gaat liefhebben in de lokale kerkgeschiedenis van zijn geboortegrond? Mijn intuïtie is dat geen van beide het geval is. Ik vermoed dat Brümmer ook in de huidige fase van zijn leven nog altijd wel degelijk met zijn vakgebied bezig is, maar dat nu over de band van de kerkgeschiedenis doet. Dat is dan ook de werkhypothese die ik in deze bijdrage wil toetsen. Het zal daarbij blijken dat het inderdaad geen pure historische nieuwsgierigheid is die Brümmer drijft, maar een theologische grondovertuiging. Aan de hand van de kerk- en theologiehistorische ontwikkelingen te Stellenbosch in de 19^e eeuw wil Brümmer een systematisch punt maken. Het betreft een punt dat in zijn eerdere oeuvre ook al oplicht, maar dat kennelijk steeds centraler is komen te staan in zijn denken, en dat hij daarom nog eens afzonderlijk in een ander (nl. historisch) gewaad aan de orde wil stellen.

In dit opstel wil ik allereerst de lijn van Brümmer's theologiehistorische betoog volgen en aangeven welke stappen hij daarin zoal zet, zodat we zijn gedachtegang zo zorgvuldig mogelijk in beeld krijgen. Conform zijn eigen invalshoek zullen we daarbij speciaal letten op hoe Brümmer in zijn theologiehistorisch vertoog de verhouding tussen geloofsbeleving en geloofsleer schetst (par.2). Daarna ga ik speciaal hierover met Brümmer in gesprek en stel enkele vragen bij de wijze waarop hij deze relatie stelt. Nu Brümmer zich zo diepgaand op zijn eigen kerkelijke traditie bezint, veroorloof ik me daarbij ook een klein uitstapje naar de mijne (die van de zogeheten "Gereformeerde Bond"). Ik zie opmerkelijke overeenkomsten, maar denk tegelijkertijd dat de relatie tussen geloofsbeleving en geloofsleer zowel historisch als systematisch anders gesteld moet worden dan Brümmer suggereert (par.3). Ik sluit af met een korte wens bij wijze van conclusie (par.4).¹

2. MODERNITEIT, CONFSSIONALISME EN GELOOFSERVARING IN DE NG KERK

In zijn te verschijnen boek bespreekt Brümmer enkele spraakmakende theologische controverses in de N.G. Kerk gedurende de jaren 1860-1870. Allereerst onderzoekt hij de reacties van twee beeldbepalende N.G. theologen van destijds, Nicolaas Hofmeyr en Andrew Murray, op de moderne richting zoals die vanuit Nederlandse invloeden in de Kaap was opgekomen. Aan de hand van enkele van hun publicaties beschrijft Brümmer daartoe de theologie en spiritualiteit van Hofmeyr en Murray. Hij werkt daarbij met uitvoerige citaten, zodat de lezer de geloofsbeleving van beiden als het ware kan proeven. Het blijkt dat beiden weliswaar verschillende accenten leggen, maar dáárin een zijn dat de beleving van het geloof als persoonlijke relatie met God belangrijker is dan de leer van de kerk. Beiden blijken tijdens de studiejaren die zij in Utrecht

1 Het geheel van dit artikel staat onder een voorbehoud, aangezien ik inga op een nog niet gepubliceerde tekst van Brümmer: 'Vroom of regsinnig? Theologie in die N.G. Kerk', 132 pp.; ontvangen van de auteur op 31 oktober 2012 met de mededeling dat hij 'nog bezig [is] met een laatste hoofdstuk dat ik af wil maken' (persoonlijke correspondentie). Dit typoscript kan dus nog in meer of mindere mate aangepast worden. Maar ook als dat het geval zou zijn, markeert het een interessante fase in Brümmer's interactie met de theologie en spiritualiteit die zijn opvoeding gestempeld hebben. Overigens is een deel van het typoscript reeds verschenen als voorpublicatie: Brümmer 2010.

doorbrachten te zijn aangeraakt door de 19^e eeuwse Europese opwekkingsbeweging die onder meer in Nederland de gestalte aannam van het zogeheten Réveil. Daarbij lijken met name bij Murray (die behalve in Utrecht ook in Schotland gestudeerd had) daarachter ook methodistische invloeden een belangrijke inspiratiebron te zijn geweest. De liefde van God in Christus was voor Murray de centrale hoofdwaarheid van het christelijk geloof, en hij verbond deze (goed methodistisch?) met een streven naar persoonlijke levensheiliging. Hofmeyr formuleerde het “kindschap van God” als de kern van waar het in het geloof om draait, en contrasteerde dat sterk met een “knechtelijk” (lees: zakelijk-contractueel) gedachte verhouding tussen God en mens.

Vervolgens gaat Brümmer in op de opkomst en theologische eigenheid van de Kaapse “moderne richting”. Leidinggevende theologen binnen deze beweging waren J.J. Kotze, T.F. Burgers en D.P. Faure. Alle drie hadden zij in Nederland gestudeerd, en waren zij via de Utrechtse filosoof C.W. Opzoomer onder invloed gekomen van toonaangevende “moderne” theologen te Leiden, zoals A. Kuenen, L.W.E. Rauwenhoff en vooral J.H. Scholten. Eenmaal terug in Zuid-Afrika zetten zij zich in voor de verspreiding van het moderne gedachtegoed. Zij werden daarbij geholpen door de landmeter Leopold Marquard (een zwager van Faure), die redacteur was van het tijdschrift *De Onderzoeker* dat vanaf 1860 de moderne richting in de Kaap propageerde. Kotze en Burgers behoorden tot de N.G. Kerk, maar Faure studeerde enkele jaren later af en mocht vanwege een synodebesluit uit 1862 niet meer op basis van zijn Nederlands proponentsexamen N.G. predikant worden. Hij zou daartoe een in confessioneel opzicht “streng” Zuid-Afrikaans colloquium af moeten leggen, en besloot om in plaats daarvan te Kaapstad een Vrye Protestantse Kerk te stichten. Deze zou in de loop der jaren onderdak gaan bieden aan vele vrijzinnige inwoners van de Kaap, onder wie ook Marquard. Vooral met deze vier voormannen van de moderne richting zouden Hofmeyr en Murray het debat aangaan.

Waar ging het om in dit debat? Normaal gesproken zou men verwachten: over de ware leer die in de kerk verkondigd dient te worden. Hofmeyr en Murray zouden dan gemakkelijk gezien kunnen worden als vertegenwoordigers van het orthodoxe establishment. Op dit punt doet Brümmer echter een belangrijke observatie. Wat Hofmeyr en Murray dreef was zijns inziens niet zozeer zorg om de belijdenis van de kerk of om de zuiverheid van de christelijke leer, maar om “rechtzinnigheid in het hart”.² Met andere woorden: het ging hen om het geleefde geloof, om de “heilige en tere verhouding tussen God en mens” (Hofmeyr 1868: 11; geciteerd bij Brümmer 2012: 33). Bij Hofmeyr is dit overigens duidelijker dan bij Murray. Die laatste moest soms “schipperen” omdat hij als moderator van de N.G. synode ook geacht werd op te komen voor de officiële kerkelijke leer. Hofmeyr lijkt dan ook Brümmer’s eigenlijke held. Hij noemt hem één van de meest oorspronkelijke en scherpzinnige theologen die de N.G. Kerk ooit heeft voorgebracht (Brümmer 2010: 27). Anders dan Andrew Murray is Hofmeyr echter vandaag zo goed als vergeten. Vandaar Brümmer’s inspanningen om vooral Hofmeyr en zijn theologische betekenis opnieuw voor het voetlicht te brengen.

Hofmeyr blijft ook belangrijk in het vervolg van Brümmer’s onderzoek, waarin deze vanuit de zestigste jaren van de negentiende eeuw lijnen doortrekt tot ver in de twintigste eeuw. In het eerste kwart van de twintigste eeuw vindt in de N.G. Kerk als geheel en ook aan de Kweekschool te Stellenbosch een opmerkelijke verschuiving plaats in confessionalistische richting. Theologen die hun studies na de Boerenoorlog niet langer te Edinburgh of Utrecht voort wilden zetten, hadden in plaats daarvan gekozen voor de VU Amsterdam en voor Princeton.³

2 Het is opvallend dat Brümmer deze uitdrukking (samen met de contrastterm ‘regsinigheid van die leer’) door het hele manuscript heen regelmatig aan Hofmeyr toeschrijft, maar nergens de context ervan geeft of een vindplaats noemt.

3 Zie hierover Schutte 2010. Schutte laat in dit artikel overigens ook zien, dat men ervoor op moet passen een rechte lijn te trekken tussen de Kuypriaans-confessionalistische invloeden in de Zuid-Afrikaanse

Velen van hen waren daardoor met orthodoxe ideeën van respectievelijk Kuyperiaanse of fundamentalistische snit thuis gekomen en N.G. predikant geworden. Brümmer laat zien hoe dat op den duur tot botsingen leidde, niet alleen met het modernisme maar ook met het piëtistisch klimaat dat tot dusver in de N.G. Kerk vigeerde. Brümmer's onderzoek biedt al met al een prachtige dwarsdoorsnede van de kerk- en theologiegeschiedenis – maar vooral ook van de spiritualiteitsgeschiedenis – van de gereformeerden aan de Kaap. We zien hoe vrijwel alle stromingen en richtingen uit het Nederlandse gereformeerde protestantisme er hun pendant hadden, en hoe dat leidde tot soortgelijke conflicten als in Nederland tussen orthodoxen en moderneren over de inspiratie van de Bijbel, de historische Bijbelkritiek, de waardering van de contemporaine wetenschap, predestinatie en vrije wil, de godheid van Christus, de aard van de verzoening tussen God en mens, et cetera.

We zien echter ook hoe zich te midden van die botsingen een “etiese rigting” uitkristalliseert, die enerzijds openstaat voor nieuwere ontwikkelingen in wetenschap en cultuur maar anderzijds probeert deze te interpreteren op een manier die te rijmen valt met de geest van het Réveil. Hier meldt zich dus weer de stroming van Murray en (vooral) Hofmeyr, met wie het allemaal ooit begonnen was aan de Kweekschool te Stellenbosch. Juist deze stroming blijkt als het ware de rode draad te vormen door de studie van Brümmer heen. Vertegenwoordigers van deze ethisch-irenische stroming organiseren in 1910 een symposium in Montagu, en haast terloops meldt Brümmer ons dat één van de referaten daar gegeven werd door ene ds. N.J. Brümmer (Brümmer 2012: 97). Deze was destijds predikant te Drieankerbaai, maar zou van 1911 tot 1941 werkzaam zijn als hoogleraar filosofie te Stellenbosch (Brümmer 2012: 99). Ook al is Vincent Brümmer te bescheiden om dit te vermelden (of wil hij gewoon objectief blijven), het gaat hier om zijn vader en we krijgen langs deze weg dus meteen een inkijkje in de geestelijke atmosfeer waarin hijzelf is opgegroeid. J. Muis merkt elders in dit nummer dan ook terecht op dat Brümmer “in de traditie staat van de zogenoemde ‘ethische theologie’, waarin niet de kerkelijke belijdenis maar de liefdesgemeenschap met Christus de toon aangeeft”.⁴

Brümmer (2012: 100-101) tekent de spirituele en theologische sfeer van Montagu aan de hand van vier kenmerken. (1) Het geloof is niet zozeer intellectueel als wel existentieel (“ethisch”) van aard; dat wil zeggen: het gaat niet om cognitieve aanvaarding van confessionele standpunten, maar om de vormgeving van het leven vanuit de persoonlijke liefdesverhouding met God, en de interpretatie van het leven in de wereld in het licht hiervan. Geloofskennis is dus iets anders dan praktische kennis. (2) In het verlengde hiervan moet in de Bijbel onderscheiden worden tussen feiten en waarheid. De feiten zijn natuurlijk wel belangrijk, maar alleen in zoverre ze de noodzakelijke vooronderstellingen vormen van de existentiële geloofswaarheid; daar waar dat niet het geval is, staan ze volstrekt open voor wetenschappelijke toetsing en kritiek. De Bijbel is immers niet bedoeld om ons allerlei informatie te geven, maar om ons “wijs te maken tot zaligheid” (2 Tim.3:15). (3) Alleen daar waar de wetenschap hypothesen ontwikkelt die aantoonbaar de existentiële waarheid van het geloof ondergraven, trekt het geloof een duidelijke grens. Vandaar dat de ethischen destijds de moderneren bestreden, die deze grens naar hun inzicht immers overschreden. (4) Gelovigen moeten onbevooroordeeld staan tegenover de bevindingen van wetenschappelijk onderzoek, en het behoort tot de taak van de theologie om deze bevindingen (voorzover ze goed gefundeerd zijn) met het geloof in verband te

theologie en de latere apartheidsideologie – een gangbare simplificatie waar ook Brümmer niet helemaal aan lijkt te ontkomen (vgl. Brümmer 2012:3, noot 4). Kuypers spiritualiteit verschilde (anders dan zijn theologie) misschien ook wel niet zozeer van die van Hofmeyr en Murray als men misschien zou denken – men leze bijv. eens Kuyper 1901, waar hij voorafgaand aan “mysticisme” en “practicisme” het “intellectualisme” bespreekt als de eerste “zonde, waarvoor het Gereformeerde kerkelijk leven bloot ligt”

(1)

4 Muis 2012, p.2 van het typoscript; Muis baseert deze waarneming op Brümmer 2010.

brengen. Op dit punt verschilden de ethischen van de meer confessioneel ingestelde orthodox-reformeerden in de NG Kerk, die dit streven met achterdocht bejegenden.

Dicht in de buurt van de ethischen tekent Brümmer in een apart hoofdstuk nog de “Bybels-Apologetiese Skool”, die sterk verwant was aan de gelijknamige Utrechtse stroming waarvan J.I. Doedes en J.J. van Oosterzee de voornaamste vertegenwoordigers waren. In Stellenbosch kreeg deze stroming gedurende het eerste kwart van de twintigste eeuw gestalte in het werk van de Kweekschool-hoogleraren J.I. Marais (1848-1919), A. Moorrees (1855-1938), P.J.G. de Vos (1842-1931) en C.F.J. Muller (1845-1915). Hun theologie was behoudender dan die van de ethischen, maar hun spiritualiteit irenisch.

Opvallend is dat naarmate we het tweede kwart van de twintigste eeuw ingaan zowel de ethische als de apologetische school door Brümmer steeds dichter in de buurt van de modernen gepositioneerd worden. Alle drie deze groeperingen lijken zich te verenigen in de strijd tegen wat zij zagen als een (via de invloed van Hodge en vooral Kuiper) opgekomen confessionalistisch front in de NG Kerk. Hadden ze door de opkomst van deze nieuwe stroming onderling steeds minder appels met elkaar te schillen? In elk geval blijkt van de onderlinge verschillen van inzicht weinig meer wanneer Brümmer een tweede controverse in de NG-Kerk bespreekt. Deze cirkelt rond de figuur en theologie van Johannes du Plessis (1868-1935); zoals Hofmeyr de hoofdpersoon is in het eerste deel van Brümmer's studie, is Du Plessis dat in het tweede. Du Plessis was in 1916 benoemd tot hoogleraar te Stellenbosch als opvolger van de bovengenoemde Muller. Hij was opgegroeid in de sfeer van de ethische theologie en als zodanig een leerling van Hofmeyr, trad als spreker op tijdens het symposium in Montagu (1910), maar ontwikkelde zich naderhand *de facto* steeds nadrukkelijker in moderne richting. Hij pleitte bijvoorbeeld voor een prediking waarin ingegaan werd op de nieuwe bevindingen van de wetenschap, zodat voor studenten en intellectuelen duidelijk zou worden dat deze niet in strijd waren met het christelijk geloof. Dat kwam hem in 1912 op kritiek te staan van niemand minder dan Andrew Murray, die van mening was dat een dergelijke prediking alleen maar twijfel zou zaaien en het geloof in Gods Woord zou ondermijnen (Brümmer 2012: 102).

Helaas was Hofmeyr in het jaar voorafgaand aan het symposium in Montagu overleden, zodat we nooit zullen weten hoe hij op de stellingname van Du Plessis zou hebben gereageerd. Dat geeft Brümmer de ruimte om te betogen dat Du Plessis in zijn pleidooi voor openheid jegens nieuwe ontwikkelingen een “navolger van Hofmeyr” was. Het merkwaardige daarvan is dat Brümmer zelf in een eerder hoofdstuk juist met enige uitvoerigheid beschreven heeft hoe buitengewoon kritisch Hofmeyr reageerde op de moderne richting. Weliswaar maakt Brümmer duidelijk dat Hofmeyr's kritiek een speciaal karakter had: ze was veelmeer spiritueel en existentieel van aard dan leerstellig. Dat wil echter niet zeggen dat ze minder fel of minder duidelijk was, integendeel. Het moderne wereldbeeld ondergroef zijns inziens immers de “zo heilige en tere” liefdesrelatie tussen God en mens (Brümmer 2012: 33). Zij raakte het christelijke geloof volgens Hofmeyr dus in het hart. Het kan liggen aan de wijze waarop Brümmer zijn materiaal selecteert, maar als het gaat over Du Plessis horen we niets van dit alles. Zijn openheid jegens cultuur en wetenschap én zijn afkeer jegens elke vorm van confessionalisme lijken hem op den duur elke kritische zin jegens de moderniteit te hebben doen verliezen. Behalve tegen het confessionalisme richt Du Plessis zijn pijlen vooral nog tegen de (rechtzinniger, maar zeker niet on-mystieke) Doppers uit Potchefstroom en tegen de Rooms-Katholieke Kerk (Brümmer 2012: 121). Wanneer Brümmer dus schrijft dat Du Plessis in zijn kerkelijke opstelling een trouw volgeling van Hofmeyr was, valt daar dus misschien wel het een en ander op af te dingen. Op z'n minst moet Brümmer toegeven dat Du Plessis een nogal polemische instelling had (Brümmer 2012: 120), wat naar het mij voorkomt inhoudt dat hij minstens in dat opzicht afweek van de (ethisch-)irenische geest van het Reveil.

Hoe dit ook zij, de ontwikkelingen komen tot een dramatisch hoogtepunt (of dieptepunt) wanneer in februari 1930 Du Plessis door een buitengewone synode van de NG Kerk vanwege gebleken onrechtzinnigheid voor onbepaalde tijd wordt geschorst als hoogleraar. Dat het Kaapse Hooggerechtshof die beslissing later onjuist acht en een volgende synode, van 1932, zich daarbij neerlegt, mag niet meer baten. Du Plessis mag weliswaar zijn salaris en pensioenrechten behouden, maar keert gezien de onwerkbaar geworden verhoudingen niet terug als hoogleraar aan de Kweekschool. In zijn plaats en die van een emeriterende collega worden twee "Princeton-fundamentalisten" (Brümmer 2012: 126) benoemd, en samen met de Kuyperianen zullen de Princetonianen de daarop volgende decennia de dienst uitmaken in de NG-Kerk. Het betekent een einde aan elk debat over theologische vernieuwing en een toenemend isolement op oecumenisch gebied. Brümmer tekent het als een ontwikkeling die wezensvreemd is aan de oorspronkelijke geest van de NG Kerk, en afbreuk doet aan haar ethisch-irenische karakter in de sfeer van het Reveil (bijv. op p.121 vanuit Du Plessis en op p.126 vanuit Deist 1986). Op die manier geeft hij een duidelijk eigen accent mee aan zijn relaas over de geschiedenis van de NG Kerk. Dat brengt me bij enkele vragen die de lectuur van zijn nieuwe boek oproept.

3. ENKELE VRAGEN

Ook al probeert Brümmer zich namelijk vooral op te stellen als "onpartijdig" historicus, toch blijft zoals we zagen niet onduidelijk waar zijn sympathieën liggen. Methodisch is het interessant dat hij in zijn samenvattende weergaves van de opvattingen van hem sympathieke theologen haast ongemerkt het stokje van hen kan overnemen. Soms is daardoor niet helemaal duidelijk of hij Hofmeyr, Murray of later Marais parafraseert dan wel voor eigen rekening spreekt. Gaat het echter om vertegenwoordigers van eerst de moderne en later de orthodox-confessionele richting, dan plaatst hij regelmatig kritische evaluerende kanttekeningen. Zijn als historisch gerepresenteerde betoog gaat op deze manier gepaard met theologische oordelen – Brümmer's achtergrond als systematicus verloochent zich niet.

Trouwens, alleen al in de manier waarop hij het historische verhaal vertelt bevindt zich een bepaalde tendens. Het is immers duidelijk dat Brümmer de geschetste ontwikkeling van een ethisch-irenische naar een meer confessioneel geijkte spiritualiteit in de NG Kerk zeer betreurt, en er een wezensvreemde afwijking in ziet van haar oorspronkelijke Anliegen. De vraag is echter of dit oorspronkelijke Anliegen voor altijd bepalend zou moeten zijn voor de NG Kerk. Juist Brümmer leerde ons in dit verband om kritisch te zijn jegens elk 'essentialisme' in de kerk en theologie (vgl. Brümmer 2006: 375-390). Het is dan ook wat merkwaardig dat hij in dit geval kennelijk juist wil vasthouden aan een gelijkblijvende kern, en wat romantisch blijft terugverlangen naar "hoe het altijd geweest is"? Net als cultuur en wetenschap zijn ook kerken in ontwikkeling. En soms bewegen zij zich door de omstandigheden ineens in een meer orthodoxe en confessionele richting. Beter dan zulke ontwikkelingen te veroordelen is het – zeker voor wie zich er in historische zin toe wil verhouden – om na te gaan hoe ze in hun samenhang begrepen kunnen worden, en wellicht gewaardeerd als adequate reactie op nieuwe omstandigheden die zich in de tijd voordoen.⁵Nu was het echter ook niet Brümmer's bedoeling

5 Men kan zich bijvoorbeeld afvragen of een grote openheid voor nieuwere ontwikkelingen in cultuur en wetenschap uiteindelijk niet secularisatie-bevorderend werkt. In Nederland lijkt het er in elk geval sterk op dat kerken en groeperingen die zich hier juist kritischer en met meer distantie toe verhouden beter in staat zijn het geloof op een volgende generatie over te dragen. Wanneer dit in Zuid-Afrika ook zo zou zijn (en het zou me verbazen als dat niet zo was), zou het dus wel eens van wijsheid kunnen getuigen dat de NG Kerk in haar strijd tegen het modernisme (Murray en Hofmeyr!) op den duur behoefte kreeg aan een wat belijnder confessioneel en leerstellig kader. Vanuit onder meer Kuyper kon vervolgens aan die behoefte getemoet gekomen worden.

om een neutrale weergave van de ontwikkelingen in de NG Kerk te bieden. Brümmer weet veel te goed dat dat niet mogelijk is – hij bracht ons destijds óók het nodige bij over de betekenis van recente hermeneutische theorievorming zoals die van H.G. Gadamer (vgl. Brümmer 2006: 433-452). Brümmer opent zijn studie dan ook met expliciet te maken vanuit welk perspectief hij naar het verleden wil kijken. Dat is het perspectief van een onderscheid dat zijns inziens door heel de geschiedenis van de NG Kerk heen zichtbaar is, namelijk tussen wat hij noemt confessionalist en mystici. Dit onderscheid is echter niet altijd openlijk uitgesproken en was ook niet steeds scherp, doordat veel gelovigen en theologen intuïtief geprobeerd hebben om mystiek en confessie in hun geloofsbeleving te verenigen. Brümmer acht het onderscheid echter wel van groot belang, en zijn studie is er dan ook op gericht het weer naar voren te halen. De doelstelling van zijn boek formuleert hij in dit verband als volgt: “In wat volg wil ik probeer om hierdie twee tendense [nl. confessionalisme en mystiek, GvdB] te ondersoek aan die hand van die twee groot teologiese kontroverses in die N.G. Kerk gedurende die afgelope 150 jaar: Die stryd teen die sogenaamde ‘Moderne Rigting’ in die 1860’s en die stryd rondom professor Johannes du Plessis in die 1920’s” (Brümmer 2012, 2-3). Vanuit dit specifieke perspectief kijkt Brümmer dus naar de geschiedenis, en het is goed dat hij hierover van meet af aan duidelijkheid verschaft.

Maar hoe verhelderend is het perspectief precies? Hoe raak zijn om te beginnen de trefwoorden? Een woord als “confessionalisme” kan haast alleen maar pejoratief gebruikt worden. Door het in een historische studie als sleutelterm te hanteren, verliest de historicus eigenlijk meteen zijn onpartijdigheid. Want een confessionalist wil natuurlijk niemand zijn – ik ken althans geen mensen die deze term als adequate weergave van hun (kerkelijk) zelfverstaan beschouwen. Brümmer definieert de term ook niet heel nauwkeurig, maar het gaat hem duidelijk om gelovigen bij wie de belijdenis van de kerk bepalend is voor hun geloofsbeleving. Wellicht zou men in dit verband, neutraler, over confessionelen kunnen spreken, of over op de kerkelijke belijdenis georiënteerden. Bij Brümmer’s mystici ligt de verhouding tussen leer en beleving precies omgekeerd: bij hen is de geloofsbeleving, meer concreet: de beleving van de persoonlijke relatie met God in Christus, bepalend voor de leer. Op deze manier is het contrast dus scherp te krijgen.

Meer nog dan bij “confessionalisme” vraag ik me echter of “mystiek” wel een goede aanduiding is van wat Brümmer voor ogen staat. Opvallend is dat hij, evenals in andere publicaties waarin hij deze term op de voorgrond stelt, haar onmiddellijk moet kwalificeren (bijv. in Brümmer 2010, 26-27; vgl. ook Brümmer 2006, 317-331). Het gaat hem niet om een spiritualiteit die slechts aandacht heeft voor het innerlijke zelf en niet voor de wereld. Evenmin gaat het om een – al dan niet oosterse – “eenheidsmystiek” die streeft naar extatische eenwording met het goddelijke. Brümmer denkt veeleer aan een vroomheid die gestempeld wordt door de persoonlijke gemeenschap met Christus en de persoonlijke ervaring van Zijn liefde. Om het met woorden van Andrew Murray te zeggen: de persoonlijke omgang met Christus en de persoonlijke ondervinding van Zijn grote liefde zijn de hoofdzaak van het christendom (Murray 1905: vii-viii; vgl. Brümmer 2010: 25; 2012:7). Van een opgaan in God of het goddelijke waarbij de grens tussen Schepper en schepsel wordt uitgewist is dus geen sprake. Maar dat is nog wel altijd de eerste associatie die velen bij de term mystiek hebben. Al is er op zichzelf niets mis met de term als zodanig (ook niet in de gereformeerde traditie: iemand als Calvijn sprak ook al over een *unio mystica cum Christo*), de vraag is daarom of niet beter voor een andere, minder ambivalente aanduiding gekozen kan worden.

Zelf ben ik groot geworden en beweeg ik me nog altijd in de Gereformeerde Bond – ook ooit ontstaan uit een kerkelijk-theologische controverse over modernisme (vgl. Graafland 1981), maar opvallend genoeg één van de weinige stromingen uit het Nederlands protestantisme die in

Zuid-Afrika geen pendant lijkt te hebben gekregen. Ook binnen de Gereformeerde Bond is altijd groot belang gehecht aan de concrete beleving van het geloof en de praktische omgang met Christus. Zonder een dergelijke persoonlijke omgangskennis zit het geloof “een voet te hoog”, zo heette het – namelijk in het hoofd in plaats van in het hart. Voor dit existentiële karakter van de geloofskennis ijkte men in deze traditie echter de term *bevinding* (vgl. bijv. Quispel e.a. 1976). Men ontleende dit begrip aan de Statenvertalingtekst van Rom.5:4 – “[... wetende, dat] de lijdzaamheid bevinding [werkt], en de bevinding hoop” – en vatte bevinding daarbij op als het proefondervindelijk aan de weet komen van wie God is. “Bevinding” is feitelijk hetzelfde als “ondervinding”, dus ervaring. De Engelse vertaling van “bevindelijk” die ik tegenkwam in Nederlandse immigrantenkringen te Grand Rapids (MI) luidt: *experiential*. Het gaat inderdaad om de ervaring die de gelovige in het leven met God opdoet, waarbij enerzijds verdriet over de eigen zondigheid een plaats heeft en anderzijds blijdschap over het overweldigende van Gods liefde alsook dankbaarheid die zich uit in concrete goede werken. Dat zijn categorieën die ik onmiddellijk terug herken in Brümmer’s beschrijving van de spiritualiteit van Murray en Hofmeyr. In die zin zou men hun theologie (en als Brümmer’s continuïteitsthese klopt ook die van Du Plessis) ook, en minder ambivalent, kunnen typeren als *bevindelijk*. Wie dat te wereldvreemd in de oren klinkt⁶ zou ook nog voor een term als piëtistisch kunnen opteren.

Belangrijker dan de terminologie is echter hoe Brümmer zijn sleutelbegrippen inhoudelijk met elkaar in verband ziet staan. Op dit punt komen enkele verdergaande vragen op. Het is duidelijk dat Brümmer in sterk contrasterende zin over confessionalisme en mystiek wil spreken. Dat blijkt meteen al uit de opvallende disjunctie in de titel: vroom óf rechtzinnig? De mysticus is kennelijk het één, de confessionalist het ander. Of met woorden die Brümmer ontleent aan G.K. Chesterton: voor de mysticus is het geloof “a thing like a love affair”, voor de confessionalist “a thing like a theory” (Brümmer 2012: 2). Al spoedig blijkt echter dat het zo eenvoudig toch niet kan zijn. Bij de mystici mag de leer dan niet voorop staan, zij stellen toch wel grenzen aan de relativisering ervan. In de hoofdstukken waarin Brümmer de kritiek van Hofmeyr en Murray op de moderne richting bespreekt blijkt waar zij die grenzen stellen: niet daar waar aanhangers van de moderne richting afwijken van de kerkleer of de belijdenisgeschriften, of andere ideeën hebben over de historiciteit van de Bijbel (dat zijn volgens Hofmeyr “ondergeschikte punten”), maar daar waar zij met hun gedachten de spiritualiteit van de gelovige omgang met God ondergraven. Dat doen de modernen (in de lijn van Nederlandse inspiratoren als J.H. Scholten) met name door hun pantheïsme en hun determinisme, welke twee een persoonlijke relatie met God immers onmogelijk maken.

Nu doet Brümmer het voorkomen alsof het met de kritiek van Hofmeyr c.s. op de modernen nog wel wat meeviel. Men krijgt de indruk dat de kritiek die de “confessionalisten” later zouden uitoefenen op elke moderniseringsbehoefte in de kerkelijke theologie veel forser was. Toch is dat nog maar de vraag. In zijn *Leerredenen* roept Hofmeyr ergens uit: was het maar waar dat het geschil met de modernen uitsluitend betrekking had op een kerkelijk leerstelsel – het is veel erger (Hofmeyr 1868: 17)! Niet voor niets was Hofmeyr destijds de eerste die de Kaapse modernen aanviel. Het ging daarbij wat hem betrof niet maar om het al of niet open staan voor de historische bijbelkritiek. Nee, “die een vraag wat vóór alle ander vrae beantwoord moet word, is dit: ‘Is dit waar of nie waar nie, dat die sondaar deur God se heilige toorn en deur die onheilige mag van die sonde van God geskei is, en alleen deur die bloed en die gees van Christus in die gemeenskap van God herstel kan word? Met hierdie vraag staan of val die ganse

6 Betreurenswaardig is intussen, dat de term sinds Janse 1985 verschoven is van een theologische naar een sociologische categorie; ze denoteert vooral nog een bepaalde bevolkingsgroep die zich aan de hand van uiterlijke kenmerken (kleding etc.) laat karakteriseren (de zogeheten ‘refo’s’), en heeft daardoor in Nederland een beperktere actieradius gekregen.

Bybel en die ganse Christendom' (Hofmeyr 1868: 59; Brümmer 2012: 32). Bij zo 'n citaat denk ik: een Gereformeerde Bonder zou het exact zo kunnen zeggen. Inderdaad: de gemeenschap – de bevindelijke omgang – met God staat hier voorop. Maar onmiddellijk is duidelijk dat deze kennelijk niet los verkrijgbaar is. Zij hangt blijkens dit citaat voor Hofmeyr in elk geval onlosmakelijk samen met een verzoeningsleer, die hier (anders dan Brümmer suggereert, 12) toch wel anselmiaans van karakter lijkt. Want “alleen door het bloed ... van Christus” is het mogelijk om weer in de gemeenschap van God opgenomen te worden – een visie waarvan Marcel Sarot elders in dit tijdschrift laat zien dat Brümmer deze wel graag wil onderschrijven, maar daar gezien andere delen van zijn theologie eigenlijk maar nauwelijks toe in staat is (Sarot 2012: 9 [typoscript]).

Maar ook als Brümmer deze woorden van Hofmeyr wel volmondig zou bijvallen (of misschien dankzij Hofmeyr van mening veranderd is?), blijft staan dat het hier om een leerstellig gegeven gaat dat als zodanig ook in de confessie van de kerk is opgenomen (bijv. in de Heidelbergse Catechismus, zondag 4-6). Iets soortgelijks geldt voor Hofmeyrs spreken over de Geest van Christus door wie de mens geheiligd wordt. Ook dat is een typisch gereformeerd theologoumenon en als zodanig behalve een geloofservaring een leerstellig gegeven. Trouwens, ook uit de meer thetische bespreking van Hofmeyrs spiritualiteit die Brümmer geeft, blijkt dat deze spiritualiteit nauw verbonden was met allerlei dogmatische visies, bijvoorbeeld op de verzoeningsleer, de kerkleer, de leer van de wedergeboorte, de pneumatologie, de voorzienigheids- en verkiezingsleer, eschatologie et cetera (vgl. Brümmer 2010: 27-33, en over de eschatologie 39: “julle gaan met die dwaling verlore”). Brümmer laat fraai en overtuigend zien hoe al deze “leerstukken” door Hofmeyr hernomen worden vanuit het centrale belang van de persoonlijke relatie van de gelovige met God in Christus. De propositionele aanspraken van de geloofsleer vallen in die zin niet samen met het geloof maar zijn, zoals Brümmer ook vaak zegt als hij voor eigen rekening spreekt, te beschouwen als de noodzakelijke *vooronderstellingen* ervan. Als dat echter zo is, zijn ze toch niet minder (maar eerder meer) van belang? Men kan dan vroomheid en rechtzinnigheid toch niet eenvoudig tegen elkaar uitspelen? Veeleer moet men dan zeggen: geen vroomheid zonder rechtzinnigheid, en geen persoonlijke geloofsrelatie zonder confessie. Hofmeyrs felle polemieken tegen de Moderne Richting moet naar het mij voorkomt overduidelijk vanuit dit besef verklaard worden. Brümmer daarentegen lijkt meer te suggereren, dat als men maar vroom is het er niet meer zo toe doet of men al of niet rechtzinnig is. Dat zou Hofmeyr als ik hem goed begrijp nooit zo zeggen. Vroomheid en rechtzinnigheid lijken bij hem juist nauw met elkaar verstrengeld, net zoals dat trouwens het geval was in de “voorwerpelijk-onderwerpelijke” prediking waarmee ikzelf ben opgegroeid in de Gereformeerde Bond. Het enige waar Hofmeyr terecht niet mee uit de voeten kon was een rechtzinnigheid die geheel van de doorleefde geloofsrelatie was losgemaakt, en daardoor verstard en versteend was geraakt – het soort “dode rechtzinnigheid” dat hij in het Nieuwe Testament terugvond bij Farizeeën en Schriftgeleerden.

Misschien speelt hier op de achtergrond ook een bepaalde misvatting mee van wat geloofsleer eigenlijk is. Mijns inziens zal de geloofsleer zichzelf als het goed is nooit verstaan als een cognitief stelsel van propositionele waarheden waarvoor geldt “slikken of stikken”, maar veeleer als een hulpdienst bij het bewaren van de verrassende vondsten die de kerk in haar gang door de geschiedenis heeft opgedaan en waarachter zij niet terug wil (vgl. Van den Brink & Van der Kooi 2012: 11). Zij houdt op deze manier inderdaad – daarin stemmen Hofmeyr, Brümmer en ik geheel samen – de wacht bij het geheim van de *unio mystica*, de innige gemeenschap met de Vader door de Zoon in de Geest die het hart vormt van het christelijk geloven, beleven en belijden. Maar dat de- wacht-houden-bij moet dan wel heel grondig en doordacht gebeuren. Want zoals Hofmeyr inzag: voor men het weet wordt de verborgen omgang met God de adem afgesneden doordat de propositionele vooronderstellingen onder het geloof weggeslagen worden. Juist die propositionele vooronderstellingen worden daarom in belijdenis en geloofsleer geëxpliciteerd.

Natuurlijk – er kan scheefgroei optreden, verstarring en verintellectualisering. Maar dogmatiek is juist bedoeld om de concrete praktijken van het geloof (zoals het gebed) te verhelderen, verantwoorden en bevorderen. Ze heeft niet slechts te maken met concepten, maar is “met allerlei draden verbonden met religieuze praktijken en levende geloofsgemeenschappen” (Van den Brink & Van der Kooi 2012: 13).

4. TEN SLOTTE

In het bovenstaande hebben we niet alleen een faire weergave van Brümmer's nieuw te verschijnen boek willen geven, maar ook enkele vragen gesteld bij wat hij in dat boek doet en beoogt. Echter, wie weet blijken straks bij de publicatie van de nieuwe studie al die vragen volstrekt ongegrond. Dat hoop ik eigenlijk ook maar, want het zou kunnen betekenen dat de auteur – uit eigen beweging dan wel geholpen door anderen – alsnog besloten heeft om duidelijker tot uiting te laten komen dat vroomheid en rechtzinnigheid, leer en beleving, confessie en mystiek zich niet antithetisch maar veelmeer synergetisch tot elkaar verhouden.

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TREFWOORDEN

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Doordacht doorgaan met spreken over God

ABSTRACT

How to continue meaningful God-talk

It is often thought that talk of God is meaningless because God's existence is implausible. The philosopher of religion Vincent Brümmer convincingly argued that this modern conviction is rooted in the Enlightenment way of thinking, which presupposes an empirical foundation to justify the meaningfulness of utterances. This foundationalism reduces religious belief to an epistemic hypothesis and thus neglects various characteristics of God-talk. This view is questionable because it uses a referential theory of meaning. Brümmer argues for an anti-foundationalist way out of this bias; he stresses the commissive nature of religious language and defends a holistic philosophical theology. However, this holistic programme is not completely convincing, since Brümmer assumes that metaphors are reality-depicting. Reality-depictingness, however, also assumes a referential theory. In order to avoid this problem, one should use a relational conceptuality which makes talk of God understandable in an ecclesiological perspective as the network of the Kingdom of God.

INLEIDING

In de eenentwintigste eeuw beleeft de christenheid grote veranderingen die sinds het einde van de Tweede Wereldoorlog door vele denkers al waren aangekondigd: een proces van veranderingen in de Westerse cultuur dat met de term secularisatie wordt aangeduid. In de dagelijkse ervaring van gewone mensen duidde deze term de sfeer van de teruggang van de plaats en rol van de kerken in het geheel van de samenleving. Binnen een periode van vijftig jaar verdween de kerk in West-Europa als voorname stem in het publieke debat naar rand van de maatschappij, als betrof het een rudiment uit het verleden. Tegenwoordig klinkt regelmatig de vraag of geloof in (een) God voor mensen nu eigenlijk *nog* wel enige betekenis heeft. Sommigen suggereren dat geloof in God langzamerhand in de West-Europese cultuur geen betekenis meer *kan* hebben, want wij leven nu in "een wereld zonder God". In andere werelddelen en culturen beleeft echter de christenheid juist een bijzondere groei waarbij tevens nieuwe vormgevingen van de geloofsbeleving zich aandienen, maar West-Europa lijkt van God meer en meer te vervreemden. In de Nederlandse theologie werd eind twintigste eeuw de vraag weer acuut hoe over God in die cultuur te spreken.

De manier waarop Vincent Brümmer dit soort vragen tegemoet trad, blijft inspirerend. Toen hem in 2001 de vraag werd voorgelegd "of we kunnen spreken over God in een wereld zonder God", bracht hij een kleine wijziging in de vraag aan: "voorbij een wereld zonder God?" Terwijl de vragenstellers menen dat spreken over God voor geseculariseerde Nederlandse oren uiteraard onbegrijpelijk blijft, suggereert Brümmer's kleine wijziging dat spreken over "een wereld zonder God" evenmin zo vanzelfsprekend lijkt als men denkt. Voor geseculariseerde oren verwijst

namelijk de term “God” niet meer naar een zinvolle werkelijkheid *buiten* onze taal waarmee wij de wereld om ons heen enigszins kunnen begrijpen. Onvermoeibaar zet Brümmer dan maar weer uiteen hoe zijn vragenstellers in een tunnelvisie gevangen zitten van een “representatieve betekenistheorie” die hun kijk op de leefwereld beperkt.¹ Een dergelijke betekenistheorie veronderstelt dat uitspraken alleen betekenisvol zijn als zij naar feitelijke standen van zaken verwijzen; doen zij dat niet, dan zijn zij betekenisloos of geven uitdrukking aan ons gevoelens of attitude. Deze betekenistheorie reduceert de mogelijkheden om taal betekenisvol te gebruiken drastisch tot twee, maar Brümmer zet daarentegen in zijn boek *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse* diverse dimensies van ons taalgebruik uiteen, zodat ook godsdienstig spreken betekenis krijgt.

Zijn Leidse collega Han Adriaanse (1940–2012) meende dat Brümmer wel over stalen zenuwen moest beschikken om onverdroten de zin en rationaliteit van godsdienstig taalgebruik aan de orde te stellen te midden van alle argumenten tegen Gods bestaan die men binnen de Westerse cultuur plausibel acht. Adriaanse meent in lijn met eerder onderzoek van Peter Berger dat het seculariseringproces in de moderne samenleving met ontwikkelingen in haar economie gepaard gaat die van personeel een hoge mate van rationale doelmatigheid vereist. Deze rationalisering van denken en handelen kreeg ook invloed op het bewustzijn van moderne mensen dat niet enkel terreinen als techniek en economie religievrij zijn, maar ook andere. Binnen die gebieden verliest met het theïsme ook een godsgeloof zijn plausibiliteit als “oriëntatie” voor die maatschappij noch functioneert het als wereldverklaring (Adriaanse 1997:28–32). Brümmer wil deze seculariserende ontwikkeling in de Europese cultuur wel beamen, maar ziet haar als een gevolg van de genoemde tendens tot rationalisering die zelf weer voortkomt uit een denktrant van de Verlichting. Daar ligt volgens hem de diepere wortel: “Dat wij vandaag in Europa leven in een ‘wereld zonder God’, is een van de vruchten van het zogenaamde ‘Verlichtingsproject’ ...”² Of na het wijzen op dat denkpatroon nu Gods bestaan voor sceptici plausibeler wordt, blijft wel de vraag, maar Brümmer heeft zeker een punt om de tunnelvisie van dat Verlichtingsproject aan de orde te stellen die de kenleer tot structureel uitgangspunt voor alle denken maakt.

René Descartes heet wel de vader van deze epistemologische concentratie die zoekt naar een vast en duurzame basis om menselijke kennis op te bouwen. Hij is van oordeel dat een weldenkend mens niet overgeleverde opvattingen moet napraten, maar zich richten op de ontwijfelbaar zekere gronden van onze kennis.³ Deze attitude leert ons kritisch te vragen op basis waarvan wij geloven en ontwijfelbaar weten van God. Daarmee legt hij de grondslag voor het funderingsdenken in de kentheorie dat stelt dat de structuur van onze kennis op een bouwwerk lijkt, waarvan het fundament uit *zelfevidente* grondovertuigingen bestaat, die (niet afleidbaar uit andere overtuigingen) de rechtvaardiging vormen van overige kennisclaims. Dit type denken brengt de natuurwetenschap ertoe grootschalige objecten te analyseren in kleinere onderdelen: kennisanspraken zijn met controleerbare waarnemingen van die onderdelen te rechtvaardigen. Haar succes verleidt ertoe bij *elke* menselijke activiteit te vragen op grond van welke kennisclaim zij is te rechtvaardigen. Op deze manier zijn Westerse mensen gewend geraakt ook naar de gronden te vragen voor godsdienstige activiteiten.

Brümmer beaamt dat vragen naar gronden gelovigen kritisch kan maken ten aanzien van hun opvattingen om naar de relevantie ervan te vragen bij veranderde levensomstandigheden. Hij wijst echter erop dat dit eenzijdige funderingsdenken godsdienstig geloof tot een soort

1 Deze theorie noemt men ook wel de “afbeeldingstheorie van betekenis” of “referentiële semantiek”.

2 Brümmer 2001:39–55, m.n. 40. Hij verwijst naar Clayton 1992:7–18, die betoogt dat de (Amerikaanse) Verlichting een beeld van “natural religion” als universele religie construeerde om het *publieke* debat met een *algemeen geldige* consensus te kunnen voeren op basis van redelijkheid en vrij onderzoek.

3 Descartes deel 4, waar hij betoogt “alles voor onwaar te houden waar ik maar de minste grond heb om aan te twijfelen om te zien of er iets in mijn geloof overblijft, dat helemaal zeker is”.

hypothese *reduceert* waardoor de eigen betekenis van geloofspraktijken buiten beeld raakt (Brümmer 2001:43). Vervolgens toont hij hoe problematisch de natuurlijke theologie van het Verlichtingsproject is en vindt daaruit een eigen weg via een “postmoderne” semantiek in de lijn van de latere Wittgenstein en J.L. Austin in combinatie met een holistische kennistheorie à la Quine, inclusief een coherentietheorie van waarheid. Hiermee verdedigt Brümmer de these dat het “deel van de taak van de theologie [is] om de impliciete claims van een religieuze traditie in een coherent leerstellig schema vorm te geven” (Brümmer 2001:52, 2006c:453–470).

BRÜMMERS UITWEG UIT HET EPISTEMISCH DIENSTHUIS VAN DE VERLICHTING

1. De eenzijdigheid van het Verlichtingsproject

Kant heeft voor het Verlichtingsproject een canon van drie fundamentele vragen geformuleerd waarop de filosofie kritisch moet antwoorden: 1. Wat kan ik weten? 2. Wat moet ik doen? 3. Wat mag ik hopen? Dit betreft een zoektocht naar algemeen geldige gronden voor onze kennisclaims over de causale wereld der natuur, over de morele werkelijkheid van ons handelen en over wat redelijk is als geluk te verwachten (Kant B 832–847). Door de concentratie op het eerste type vragen hebben vele Westerse mensen de neiging medemensen primair als kennend subject te bejegenen. Daarmee ging het besef verloren dat het bij godsdienstig geloof niet om gronden voor een geloof in Gods bestaan gaat, maar om welke attitudes en activiteiten voor gelovigen gepast zijn tegenover God. Bij godsdienstig geloof is een andere rationaliteit aan de orde dan het vaststellen dat water bij 100° C en 1 atmosfeer kookt. Godsdienst helpt mensen om manieren te vinden hoe met het leven om te gaan te midden van vragen over eindigheid, menselijke relaties, zin, lijden, veranderingen, verantwoordelijkheid, verdriet, ervaring van schuld en geluk enzovoort.

De nadruk op een kentheorie, gemodelleerd op empirische waarneming, heeft in het taalgebruik ertoe geleid een representatieve theorie te hanteren volgens welke betekenissen van uitspraken zaken in hun onderlinge verbanden “afbeelden”. Wanneer de uitspraak verifieerbaar met de feiten kan kloppen, heeft zij betekenis, anders is zij of een uiting van een gevoel of betekenisloos. Daarmee worden uitspraken ofwel een testbare hypothese ofwel een emotionele expressie. Belijdt het christelijk geloof dat God “in een ontoegankelijk licht woont” en “geen mens hem kan zien” (1 Tim. 6,16), dan doet het – volgens deze theorie – geen betekenisvolle uitspraak, want zij is niet verifieerbaar. Het funderingsdenken van het Verlichtingsproject veronderstelde het primaat van een dergelijke representatieve betekenisstheorie. Wilden christelijke theologen hun voorstellen daarbij betekenisvol laten aansluiten, dan moesten ook zij universeel geldige gronden voor het geloof aanreiken middels een soort natuurlijke theologie die confessioneel neutraal moest zijn. In het begin van het Verlichtingsproject stelde John Locke paradigmatisch de plek van de natuurlijke theologie binnen het geheel van de theologie vast. In de menselijke geest onderscheidt hij tussen “faith” en “reason”. Enerzijds aanvaardt hij het godsdienstig geloof met te stellen dat Gods openbaring ontwijfelbaar waar is en daarop moet zich juist het geloof richten. Omdat wij echter zowel geloven als denken, zullen wij minder evidente zaken niet aanvaarden noch heel evidente zaken opgeven: dat gaat tegen ons denken in. Hiermee krijgt het verstand een *beslissende* rol, zodat Locke anderzijds kan stellen: of iets goddelijke openbaring is of niet, moet ons verstand beoordelen.⁴ Locke heeft een propositionele voorstelling van openbaring, waarbij een propositie als openbaring aanvaard wordt nadat *eerst* door het verstand getoetst is of zij evident is. De natuurlijke theologie heeft nu als taak rationele gronden te geven waarmee het geloof in de openbaring plausibel(er) verwoord kan worden.

4 Zo zegt John Locke: “Whatever GOD has revealed is certainly true ... This is the proper object of *faith*; but whether it be a divine revelation or not, *reason* must judge”. Locke Vol. II:287.

2. De doodlopende weg van een Verlichtingstheologie

Een dergelijke natuurlijke theologie veronderstelt een zodanig abstract godsbegrip dat bedoeld is om algemeen aanvaardbaar te zijn, zoals een “hoogste intelligentie” (Kant). Brümmer levert hierop echter als kritiek dat deze procedure uiteindelijk een godsbeeld oplevert dat – methodisch – “gedecontextualiseerd” gepresenteerd wordt, dat wil zeggen, buiten godsdienstige “levensvormen” met haar praktijken.⁵ Hij stelt een representatieve betekenisstheorie als eenzijdig aan de kaak, omdat zij de verscheidenheid van ons taalgebruik miskent: met spreken doen wij meer dan alleen naar feiten verwijzen of ons gevoel uitdrukken. Naast beweringen en gevoelsuitingen verrichten wij met taal veel meer zinvolle handelingen, want wij doen ook beloften en verzoeken, zweren, bevelen en wij verbinden ons ergens toe, of geven aan onze bedoelingen en overtuigingen uiting. Of deze handelingen succes hebben, hangt van de context met zijn talige conventies af waarvan wij als spreker of hoorder deel uitmaken. Zo accentueert Brümmer in de “linguistic turn” dit handelingsaspect van activiteiten die sprekers in hun taaldaden verrichten. Sprekers verspreiden niet enkel informatie over standen van zaken, maken niet enkel kennisclaims of uiten hun gevoelens. Sinds de negentiger jaren van de vorige eeuw gaf Brümmer daarom er ook de voorkeur aan zijn taaltheorie met “postmodern”⁶ op te sieren om die te onderscheiden van de “moderne” visie van het logisch positivisme en het verificatieprincipe voor betekenis. De Verlichtingstheologie met haar neutrale standpunt zoekt enkel naar algemene gronden om geloof in Gods bestaan te funderen, maar ziet daarbij voorbij aan de geloofspraktijken waarin geloof in God functioneert. Zij stelt niet de vraag naar wat gelovigen precies doen wanneer zij God in hun levensvorm aan de orde stellen, maar construeert zelf een abstract godsbegrip om te beredeneren dat naar alle waarschijnlijkheid er een subject bestaat dat men met dit begrip kan bespreken. Zodra men echter voor het begrip naar een concretisering zoekt, zou men een beroep op een concrete geloofstraditie moeten doen, die echter weer niet universeel geldig kan heten. Kortom: de “god” waar de natuurlijke theologie naar zoekt, is door diezelfde theologie a priori tot een lege huls gedegradeerd.

3. Brümmer's uitweg

Hij beklemtoont dat met hun spreken mensen alle mogelijke taalhandelingen verrichten, want “mensen zijn niet enkel kennende subjecten maar veeleer actoren die dingen doen binnen een sociale context in de wereld (Brümmer 2001:47).” We kunnen onze taaldaden niet van deze context abstraheren, want daarmee verliezen zij hun betekenis. De context als levensvorm, die Wittgenstein met “the weave of our lives” aanduidt, is juist bepalend voor de betekenis van onze taaluitingen die zonder deze levensvormen enkel “betekenisloze” geluiden vormen. Een levensvorm levert het verband voor de betekenis van een uitspraak: een taaluiting krijgt pas betekenis in haar rol binnen een “taalspel” welke term onderstreept dat ons spreken “deel

5 Zie Kant B827: een hoogste intelligentie maakt het bestaan van fysische orde enkel begrijpelijk, maar bewijst niet het bestaan van een dergelijke intelligentie; zie voor Brümmer's oordeel Brümmer 2001:44–46. Brümmer spreekt van “religieuze levensvorm”, waar ik “complex van religieuze taalspelen *binnen* een levensvorm” prefereer. Christelijk geloof beziet zelfde aspecten van het leven anders dan bijvoorbeeld marxisme.

6 Voor taalhandelingen ontwikkelde hij een illocutionaire theorie in het perspectief van Austin 1975² en Wittgenstein 1958. Sinds het lezen van Murphy & McClendon 1989 hanteert hij de titel “postmodern” met enig voorbehoud voor zijn latere werk. Mijn probleem blijft dat Brümmer zoekt naar een “omvattend *key model*” om de vele metaforen eronder coherent samen te brengen (Brümmer 2006c: 462): dit lijkt op een *abstracte* superstructuur of een metanarratief boven de metaforen. Deze laatste voorstelling van zaken wordt meestal als typisch “modern” door postmoderne denkers verworpen. Zie Smith 2005:123–140. Wat is er op tegen metaforen en spreekmodellen naast elkaar te laten staan zonder een hiërarchie, net als de vier canonieke evangeliën zonder een Evangelieharmonie?

uitmaakt van een activiteit of van een levensvorm.”⁷ Dit begrip “levensvorm” hanteert Brümmer om godsdienstig geloof te duiden: daarin trachten gelovigen zin aan te geven van hun leven en levenservaringen door deze in relatie met God te bezien met behulp van de metaforen en talige modellen van hun geloofstraditie. Om de religieuze levensvorm te kunnen begrijpen dienen we de techniek van het bijbehorend taalspel te herkennen en te beheersen om te weten wat binnen dat taalspel wel of niet gezegd kan worden om een gesprek voort te zetten. Hierbij moeten deelnemers bedacht zijn op de “logische grenzen” van het taalspel waarvan bepaalde activiteiten zich bedienen: wat kan en mag daarin nog wel en wat niet meer gezegd worden. Het is een taak voor de theologie om deze grenzen en de techniek van het betreffende religieuze taalspel te expliciteren.

Vervolgens maakt Brümmer een belangrijke stap waarbij het verschil tussen “modern” taalgebruik en zijn “postmoderne” taalgebruik een rol gaat spelen. Hebben religieuze buitenstaanders zich de bovenstaande techniek van een religieus taalspel eigen gemaakt, dan heeft dat consequenties voor hun eigen taalgebruik op het ogenblik dat zij in de aanwezigheid van gelovigen zich van het specifieke vocabulaire van dat religieuze taalspel bedienen. Dan “impliceert het gebruik van de beelden van het taalspel dat wij ons *verbinden* tot de [desbetreffende] levensvorm” (Brümmer 2001:49; mijn cursivering). Zij bootsen op dat moment niet het taalspel na, maar in de ogen van geëngageerde gelovigen verklaren zij dat die religieuze levensvorm met een bijbehorend geheel aan attitudes, gevoelens en gedragingen ook voor hen geldt. Daarmee spreken zij net als gelovigen uit dat zij met hun leven in de wereld op *dezelfde* wijze beoordelen en omgaan als de gelovige insiders. Gebruiken deze buitenstaanders in die context de beelden en het idioom van dit religieuze taalspel, dan bedienen zij zich van *performatieve* taal: met dat te zeggen stellen zij hun leven *binnen* de grenzen van dat religieuze taalspel met de daarbij passende overwegingen en beschouwingen. Brümmer noemt het “absurd” wanneer deze buitenstaanders wel menen dergelijke taal kunnen gebruiken *zonder* dat zij zich daarmee tot die religieuze levensvorm te verbinden.

Tenslotte verdedigt Brümmer dat het religieuze taalspel ook waarheidsclaims ten aanzien van de werkelijkheid impliceert. Daarmee neemt hij een positie in die een omgekeerde weg bewandelt dan de rol die de natuurlijke theologie binnen het Verlichtingsproject speelt: zoals wij bij Locke en Kant zagen, heeft die natuurlijke theologie primair als taak rationele gronden *a priori* te leveren waarmee het geloof in de openbaring plausibel kan worden gemaakt voor redelijk denkende buitenstaanders, terwijl Brümmer juist tegenovergesteld zijn postmoderne vraag stelt naar de feitelijke veronderstellingen van het religieuze taalspel omtrent de werkelijkheid waarbinnen een taalspel plaatsvindt. Wanneer zij binnen het religieuze taalspel de eigen levenservaringen in het licht van het geloof betekenis geven, veronderstellen praktiserende participanten allerlei claims omtrent “God, de wereld en de mens”. Zo kan Brümmer stellen: “Wanneer gelovigen gebeurtenissen in het leven of de wereld of in de geschiedenis verstaan in het licht van hun geloof, impliceert dit dat deze gebeurtenissen ook werkelijk plaatsvonden.” Mocht dit laatste niet het geval blijken te zijn, dan kunnen gelovigen zich genoodzaakt zien hun geloof te herinterpreteren in overeenstemming met de “onomstotelijke uitkomsten” van historisch wetenschappelijk onderzoek. “[The] claim that God exists has *commissive* force: by interpreting their lives and experience in terms of it, believers commit themselves to specific attitudes and forms of action. Non-realist and non-cognitivist interpretations of religious beliefs are correct in pointing this out. However, such interpretations are mistaken in denying that these models also have a *constative* force, and in maintaining that they are merely useful fictions in terms of which believers bring order to their lives without claiming them to be factually true

7 We moeten “taalspel” niet als een “spelletje” begrijpen, maar als een serieuze *activiteit*. Zie Wittgenstein 1958: I.23; II.174; II.229.

in any sense. Such views on the nature of religious models will not do, since the actions and attitudes to which believers commit themselves when understanding their lives in terms of these models become incoherent when interpreted in this way.”⁸ Brümmer veronderstelt in dit verband dat modellen en metaforen in godsdienstige taal op de een of andere manier “werkelijkheid afbeelden”. Al komt hij vanuit tegenovergestelde richting, hij verdedigt net als de natuurlijke theologie in het Verlichtingsproject dat het gebruik van metaforische geloofstaal zich “op een of andere manier” van feitelijke waarheidsclaims bedient.

Er is wel een fundamenteel verschil. De natuurlijke theologie in het Verlichtingsproject beoogt de feitelijke veronderstellingen voor godsdienstige uitspraken *vooraf* te beargumenteren op basis van neutrale en plausibele inzichten. Brümmer's aanpak is “anti-foundationalist”: hij gaat niet van een natuurlijke theologie als objectieve onderbouw uit om daarop als bovenbouw een systeem van leerstellige theologie te funderen. Hij beoogt juist een “filosofische theologie” die bij een godsdienstige traditie de leerstellige begripsvorming van het geloof in God onderzoekt met filosofische analyses en argumenten. Deze filosofische theologie doet aan die godsdienstige traditie innovatieve voorstellen voor haar denkvormen (Brümmer 2006b: 459). Hij gaat daarbij holistisch te werk naar analogie van de holistische epistemologie van W.V. Quine, waarbinnen een afwijking in de empirische ervaringen leidt tot een bijstellen van een enkele hypothese waardoor de coherentie van het gehele netwerk aan beweringen wordt hersteld en gewaarborgd. Kennisuitspraken corresponderen niet één-op-één met onze empirische ervaring, maar met een complex van kennisclaims in het grotere geheel van coherente kennisclaims die wij voor onze rekening nemen. Nieuwe kennisclaims rechtvaardigen wij door aan te tonen dat zij coherent zijn met het hele veld van claims en in een logisch evenwicht daarmee verkeren (Brümmer 2001:51–52). Analogie zoekt hij geloofsuitspraken te rechtvaardigen met als criterium hun coherentie met het gehele verband aan claims die ons stelsel aan kennis vormen. Binnen het stelsel van geloofsuitspraken kan falsificatie van een nieuwe geloofspraak plaatsvinden als een *interne* procedure, terwijl in de rationele natuurlijke theologie falsificatie geschiedt op externe gronden! Daarmee komt Brümmer tot een centrale these: “Het is deel van de taak van de theologie om de impliciete claims van een religieuze traditie in een coherent leerstellig schema vorm te geven.” Hiermee kan de theologie de techniek van de diverse religieuze taalspelen in een coherent geheel expliciteren.

RUIMT BRÜMMERS HOLISTISCH PROGRAMMA THEOLOGISCHE PROBLEMEN OP?

Het bijzondere in het werk van Brümmer is zijn hartstocht om op beredeneerde wijze over God te blijven spreken in de context van de Westerse cultuur waarbij hij zich rekenschap geeft van de vragen waarvoor nadenkende gelovigen zich geplaagd zien, door in die problemen orde aan te brengen en een mogelijke uitweg voor te stellen, maar ook de “prijs” of mogelijke consequenties van die uitweg voor te rekenen. Hij laat lezers duidelijk zien dat met de representatieve betekenis-theorie er in het hedendaagse Westerse spreken en denken een drastische inperking in de communicatie ontstaat die heel veel aspecten negeert van wat mensen *doen* in het alledaags gebruik van taal. Dat is onmiskenbaar. Toch blijft voor mij de vraag of deze m.i. noodzakelijke aanpak bij zijn theologische studenten wel is beklijfd. Wanneer zij bijvoorbeeld over schepping, opstanding, eschaton, hemel, openbaring of heilsgeschiedenis spreken, dan spelen bij hen voorstellingen van concrete standen van zaken een rol. Daar past voor hen dit type vragen bij: Hoe vond de schepping plaats? Is de opstanding een echte gebeurtenis? Betekent het eschaton een eind aan de geschiedenis zoals een “big crunch”? En: Hoe kunnen we dit allemaal weten?

⁸ Brümmer 2001:51, 2006a: 187–196, spec. 194. Hij gebruikt de term “reality depicting”, die hij ontleent aan het werk van Janet Martin Soskice.

Het lijkt er veel op dat uitspraken over dergelijke geloofsbegrippen als schepping of opstanding in het theologisch gedachtegoed van deze studenten primair als *constatieve* opmerkingen worden beluisterd en niet als voorstel voor zingeving of attitude hoe wij ons situeren ten overstaan van God en gedragen. Daaruit blijkt dat zij “in hun ziel” toch als kinderen van de Verlichting zijn blijven denken. Zij horen Brümmer verdedigen dat het religieuze taalspel ook empirische claims ten aanzien van de werkelijkheid impliceert, ook al zegt hij daarbij dat nieuwe empirische inzichten in de geologie of biologie aanleiding zijn tot *herinterpretatie* van het geloof (Brümmer 2001:52–53, 2006b:197–209, spec. 208). Dan is het wel begrijpelijk dat studenten hierin beluisteren dat de empirische claims van hun gelovig taalspel zich in *hetzelfde vlak* bewegen als wetenschappelijke uitspraken over een big bang of een evolutie, maar als alternatieve keuzemogelijkheid. Immers in een postmoderne religieuze *bricolage*-cultuur kiest de professor linksom te gaan en studenten rechtsom, want zij achten een dergelijke herinterpretatie van hun christelijk geloof niet nodig. Ook Brümmer's opmerking dat godsdienstige denkmodellen “reality depicting” zijn – dus feitelijk ook waarheid claimen – kan er duidelijk toe aanleiding geven om met hem zo maar weer in de “oude” referentiële afbeeldingstheorie van betekenis terug te vallen.

Metaforen vertellen ons in taal ontleend aan de ene context waarin deze thuishoort, het een en ander over iets in een andere context: wij belijden: “God is koning” en bedenken *tegelijktijd* dat Hij geen koning is zoals koning Albert of koningin Beatrix. Dat wil zeggen: een metafoor stelt iets en maakt tegelijktijd duidelijk “it is *and it is not*” (Sallie McFague). Als wij zo metaforen willen gebruiken, dan moeten wij wel iets uitleggen bij metaforen die we “reality depicting” noemen, want op het moment dat we van deze vermeende afbeeldingsfunctie van een metafoor ook zeggen “*and it is not*”, hebben wij de feitelijke claim teruggenomen en ... *niets* gezegd! Met te zeggen “God is koning” geven wij te kennen dat we het gepast achten God met de titel “koning” ter sprake te brengen en hoe we in de *relatie* van God en mensen Hem respectvol bejegenen. Wij beweren met “God is koning” geen feiten omtrent God-op-zich, maar geven aan hoe wij ons waardig te gedragen hebben in de relatie van God met ons. Deze rol van metafoor kunnen wij met een bijbels voorbeeld adstrueren. Wanneer Jezus tegenover een aantal Farizeeën van koning Herodes zegt: “Zeg die vos ...” (Lucas 13,32), is het zijn hoorders duidelijk dat Jezus niet van mening is dat Herodes een staartdragend wezen is. De betiteling “vos” zegt hoe hij over Herodes' gedrag oordeelt en welke attitude daarbij past.

In hetzelfde opstel “Does God Really Exist?” zegt Brümmer “[t]hat something ‘really exists’ means that it determines the limits of our possibilities of action and not merely of our possibilities of perception (Brümmer 2006a: 195).” Of het hierbij nu om feitelijke handelingsmogelijkheden gaat dan wel andersoortige, wordt duidelijk als hij een *intentionele* analyse van een voorbeeld van twee ontwikkelingswerkers, Brendon en Barry, geeft. Zij hebben uiteenlopende motieven voor *ogenschijnlijk* hetzelfde werk: voedselhulp. Brendon werkt in het kader van de revolutie vooraf aan de Socialistische Heilstaat en Barry spant zich in om tekenen van het Koninkrijk van God op te richten. Die verschillen in motieven bepalen dat zij – in dezelfde levensvorm – heel verschillende handelingen verrichten. Vervolgens stelt hij dat ieder een andere werkelijkheid veronderstelt: die van de Grote Revolutie dan wel van het Koninkrijk van God. Brümmer vertelt niet wat deze “werkelijkheden” inhouden, maar wel dat zij voor hen existentiële implicaties hebben. Hij veronderstelt dat voor hen de Revolutie dan wel Gods Koninkrijk onafhankelijk van hen als *externe* werkelijkheden bestaan. Daarmee introduceert hij zelf de vraag naar *externe* verificatie ervan. Mijn voorstel is om hier van werkelijk *interne* relaties te spreken: de Revolutie manifesteert zich in daden van Brendon zoals Gods Koninkrijk zich in de tekenen vertoont die Barry opricht door Gods gebod te volgen. De socialist *is niet* de Revolutie, evenmin de christen het Koninkrijk Gods, maar zij zijn intern daaraan gerelateerd: Barry's daden bestaan *tegelijktijd* met Gods Koninkrijk en analoog Brendon met de Grote Revolutie. Hun daden zijn “visitekaartje”

voor deze “werkelijkheden”, die hun vertellen hoe om te gaan met de hen omringende levenswerkelijkheid.

Bekijken we het voorbeeld van Brendon en Barry in het licht van Brümmer's these: “Het is deel van de taak van de theologie om de impliciete claims van een religieuze traditie in een coherent leerstellig schema vorm te geven.” In zijn holistische perceptie toont dit voorbeeld twee leerstellige systemen die de juistheid van een nieuwe uitspraak door *interne* toetsing binnen een geheel netwerk van claims op coherentie mogelijk maken. Brendon en Barry claimen volgens Brümmer de Revolutie dan wel Gods Koninkrijk als externe werkelijkheden, maar praktisch geschiedt de toets van hun feitelijk bestaan via interne procedures. Deze taalspelen kunnen openstaan voor externe kritiek, wanneer zij bij nieuwe levensvragen niet meer toereikend blijken te zijn om zin aan te geven en inventief alternatieven voor te stellen. Bijstellingen of innovatieve herinterpretaties worden echter op interne coherentie met het gehele netwerk van het systeem van taalspelen getoetst. Barry en Brendon kunnen elkaar de coherentie van hun overtuigingen tonen, maar slechts getuigen voor hun aannemelijkheid. Zij kunnen daarbij laten zien in hoeverre hun geloof aanpassingsvermogen heeft om met nieuwe omstandigheden om te blijven gaan en daarmee levensvatbaar blijkt.

Hier van “feitelijke” werkelijkheden te willen spreken terwijl het bestaan van het Koninkrijk Gods niet als empirische hypothesen te formuleren is, rekt de inhoud van “feitelijk” op. Brümmer maakt het zijn lezers niet gemakkelijk door over het Koninkrijk van God als feitelijke werkelijkheid te spreken zonder enige empirische hypothese te formuleren, terwijl hij non-realistische collega's kapittelt omdat zij ontkennen dat godsdienstige spreekmodellen enige “constative force” bezitten. Volgens hen zijn zij wel nuttig voor gelovigen om hun leven te ordenen. Gelovige non-realisten mogen volgens Brümmer niet claimen dat deze modellen nuttig functioneren zonder een feitelijke waarheidsclaim daaraan te verbinden. “Reality depicting” metaforen brengen Brümmer in een lastige spagaat: er wordt onderwijl door zijn kroongetuige Sallie McFague gefluisterd “it is *and it is not*”. Claimt haar notitie meer dan de reële constatering dat een model nuttig functioneert? Enkel het perspectief van *God's eye point of view* kan hier antwoorden, maar dat hebben wij beiden (nog?) niet!

FILOSOFISCHE THEOLOGIE HELPT DOORDACHT GOD RELATIONEEL TER SPRAKE TE BRENGEN

Brümmer's analyse leert ons om in geloofstaal meer dimensies naast elkaar te onderscheiden en niet ééndimensionaal in betekenissen te denken. Nu wil ik de idee van “werkelijk *interne* relaties” in het bovenstaand voorbeeld benutten om aan te geven hoe christelijke theologie God ter sprake kan brengen. Voor wie een inclusief perspectief hanteert zodat daden van gelovigen *tegelijktijd* met Gods Koninkrijk bestaan, kijkt de Verlichting in de verkeerde richting als zij naar argumenten voor Gods separate bestaan vraagt: dat levert een verknipt beeld op.

We kunnen een onderscheid maken tussen “spreken *over* God” en “spreken *van* God”, d.i. “*vanuit* God”. Voor wie “*over*” God spreekt, is Hij object van spreken, dat zij met enige distantie beschouwt. Voor wie daarentegen “*van/vanuit*” God spreekt, is Hij als subject in dit spreken gedacht, die haar heeft aangesproken, voordat zij Hem ter sprake bracht.⁹ Dit spreken *van/vanuit* God is een geëngageerd spreken: de gelovige beseft zelf aangesprokene te zijn zodat met haar spreken van God de gelovige ook haarzelf ter sprake brengt. Beiden maken deel uit van één verband. Als gemeenschap van deze gelovigen *moet* de kerk God ter sprake brengen, want dat behoort tot haar identiteit, die anders ophoudt te bestaan. God en kerk horen bijeen, zodat ook de kerk alleen *van/vanuit* God kan spreken: zij spiegelt zich aan Paulus en *moet* het evangelie

9 Vgl. Barth 1932:1v. Zie Van den Brom 2001:51–67.

vercondigen.¹⁰ Haar identiteit bestaat in haar verwevenheid met God: met God ter sprake te brengen brengt zij zichzelf ter sprake, *vice versa*. Het Nieuwe Testament benoemt deze directe verwevenheid met *ekklesia tou theou*.¹¹ Volgens exegeten is dit een staande uitdrukking om aan te geven dat God degene is die in en met de kerk werkt. De relatie tussen God en kerk wordt door God geconstitueerd zodat men met de zichtbare kerk ook met deze God te maken heeft. Zij heet tevens *ekklesia tou christou*, als door God in Christus bijeengeroepen.¹² In de zichtbare interactie tussen Jezus met zijn prediking en de leerlingen toont zich een *nieuwe gemeenschap* als netwerk van persoonlijke relaties tussen God in Jezus Christus en de leerlingen onderling: met de daden van een volgeling ontmoet je *tegelijkertijd* het hele netwerk van Gods Koninkrijk (zoals eerdergenoemde Barry). Waarom niet deze interacties door de tijd heen als onderwerp voor theologische reflectie en prediking noemen? Deze interacties worden in teksten verbeeld: Wie jullie hoort, hoort mij; wie jullie afwijst, wijst mij af en daarmee Hem die mij gezonden heeft (Luc. 10,16). Daarmee claimen de evangelisten dat Jezus in zijn spreken structuren tussen zijn leerlingen en het Koninkrijk creëert als de *werkelijkheid* van het Koninkrijk. Dit is een vorm van *performatief* taalgebruik, een handeling welke in het spreken zelf tot stand komt. In de levende traditie klinkt Jezus' woord performatief voort en confronteert hoorders met het *relationele* netwerk van het Koninkrijk van God en daarin met God. Kortom: Spreken van/vanuit God vormt de actuele voortzetting van de performatieve act in navolging van Christus. Hier manifesteert God zich.

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TREFWOORDE

10 1 Kor. 9,16b. Zie Conzelmann 1981:194–5.

11 Door deze woordcombinatie te vertalen met "*gemeente van God*", verdwijnt het bredere betekenis van "*kerk van God*" uit het blikveld. Zie bijv. Hand. 20,28; 1 Kor. 10,32, 11,16,22, 15,9; 2 Kor. 1,1; Gal. 1,3; 1 Tess. 2,14.

12 K.L. Schmidt in *TWNT*, III, 506v.

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***Spiritual discernment* according to 1 Corinthians 2: the Spirit and discerning the wisdom of God (An exploration in Pauline discernment: part 1)¹**

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the nature of “discernment” as personally experienced and communicated by Paul regarding his discernment of the “wisdom of God” as revealed to him by the Spirit of God. It is the first part of two articles that explore Pauline discernment, specifically with reference to 1 Corinthians 2. It is one of the main themes in 1 Corinthians 2. The verb κρίνω (decided, 2:2) and its derivatives ἀνακρίνω (discern, 2:14, 15[2x]) and συγκρίνοντες (interpreting, 2:13) occur five times in chapter two; this verb is used by Paul to explain how the spiritual person (πνευματικός) discerns the wisdom of God as this wisdom is mediated by the Spirit of God. This research endeavours to point out the coherence and relatedness of the different components that are involved in the process of the discerning of the wisdom of God.

INTRODUCTION

It is a great delight to offer this contribution to a fine and respected scholar. When reading the publications of Vincent Brümmer one becomes aware of his innovativeness. His ways of thinking is remarkable: this is sensible in the logic of his thinking and the constituents he raises in his discussions and arguments. The richness of his work and his confessions of faith, with which the author of this article can identify, is highly valued. This research focuses on “the Spirit and discerning the wisdom of God according to 1 Corinthians 2.”

Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians is unique in the New Testament in that it shows the wide spectrum of problems encountered by one of the early church communities (Prime 2005:11). One of these problems seems to be that a high esteem for wisdom led to the creation of factions within this early church community. This is evident from the first four chapters which, together, form a unit. Paul addresses this problem indirectly by referring to another form of wisdom, one that will contradict the wisdom of the Corinthians. He opposes their human wisdom with divine wisdom, which is not accessible to everybody. This is evident in his statement: “And we speak of these things in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual” (...ἀλλ’ ἐν διδακτοῖς πνεύματος, πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες, 2:13). Discernment for the correct understanding and implementation of the wisdom of God was a matter of great concern to Paul.² In 1 Corinthians 2, Paul explains to the Corinthian congregation how the various components or phenomena that establish the discernment of this divine wisdom are knitted together.

In doing so, and when referring to the act of discernment, Paul uses the verb κρίνω (decided,

1 This is the first article of two about “The discernment of the wisdom of God.” The title of the second article is: Cognitive transformation and spiritual growth: the matrix for discerning the wisdom of God (An exploration in Pauline discernment: part 2).

2 See 1 Corinthians 1-4.

2:2) and its semantic related derivatives συγκρίνοντες (interpreting, 2:13) and ἀνακρίνω (discern, 2:14, 15 [twice]). Given Paul's use of the verb "discernment" on multiple lexical levels (κρίνω / ἀνακρίνω / συγκρίνοντες) of meaning in the Greek language,³ we therefore need a working definition of the term "discernment".⁴ The following definition, as stated by Louw & Nida (1996:363), will be used: "To make a judgment on the basis of careful and detailed information – 'to judge carefully, to evaluate carefully.'"

With this working definition in mind, this article endeavours to point out, the relatedness and coherence⁵ of the different components that are involved in the process of discerning the wisdom of God (as explained in 1 Cor 2). In this article, I will also explain how Paul understood the process of spiritual discernment. This article will begin with a preview of the "literary context" of the selected text within the macro context of 1 Corinthians 1-4.

LITERARY CONTEXT OF 1 CORINTHIANS 2

Matters of literary context and the continuity of the argument are important in understanding 1 Corinthians 2 and, in particular, in understanding the *nature* and *operation* of spiritual "discernment" (cf. Cousar 1990:169).

The first four chapters of 1 Corinthians⁶ form an appropriate unit in the letter. The problems of factionalism or internal rivalries,⁷ which are specifically discussed in these chapters, are at the centre of the congregational difficulties that emerge as the epistle proceeds. The problem of divisions in the congregation, which revolves around various leaders in the congregation, is introduced as early as 1:10-17.

In this section Paul accuses the Corinthian church of σχίσματα (divisions,⁸ 1:10) and consequently makes several requests for unity. The facts regarding the divisions have been

3 See Hertrich (1979:921-933) and Büchsel (1979:933-954) for a thorough discussion on the verb ἀνακρίνω and its many derivatives in TDNT III:921-954. Though it must be borne in mind that a word's meaning can primarily be derived from its immediate literary context, though the macro textual context also plays a secondary role. One must be cautious to take one word and then build an entire theology around its lexical meaning.

4 Waaijman (2002:484) explains discernment as follows: "*Diakrisis* is the process of assembling and sorting out knowledge with respect to the way toward God. It tests the end and the means and creates a critical center. With a contemplative eye it looks at a person's life journey and envisions its perfection... *Diakrisis* is the critical-reflective moment of transformation in God." According to Danker (2000:66), ἀνακρίνω has the meaning of "to examine with a view to finding fault, *judge, call to account, discern.*" Louw & Nida (1996:15) attach the following meanings to it: to study thoroughly (27.44); to investigate in court (56.12); to criticize (33.412) or to evaluate carefully (30.109). Later on (1996:363) they elaborate on the last proposal as "to make a judgment on the basis of careful and detailed information—'to judge carefully, to evaluate carefully.' ὁ δὲ πνευματικὸς ἀνακρίνει τὰ πάντα 'the spiritual person makes careful judgments about all things' 1 Cor 2:15." For Louw and Nida the meanings of κρίνω (30.108), ἀνακρίνω and διακρίνω (30.109) are all closely related to the process of learning and of understanding, and in some contexts the meanings shade one into the other. See also Hertrich's (1979:921) discussion of all the derivatives of κρίνω; see also Swanson (1997:§3212); Zodhiates 2000:§2919); Balz – Schneider 1990:II, 318).

5 Research on chapter 2 has not yet looked *holistically* into the discernment of divine wisdom. Past research on 1 Cor 2 focussed on individual aspects such as "wisdom" (Kaiser 1981:301-319; Baird 1959:425-432; Ellis 1974:82-98; Horsley 1977:224-239; Pogołoff 1992; Polhill 1983:325-339); "to know God" (Gärtner 1967-68:209-31; Gooch 1987); the "Holy Spirit" (Lim 1987:137-149).

6 There is general agreement that 1:10 to 4:21 constitutes an identifiable section (see Thiselton 2000:107).

7 See Garland 2003:37-39) for a discussion of different and nuanced views with regard to the nature of this conflict in the Corinthian church.

8 "Division, dissension, schism" (Danker 2000:981); "literally *split, rift, division*" (Friberg 2000:372).

communicated orally to Paul by “Chloe’s people” (ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόης, 1:11).⁹ Factions have developed over certain figures of authority. Paul’s response to this problem is not to favour one leader over or against another. Instead, he tries to make the community face the reality of schism (Cousar 1990:169). In his treatment of this situation he makes them aware of the joint sharing of their being-in-Christ. Thus, no single group has a monopoly (μεμέρισται ὁ Χριστός; has Christ been divided?, 1:13) (Thiselton 2000:107).

This introduction is followed by a discussion of the contrast between human and divine wisdom in 1:18-2:16¹⁰ (Polhill:1983:325), an issue that is directly related to this factionalism.¹¹ Paul tends to treat the problem of division as being symptomatic of a much deeper problem: the Corinthians’ attraction to “the language of worldly wisdom” (Cousar 1990:169f). It is probable that some in the community understood themselves to be wise, and that these people regarded themselves as inspired, Spirit-filled persons (3:1) (Cousar 1990:170).

The key to Paul’s interaction between these twin parallel themes of *faction* and *wisdom* is his conviction that the Spirit unites (see 1 Cor 12). Where the Spirit of God is present, there can be no internal rivalries, because it is the Spirit of God alone who reveals the divine wisdom (2:10-12). Given this conviction, Paul does not discuss the ideas of the various Corinthian groups. For him, the existence of division proves that the various ideas found in the church at Corinth have their origins in human, rather than divine, wisdom (Polhill 1983:325).

This major subsection (1:18–2:16), which centres on the subject of wisdom, can be subdivided into smaller subsections. Verses 18-25 form the first subsection, where human-centred wisdom is contrasted with God’s revealed wisdom. The fact that the wisdom of God contradicts human standards of wisdom is illustrated in the second subsection. In these verses, Paul points out that, firstly, God’s calling of the Corinthians contradicted human expectations (1:26-31). Secondly, (2:1-5) Paul refers to his initial preaching to them in weakness, fear and trembling, and with simple speech; despite this, they came to faith through the power of God. The last contrast between human wisdom and the power of God (2:5) is developed in the third subsection (2:6-16), where Paul contrasts the discernment of spiritual people with the discernment of unspiritual people (cf. Garland 2003:39).¹² In this subsection, Paul returns to the subject of the divine wisdom and its locus of revelation in the Spirit (Polhill 1983:328).

In 3:1-4, Paul characterises the Corinthians as being carnal rather than spiritual people.¹³ He refers to the party slogans (“I belong to Paul” and “I belong to Apollos”) to prove that the Corinthians are carnal. He closes this subsection with three metaphors to describe the church: as God’s field (3:5-9a), as God’s building (3:9b-15), and as God’s temple (3:16-17).

In 3:18–4:5, he reviews his argument about the foolishness of the wisdom of the world, which leads to foolish boasting about leaders. Paul summarises his argument in 4:6-13 and concludes in 4:14-21 with a fatherly admonition that they imitate him (4:16). The entire section (1:10–4:21) sets off and closes with the phrase “I exhort you” (Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς ... Παρακαλῶ οὖν ὑμᾶς, 1:10; 4:16). Paul instructs them to bring their disputations under the rule of the cross in order to live in unity (Garland 2003:39).

9 On the reception of the oral report and criteria for reconstructing it, see especially Hurd (1983:47–50 and 61–94, esp. 82).

10 According to Stuhlmacher (1987:333) sets 2:6 (6a and 6b) the direction for a chiasmic sequence: 2:7-9 expand on 6b and 2:10-16 on 6a.

11 This becomes sensible in 3:18-21 and 4:6-10 that the boasting of the Corinthians over various leaders involves a boasting of their own wisdom. Paul, himself, has also been charged by some members as lacking wisdom (4:1-5, 8-21).

12 This contrast links the two subsections (2:1-5 and 6-16) with one another.

13 The occurrence of πνευματικός, in both 2:6-16 and 3:1-4, links these two subsections. This linkage is further supported by the correlation of ψυχικός (2:11) with σαρκικός (3:1, 3).

The above analysis creates the literary context and historical environment in which the rest of this paper has to be understood. Thus, the content of 1 Corinthians 2 revolves around wisdom and centres on the dichotomy between worldly wisdom and divine wisdom. Before we investigate the coherence of divine wisdom, and the role of the Spirit in the communication, understanding and discernment of this wisdom, we first need to examine how Paul communicated this wisdom to the Corinthian congregation.

THE NATURE OF PAUL'S ROLE (2:1-5) IN THE WAY IN WHICH THE SPIRIT OF GOD COMMUNICATES THE WISDOM OF GOD (2:1-5)

The subsection 2:1-5 forms a prelude for the main text (2:6-16); it is this main text that I will be examining in this article. In 2:1-5, Paul turns to his own preaching.¹⁴ He recalls the point at which the discussion of the failure of human wisdom began (1:17). If he had communicated the gospel with sophistication, he says, the Corinthians might have been persuaded by his rhetoric and sophistry¹⁵ rather than by the Spirit of God. In these verses Paul explains how he avoided human wisdom and sophistication when he preached in Corinth.

First, he demonstrated *no persuasive powers or rhetoric* (2:4a) but preached only the message of the crucified Christ (2:2):¹⁶ "I did not come proclaiming to you in lofty words or wisdom ... (2:1). For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ ... (2:2). My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom (2:4a)." From these verses it is clear that Paul had decided to make Jesus the centre of his teaching when he preached at Corinth (Pratt 2000:25). This is why he did not come with "lofty words" (2:1) or "plausible words" (2:4) of wisdom. The choice of such a deliberate focus was based on his discernment and understanding of the gospel (cf. also Gal 1:15) and the needs of the Corinthian community.

Second, his style of preaching and physical presence among them were both characterised by *weakness, fear, and trembling* (2:3): "And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." This suggests that Paul was an "anti-rhetor" (Hartman 1974:118).¹⁷ "Stripped of self-reliance" (the real danger, according to Fee 1987:96), Paul had to rely on the mercy and grace of

14 In 2:1-5 Paul uses the first person singular, personal pronoun (2:1, 3, 4, $\kappa\alpha\gamma\omega$ and $\mu\omicron\upsilon$). In the next sub-section (2:6-16) "we" is the subject of the verb $\lambda\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\mu\epsilon\upsilon$, "we speak" (2:6). In fact, throughout this whole passage, Paul constantly employs to the first person plural pronoun "we" or "us" in vss. 10, 12, 13, and 16. Paul is probably referring to himself by this type of editorial "we" or "us", and perhaps in a derivative sense to those fellow-teachers who laboured with him. But in 1 Cor. 3:1 he switches back to the first person singular pronoun.

15 One might suppose, however, that Paul is rejecting the contemporary, sophist techniques as they were applied to preaching - a practice which emphasises the form rather than the content of the sermon and the role of the preacher rather than the Gospel (cf. 1 Cor. 4:20) (Lim 1987:149).

16 Theissen (1987:353) is of the opinion that Paul's rejection of persuasive words of wisdom in 2:4 might be an influence of the Jewish wisdom traditions on Paul's language.

17 Paul's comments about his weakness are not simply a rhetorical strategy as Pogooff (1992:136) suggests, citing Quintilian (*Inst.* 4.1.8-10): "We shall derive some silent support from representing that we are weak, unprepared, and no match for the powerful talents arrayed against us" (cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 42.3). Paul's scriptural backdrop is more convincing (Snyder 1992:32; Thielton 2000:220): Moses claimed a lack of eloquence (Exod. 4:10), Isaiah described himself as a man of "unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5), and Jeremiah protested that he was too young for public speaking (Jer. 1:6). In 1 Cor. 2:4, Paul is not rejecting rhetoric altogether, but specifically the Corinthian preachers' emphasis on and practice of employing human wisdom in preaching. For Paul, the preaching of the Gospel is not dependent upon any human techniques of persuasiveness, but upon the demonstration of the Spirit and power. This does not mean that devices and strategies of rhetoric are not to be used in preaching, but that they should be confined to their proper limits (Lim 1987:148).

God, and how God could work powerfully through him (cf. Hartland 2003:86).¹⁸

Third, Paul *avoided plausible words of wisdom* in favour of “the demonstration of the Spirit and power of God” (2:4): “My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” With respect to his *style* of preaching (speech), as well as its *content* (proclamation), Paul intended that the ensuing faith of the Corinthians be grounded in the power of God and not in human wisdom (Cousar 1990:170).¹⁹ God’s wisdom cannot be obtained through human wisdom. This is why Paul came to Corinth as a witness and not as a philosopher.

Paul’s acknowledgement of his own human weakness makes it evident that, when he first preached at Corinth, he relied on the demonstration of the power of the Spirit. The fact that the Spirit manifested himself through Paul’s preaching proved that his preaching did not lack power (Pratt 2000:26). *In other words, Paul stresses his weakness in order to nullify the wisdom allegations of the Corinthians and to emphasise the role and the power involvement of the Spirit in his proclamation of the mystery of God* (2:1).

He relied on the Spirit to convince the Corinthians so that their faith would not be based on the wisdom of any person (Greek culture relied on the worldly wisdom of philosophers and rhetoricians). Paul makes it clear that he feels that the Corinthian believers have begun to return to this cultural standard. In response, Paul points out that one of his primary goals is that the Corinthians build their lives on a new foundation, not on the wisdom of men (as in the case of Greek philosophers), but on the power of God²⁰ (Pratt 2000:26; also Cousar 1990:170). This is why it is necessary to be able to discern the wisdom of God.

THE WISDOM OF GOD (2:6-9)

In 1 Corinthians 2:6,7 Paul states that “... among the mature we do speak wisdom ... we speak God’s wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory”. The term wisdom (σοφία) appears in 1 Corinthians almost exclusively in 1:18–4:21, a section that has the literary form of an elaborate commentary or midrash. Here “the wisdom of this age” (3:19; cf. 1:20; 2:6) or “human wisdom” (2:5) is contrasted with “the wisdom of God” (2:7; cf. 1:24, 30) (Ellis 1974:87; also Baird 1959:425).²¹

In order to understand what Paul means in his reference to the “wisdom of God” we will look at the following three issues: the nature of God’s wisdom, the content of this wisdom, and how this wisdom is received. These three issues explain why spiritual discernment of this wisdom is necessary.

The nature of God’s wisdom

Nowhere in the long discussion of wisdom that begins at 1:18ff does Paul define what is meant by the “wisdom” that characterises the factions experienced at Corinth.²² Nor does he define

18 See Hartland (2003:85-86) for a good and thorough discussion on how other scholars have interpreted Paul’s reference: “weakness and in fear and in much trembling” (2:3, ἀσθενεία καὶ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἐν τρόμῳ πολλῷ ἐγενόμην).

19 For Paul, the Kingdom of God is not manifested in words, but in power (1 Cor. 4:20; cf. 2:5).

20 Note the strong adversative force of the preceding double δέ...δέ (“On the contrary”), “Yet (2:6)... we speak God’s wisdom” (2:7). The genitive here, θεοῦ σοφίαν, is simply possessive; it is the wisdom which belongs to God and which He reveals to those κλητὸς ... διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ (1:1).

21 Cf. Wuellner, W. 1970. “Haggadic Homily Genre in 1 Corinthians 1-3,” *JBL* 89: 199-204.

22 For Grindheim (2002:689) Paul understood these factions as symptomatic of a theological error. For him, Paul’s discourse on wisdom in 1 Cor 2:6-16 also serves his rhetorical purpose of undermining the basis of the various factions (2002:690). Pogoloff (1992:104) differs from Grindham. According to him:

the content of the wisdom for the mature in 2:6ff. This is because it is not Paul's intention to do so: it would sidetrack his whole argument. His entire purpose is to bring the Corinthians back to the only wisdom that counts – the wisdom of the cross.²³ This wisdom of God (2:7), coming from the Spirit (2:10-12), will now be examined more closely:

Firstly, this wisdom, which forms the essence of Paul's message, is a secret conceived by God Himself. Until He unveiled it to Paul, this wisdom was known only to God; God's wisdom "is a mystery" (2:7, ἐν μυστηρίῳ). In the *corpus Paulinum* a mystery is not something mysterious or a truth that humans cannot comprehend.²⁴ Instead, according to Kaiser (1981:312), it is a truth or fact which human understanding cannot discover by itself, but which one can adequately grasp once God has revealed it to his prophets or apostles.²⁵

Secondly, the reference to hiddenness (2:7, τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην²⁶) is the second characteristic of this wisdom. God was pleased to be silent about this wisdom for long ages, until the time came for Him to reveal it (cf. Rom. 16:25). God's wisdom was therefore a mystery in the biblical sense of that word and was long hidden before God chose to disclose it (cf. Kaiser 1981:312).

The third feature of this unique wisdom was that it was "marked out" or "decreed" (2:7) long ago before the ages in the eternal plan of God. Paul's wisdom was not thoughtless or subjective (Kaiser 1981:312) conjecture and nor was it a series of scholarly pastoral homilies on certain religious topics. God had planned for its release long before the ages came into existence for when it was released it might result in their eternal glory (2:7, τῶν αἰώνων εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν).

A fourth characteristic of this wisdom is that none of this world's rulers²⁷ understood it (2:8).²⁸ Indeed, in their ignorance of this wisdom, they crucified the "Lord of glory". This wisdom was superior to all human thought or the thought of any individual person, and was superior to any wisdom the leaders of this world might possess.

In *three more related clauses*, Paul continues to describe this wisdom.²⁹ It does not originate

"Paul is addressing an exigence of the ethical dimensions of division, not doctrinal divergence." Dunn (1995:43) mentions the scholarly neglect of the theological dimension of the conflict.

23 Only the Spirit of God apprehends the plans and purposes of God, and only this Spirit can link God and humans together (Gärtner 1967-68:218). What God is doing, only God knows (Garland 2003:99). Gooch (1987: 36) explains what Paul means: "It is not simply that just as individuals have private thoughts not known to others, God has private thoughts too, rather, if human things are known only to human knowers, divine things are known only to God's Spirit." Paul's intention "is to draw a thick and heavy line between things human and divine and to place the things of God squarely outside the limits of human knowing" (Garland 2003:99).

24 See Brummer (2005:4f) for a thorough discussion on this point of view.

25 See Paul's definition of μυστηρίῳ in Rom 16:25.

26 "to keep from being known, *keep secret*" (Danker 2000:114); "keep secret" (Louw and Nida 1996:§28.80).

27 Cousar (1990:171) interpreted "Rulers of this age" as political and religious figures or as apocalyptic powers. In his article on "the rulers of this age", Miller (1972:522-528) convincingly argued that, in 1 Cor 2:6-8, they "are to be understood as a reference to human, earthly authorities, and not to supernatural or spiritual, demonic or angelic powers." They trusted in their own "human wisdom" and plans and consequently knew nothing of the "wisdom of God". Gaffin (1987:110) added to this: "The rulers of this age are representative; in them we see the most impressive achievements of the present world-order, measured by the standards of human rebellion and unbelief; within the creation, as presently subject to the curse on sin (cf. Rom 8:18-22), they exemplify the most that it has to offer and is capable of attaining."

28 Brummer (2005:4) points out that "Although believers would admit that Jesus "suffered for our salvation" the way in which this is usually explained seems highly problematical." He states that if such fundamental doctrines involve logical and moral conundrums, how then can Christians be required to believe doctrines which they cannot understand?

29 In this verse Paul is not trying to point out what he is speaking among the spiritual (mature) but to

from empirical sources, traditional knowledge in the community, or from intuitive insight or imagination. With these references Paul has shattered every conceivable earthly source for these words of wisdom which he announces. Consequently, this wisdom could only emanate from God. What Paul is claiming is quite clear: this wisdom is a revelation, a disclosure of the divine mind by the Spirit to the Apostle, a human being.

An *eighth* characteristic of this wisdom is that the wisdom of God is different from human wisdom in two ways. (1) Since it is “hidden”, it is comprehended neither by natural man and his wisdom (2:13f.; cf. 1:21) nor by the wicked “rulers of this age” (2:8) under whose influence natural man and his wisdom ultimately stand. (2) Since it is “wisdom among the mature”, it presupposes, as 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 makes clear, not only understanding but also the ethical fruit of the Spirit, a mind that is being renewed to do the will of God (cf. Rom. 12:2).

The *last* characteristic is that this wisdom concerns God’s plan of salvation, “a wisdom foreordained for our glorification”³⁰ (2:7) and the “things God has prepared for those who love him” (2:9). It was disclosed (taught, διδακτοῖς) by the Spirit (πνεύματος) “who interpret (συγκρίνοντες) the spirit-manifestations (πνευματικά) to spiritual men (πνευματικοῖς)”³¹ (2:13), “so that we may know (εἰδῶμεν) the things given to us by God” (2:12).

Content of the wisdom³²

In the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul refers to and discusses the “wisdom” concept from various perspectives:

Antithetical statements

In the first two chapters, a series of antithetical statements³³ is set over against one another. In 1:20-21 Paul counters “the wisdom of the world” (τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου) with “the wisdom of God” (τῆ σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ). The weakness of the language of worldly wisdom is that it cannot enable the world to know God (1:21); it cannot bring God to discourse. Instead, Paul argues that the preaching of the crucified Messiah, understandably foolish to the eyes of the world, becomes the instrument whereby God proves the wisdom of the wise³⁴ to be wrong (Cosuar 1990:170). The gospel of the cross appears as foolishness for those who are lost, but antithetically proves to be the power of God for those who are saved (2:18). This double character of the word of the cross is then delineated in the following verses, so that the “foolish” character is elaborated on in

demonstrate “the nature of that wisdom to be sublime and inaccessible to man” (Kaizer 1981:313).

30 Schrage (1991: 1:251–52) stresses the eschatological character of δόξαν ἡμῶν (our glory) here: he compares it with πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων (before the ages) as the *Urzeit-Endzeit* pattern of soteriology, i.e., the final end-time goal at last corresponds to the original point of departure or “primal time” of apocalyptic. According to Kistemaker & Hendriksen (2001:81f), Paul refers here to “hidden wisdom, which God predestined before all time for our glory”. Wisdom that has been hidden until Paul’s present time is now revealed through the person and work of Christ. See also Pratt (2000:34); Thiselton (2000:242).

31 Also translated “... in a spiritual way...” This possibility will become clearer later on in this article.

32 Horsley (1977:224) has pointed out that “scholarly investigation has concentrated primarily on *sophia* as the means and content of salvation, searching for its background in Jewish wisdom speculation or a Gnostic *Sophia*-myth”.

33 Cf. the antithesis that has been prominent all the way since 1:18 between the believers and those who are lost: “those who are saved” vs. “those who are lost” (1:18); “those who believe” vs. “Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom” (1:21-22); “those who are called” vs. “the wise” (1:24, 27); “the perfect” vs. “the rulers” (2:6); “for our glory” vs. “those who perish” (2:7, 6); “to us God has revealed” vs. “none of the rulers of this world knew” (2:10, 8); “those who love him” vs. “they crucified the lord of glory” (2:9, 8); “the Spirit that is from God” vs. “the spirit of the world” (2:12); “spiritual” vs. “natural human being” (2:15, 14); “the mind of Christ” vs. “foolishness for them” (2:16, 14) (Du Plessis 1959:179).

34 This identification in 1:24 and 30 becomes critical in 2:6-13.

1:19-2:5 and the “powerful” or “wise” character in 2:6-3:23.³⁵ In 1:19-31 Paul explains how God has overturned the values of the world (Mitchell 1991:87). That which is considered wise in the world is foolishness to God, and *vice versa* (1:21, 25; cf. 2:14) (Grindheim 2002:692).

Incomprehensible to the world

According to Cousar (1990:171) 2:8 is the key for understanding the content of this wisdom. The rulers of this age demonstrated their ignorance of divine wisdom when they “crucified the Lord of glory”. Paul’s reference to the “crucifixion of the Lord” shows the argument very much in continuity with the preceding section and reminds us that the wisdom of God, which is incomprehensible to the world, is nothing other than the proclamation of the cross (1:23-24). It is spoken of as “secret” and “hidden” because it is rejected by both Jews and non-Jews as being scandalous. However, the “spiritual man”³⁶ among whom God’s wisdom is disclosed and grasped are none other than “those who are called”, those for whom the crucified Christ is the wisdom and power of God (1:24) (cf. Rhyne 1990:175).

The crucified Christ

Paul explains how he avoided human wisdom and sophistication when he preached in Corinth (2:1-5). He says that he had determined to “know nothing ... except Jesus Christ.” Hence, the content of his preaching at Corinth was exclusively that of the crucified Christ (2:2) (cf. Polhill 1983:331; also Schnelle 2005:202f.). The crucifixion as the way of salvation was the most offensive dimension of the gospel. It opposed the human arrogance of both Jews and Gentiles. Nevertheless, it was the power of God for salvation (Pratt 2000:25). Baird, writing significantly earlier than Polhill and Schnelle, adds a new dimension to the meaning and understanding of this wisdom. According to him (1959:425-432), this wisdom involves more than the bare fact of the crucifixion and the simple doctrine that Christ died.³⁷ He is correct in stating that “to know nothing but Christ and him crucified” does not imply a limitation of knowledge; instead, it involves understanding the whole purpose of God’s creation and redemption. The wisdom of God is manifest in the proclamation of the crucified Christ who is the revelation and consummation of God’s whole drama of salvation (Baird 1959:431-2).

We must take care not to read a narrow, one-sided theology of the cross out of (or into) 2:2, 8. It has to be connected with the equally aphoristic assertion to be found in 2 Tim 2:8: “Remember Jesus Christ raised from the dead,... according to my gospel.” The centre of Paul’s gospel is Christ’s death and resurrection in their significance as the fulfilment of Scripture (1 Cor 15:3-4). Here it entails ultimately the soteriological-eschatological renewal of nothing less than the entire creation (2 Cor 5:17) (Gaffin 1995:108). God’s eschatological wisdom, focused in Christ’s cross and resurrection, is still in view here, and elaborates on Jesus’ kingdom vision in Matthew 11/Luke 10 (Gaffin 1995:115)

Conclusion

The most likely conclusion, therefore, is that the wisdom, which is spoken in a mystery, is the

35 Theissen (1987:345) observes the parallel structure between 1:18-2:5 and 2:6-3:23. The section 1:18-2:5 he counts under the heading “The preaching as foolishness,” and 2:6-3:23 under “The preaching as wisdom,” finding parallel subsections in 1:18-25 (“The word of the cross as foolishness in the world”) and 2:6-16 (“The preaching as wisdom among the perfect”); 1:26-30 and 3:1-4 (“Application to the community”); 2:1-5 (“Application to the apostle”) and 3:5-23 (“Application to the apostles”).

36 Those who appropriate this wisdom are repeatedly designated with a dative. This sets them apart as an elect group (“saved” in 1:18, “called” in 1:24, and “perfect” in 2:6) (Grindheim 2002:695).

37 Kaiser (1981:314) agrees that the “deep things of God” must include God’s essence, attributes, and plan.

message of the death of Christ, or more comprehensively, the gospel regarding Christ (cf. 1:17a; Rom 1:16) (Stuhlmacher 1987:334; also Fee 1987:227, 250-251). This interpretation gains further confirmation when the term “mystery” (μυστήριον) recurs in the plural in 4:1. Apparently, it seems to be a reference to the gospel or God’s plan of salvation (Grindheim 2002:696; also Barrett 1992:100; Fee 1987:160).

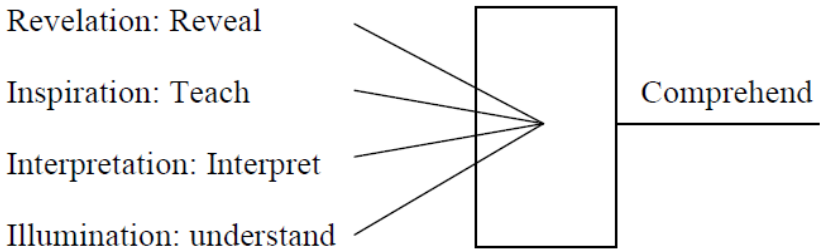
How the Wisdom was received

Paul describes the revelation and reception of wisdom³⁸ from various perspectives, all of which complement each other:

1. “...these things God has revealed (ἀπεκάλυψεν) to us through the Spirit...” (2:10);
2. “...taught (διδασκτοῖς) by the Spirit...” (2:13);
3. “...interpreting (συγκρίνοντες) spiritual things...” (2:13);³⁹
4. “...may understand (οἶδα) the gifts bestowed on us by God” (2:12);
5. “...to understand (γινῶναι)⁴⁰ them because they are spiritually discerned (ἀνακρίνεται)” (v 14).

The first perspective (ἀπεκάλυψεν) can be interpreted as “revelation.”⁴¹ The second, taught (διδασκτος), can be interpreted as “inspiration.” The third, συγκρίνοντες, as discernment. The last two related verbs (οἶδα and γινῶναι) are used to indicate understanding and can be interpreted as the “illumination of Scripture”. Although different verbs have been used by Paul, they are all connected semantically in order to constitute “comprehension”. The sequence of these verbs in the text also shows a logical progression in the process of discernment: reveal – teach – interpret – understand.

The process of discernment



38 When Waaijman (2002:582) discusses the analysis of Aristotle’s practical wisdom, he draws attention for the need for wisdom to discern all possibilities in a specific concrete situation and consequently to orient everything to the end. With Paul, spiritual discernment is needed to discern the wisdom of God.

39 See also verses 14-15 where ἀνακρίνεται is used (3x).

40 The text (2:14) uses “understand” in a negative sense, referring to the natural man who “does not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit” and consequently cannot understand the spiritual things.

41 Cf. Kaiser (1981:314) who initiated the idea of “revelation” and “inspiration” in these texts.

*Revelation*⁴²(2:10-12)

Three expressions describe the knowledge given by the Spirit of God to Christians: “the depths of God” (2:10), “the thoughts of God” (2:11), and “the gifts bestowed on us by God” (2:12).⁴³ Paul uses the verb “he revealed” (2:10, ἀπεκάλυψεν) in the Greek aorist tense. This is because Paul has in mind a definite point of time in the past when God made known to him this wisdom by way of a revelation.⁴⁴ This experience was unique to the biblical authors (Kaiser 1981:314).⁴⁵

The revelation which Paul claims for himself in I Corinthians 2:10-12, concerns the disclosure of divine *depths* (τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ). The agent who unveiled this revelation to Paul was the Spirit of God. Indeed, the “deep things of God” must refer to God’s detailed plan for salvation⁴⁶ (cf. Kaiser 1981:314). Certainly, then, the present tense of the verb ἐραυνᾷ for “searching” can only refer to the unceasing activity of the Spirit. Here it relates to the intra-Divine activity as the Spirit of God fulfils the task of revealing the deep things of God to Paul.

God takes the initiative (see also Ephesians 1:3-14) and, through human instruments such as Paul (λαλοῦμεν, 2:7, 13), He reveals his secret and hidden wisdom. Operating in and with the preaching of the cross, the Spirit unravels the web in which “worldly wisdom” has caught people. They are brought into a world constituted by the language of crucifixion, where God’s wisdom, God’s power, and God’s righteousness are understood in rather unusual ways.

42 For Gaffin (1995:105), what has been revealed is beyond all human capacity and competence, whether rational or intuitive; it is inaccessible to human potential in its highest actualisations. The necessity of revelation is strengthened by Paul’s reference to the “infants,” “little children” (νηπιός) as the recipients of revelation, in counterpoint to the “mature”.

43 Gaffin (1995:105f) convincingly uses Luke 10:21-22 as the point of departure to define the scope of revelation. Here in Luke 10 revelation is designated as “these things” (ταῦτα, v 21) and “all things” (πάντα, v 22). It is part of Jesus’ teaching about the eschatological “kingdom of God”. More specifically, the kingdom is a matter of the eschatological lordship of God in Jesus, the Christ, presently being realised in his arrival and to be consummated fully at his return.

Consequently, “these things”, as the content of revelation, are to be considered comprehensively. They are in fact “all things” (v. 22), that is, all that has its origin in the unique fellowship of knowledge between Father and Son, and is purposed by them for revelation in and by the Son (v. 22). Or, as already noted, “these things” are all that is revealed and brought to realisation in the coming of the kingdom. It might appear that this kingdom-qualification somehow limits the scope of “all things”. But, to the contrary according to the NT, there is nothing in the entire creation that is irrelevant to the kingdom; absolutely nothing falls outside the eschatological rule of Christ. For Gaffin (1995:107) the kingdom of God is totalitarian in the most ultimate sense we can know and experience. It is not partial. There is no area or dimension of human knowledge that lies outside the scope of the revelation in view in these verses, or for which that revelation is irrelevant. Any epistemological endeavor true to these verses recognises its absolute, exclusive dependence on such revelation.

44 Cf. Galatians 1:11, 12, 17. Paul writes this entire pericope to prove that his teaching was not influenced by anyone – he received the Gospel that he preaches directly from God. God is his witness about this.

45 While it is true that Paul also uses the same root of the word to say that God has given a revelation to the ordinary believer in Ephesians 1:17 (ἵνα ὁ θεός ... δώῃ ὑμῖν πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως), this is only a secondary and derivative revelation (see Kaiser 1981:314).

46 According to Schweizer (1968:426): “The content of the supernatural knowledge is not disclosure of mysteries of the heavenly world but the divine act of love effected at the cross, or the divine sonship granted to the believer thereby.” Garland (2003:98) agrees with Schweizer that the supernatural knowledge refers the depths of God to what God has foreordained (2:7) and prepared (2:9), the divine plan for human redemption (cf. Rom. 11:33). Wolff (1996: 58–59) notes that the word “depths” is at home in the apocalyptic literature (1 Enoch 63:3; 2 Bar. 14:8–9; T. Job 37:6; 1QS 11:18–19). The term’s appearance in later Gnostic literature has no bearing on Paul’s usage. Kaiser (1981:314) differs from Schweizer and Garland. For him “the deep things of God” includes his nature, attributes and plan.

Inspiration (2:13)

Paul (and the other apostles) do not speak an ordinary, natural message. His teaching is not human invention; instead, Paul is “taught (διδάκτος) by the Spirit.”⁴⁷ Paul’s main idea is evident. The Holy Spirit’s revelation was very special and cannot be discerned or communicated by ordinary means. For Kaiser (1981:314ff) this verse is probably the most precise statement on the mode of inspiration. According to Kaiser, it refers to the connection and method by which the divine Spirit and the human author interacted in the transmission and recording of these “deep things of God”.

Interpretation (συγκρίνοντες, 2:13; cf, also 2:2, 14, 15)

The concluding phrase of 2:13, πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες, poses a problem for interpretation (Gardner 1994:138).⁴⁸ The gender of πνευματικοῖς, however, could be masculine or neuter, and the verb συγκρίνειν could mean “interpret,” “compare,” or “combine” (Garland 2003:99; also Büchsel 1979:954). If the noun is taken as masculine, Paul could mean that he, by the Spirit, teaches the things of God and interprets spiritual truths to spiritual people (Rhyne 1990:175). If the noun is taken as neuter (see p 13), however, Paul means that he marries spiritual truths to spiritual expression (Kaiser 1981:317; Pratt 2000:37). According to the entire context (2:6-3:5) it is not an “either ... or”, but rather a case of “complementing”. Both meanings are equally true and present in this text and can be interpreted as: “spiritual truths (πνευματικὰ) come through spiritual expression taught by the Spirit who expresses these spiritual truths to spiritual people”.⁴⁹

Illumination of Scripture (2:14-16)

The work of the Spirit of God, in *applying* the truths Paul has received from God, is clearly distinguished here. 1 Cor. 2:14 continues: “Neither can the natural man know (γινῶναι)⁵⁰ the things of God, because they are Spiritually discerned” (see also Gaffin 1995:114).⁵¹ If a distinction is to be made between γινώσκω (“to know”) as used here and οἶδα (“know”), then γινώσκω is not merely perceiving things, but “embracing things as they really are”.⁵² Thus, the natural man neither welcomes nor embraces the realities found in the biblical text because they are “discerned” (ἀνακρίνω). This infers they are investigated and believed to have a certain value or worth by a person who is aided by the illuminating work of the Spirit. Now the Spirit’s ministry, as far as discernment is concerned, is one of aiding the believer to apply, to see the value, worth, and significance of a text for his own person, situation, and times (Kaiser 1981:318). To know

47 Paul’s statement in 2:13 recalls what he argues in 2:4. His preaching “was not with the persuasiveness of wisdom but with the demonstration of the Spirit and power”.

48 This last part of the verse is stylistically quite heavy in the Greek. Its meaning is not entirely clear. Part of its reasoning may be that Paul is piling up words (πνευματικοῖς πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες), including several repetitions, in order to emphasise his main argument (Ellingworth-Hatton 1995:59).

49 Cf, “How the wisdom was received” (p 13).

50 Terminology within the semantic field of “knowledge” occurs throughout the text: ἀναβαίνω ἐπὶ καρδίαν (2:9), γινώσκω (2:8, 11, 12, 14, 16), οἶδα (2:2; 11), νοῦς (2:16sic).

51 Brummer’s (1981:153) thoughts on “believing and understanding” help to understand the statement made by Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:14. According to him “It is possible to understand a statement without believing it.” It is only when a person understands the stating of someone that he / she can accept the proposition of that person as true or reject it as false. In this sense understanding is a precondition for both believing and disbelieving. Brummer (2006:162) is correct that believing is then more than merely understanding: “it is understanding and accepting as true.”

52 The contrast between γινώσκω and οἶδα, is that the first often suggests an acquired knowledge, but οἶδα suggests intuitive knowledge (Zodhiates 2000). It needs an obj. gen., and in the first instance denotes the act of knowing rather than knowledge (Bultmann 1979:690).

God turns out not to be an intellectual exercise in which the minds of Christians are attuned by the Spirit to be more sensitive to divine things than they otherwise might be. Instead, it entails the simple but critical discovery that they are people who live by grace and from grace (cf. Cousar 1990:173).⁵³ The “illumination of the understanding in the light of faith” leads, according to Brümmer (2008:152), to the inspiration of the heart. It also renews life in the fellowship of God.

To summarise: we need to know the nature of the wisdom of God, its contents and how it is received before we can understand why special discernment of this wisdom is required. Through the high frequency of occurrence of the word *spiritual* in this context (2:10, 13-15), Paul points out that the wisdom which he had brought to the Corinthians *was from* the Spirit of God and *taught by* the Spirit alone. It can neither be learned nor be communicated by human wisdom, as the Corinthians believed (Pratt 2000:37).

THE SPIRIT AND THE RECEPTION OF THE WISDOM OF GOD (2:10-13A)

In his discussion about receiving the true wisdom of God, Paul gives the Christian reader insight into the character of the Spirit Who is responsible for conveying the divine wisdom to believers. The identity and nature of the Spirit is such that only the Spirit can communicate the wisdom of God. In the selected text (1 Cor 2) there are explicit references about the Spirit regarding His relationship with and *affinity* to God. In 1 Cor 2 Paul clearly states that the Spirit is “the Spirit of God” (2:11, 12, 14), He “searches everything”, “even the depths of God” (2:10); and “comprehends what is truly God” (2:11). Paul describes the *role* of the Spirit as being to reveal the wisdom of God (2:10); He bestow gifts (2:12, 14) on believers; makes understanding possible (2:12); and He also teaches (2:13).

The Spirit’s relationship and affinity with God

The wisdom that is communicated to the spiritual man is not human reflection on the gospel but, like the gospel itself, only comes as revelation, as a divine gift.

The agent of the revelation of the wisdom of God is the Spirit who is *the Spirit of God* (τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, 2:11; also 10, 14). He shares in the divine attribute of omniscience. He is part of God’s council.

Nothing is hidden from the Spirit of God: γὰρ πνεῦμα πάντα ἐραυνᾷ, καὶ τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ. Although an infinite number of things about God will always remain hidden from the human mind, God’s hidden thoughts are evident to the Spirit of God (Pratt 2000:36) because He “searches everything, even the depths of God” (2:10). Only He knows what is truly God. To lend support to his assertion, Paul draws up an analogy between the human spirit and the Spirit of God (2:11). He begins by acknowledging that many things about a person’s thoughts remain hidden to other people. So it is with the Spirit of God: He alone comprehends what is truly God, and only He knows the depths of God.

Human beings cannot see into the mind of God “from the outside”, as it were, using human wisdom. Only the Spirit of God knows the thoughts of God because He searches “the depths of God”,⁵⁴ the innermost reality, and *only He can disclose those hidden things* to the spiritual man

53 Schmitz (1976:400) adds a new perspective. For him the knowledge (γνώσκω) of God (2:11, 14) comes about through the acceptance of salvation in the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, it can be nothing other than the gift of God (see Lk 1:7). This knowledge, according to him (1976:403) includes knowledge of the One he has sent. This illumination relates with Brümmer’s (2008:149f) perception of “religious experience” which he defines as “... ordinary experience (including ordinary sense perception) looked upon with the eyes of faith.” For him “religious experience” then becomes “‘hermeneutical’ in the sense that it entails an interpretation of our ordinary experience ...”

54 The depths of God refer to what God has foreordained (2:7) and prepared (2:9) – the divine plan for

(Pratt 2000:36; also Schlier 1979:517). A deeper understanding of this is first made possible and accessible for the Christian by the Spirit of God (2:10) (Delling 1978:657). The associated activity ascribed in 2:10 to the Spirit of God, by means of the verb ἐραυνᾶω, does not mean searching in order to discover something, but the activity of exploring God's purposes thoroughly in order to reveal them (Schrage 1991:257f). The idea that Paul tries to communicate here is "to search out" and *not* "to search" (Thiselton 2000:257).

The role which the Spirit plays

Verses 2:10-16 bring out the comprehensive role of the Spirit in the revelation process. He initiates both the giving and receiving of revelation; the Spirit knows and the Spirit communicates. Verses 10-11 address the former. The functioning of the Spirit in the revelation process proves his requisite investigative competence. He alone has the ability to comprehensively search out (ἐραυνῶ) "all things", including "even the deep things of God". (Gaffin 1995:112). It is the Spirit, therefore, Who reveals the wisdom of God (2:10); He bestows gifts (2:12, 14) on believers; makes understanding possible (2:12); and also teaches (2:13). This wisdom is not human reflection on the gospel but, like the gospel itself, only comes as revelation, as a divine gift. Those who are in Christ have received the Spirit and thus are receptive to its revelation (2:12). It is through the Spirit that Paul teaches and proclaims (2:1) the "mystery of God", and only those enlightened by the same Spirit are able to understand Paul's teaching (2:13).

The Spirit's role in communicating the message of the gospel raises an important issue for Paul. The message about which Paul and the apostles speak is not an ordinary, human message. Indeed, human wisdom (i.e., eloquent human reasoning) cannot find the words to express the message. Instead, this message is conveyed through words taught by the Spirit who expresses spiritual truths in spiritual words to spiritual persons (2:13). Only those who are under the influence of the Spirit of God can receive Christian instruction.⁵⁵ It cannot be learned or communicated by human wisdom, as the Corinthians incorrectly believed. People without the Spirit are not able to accept the things that come from the Spirit (Pratt 2000:37). In fact, the Christian message appears as foolishness to those who lack the Spirit (2:14).

Conclusion

In 2:10-13 Paul explains how the Holy Spirit imparts divine wisdom to those who are spiritual. In his argument, Paul undermines the Corinthians' claim to spirituality - another source of their pride and divisiveness. True spirituality would not have led them to adopt any form of human wisdom. To be truly spiritual, they will have to turn from human wisdom to the divine wisdom of the gospel (cf. Pratt 2000:36). The Spirit makes discernment possible, but only to those who are spiritual.

THE DISCERNMENT OF THE WISDOM OF GOD (2:14-16)

From what has been said so far it is evident that, for the comprehension of "divine wisdom,"

human redemption (cf. Rom. 11:33). I agree with Schweizer (1968:426): "The content of the supernatural knowledge is not disclosure of mysteries of the heavenly world but the divine act of love effected at the cross, or the divine sonship granted to the believer thereby" (Garland 2003:98). Schlier (1979:517) defines it as "'depth' or 'depths' figuratively in many different senses, mostly to denote the inscrutability or hiddenness as well as the vastness or greatness of something". See Thiselton 2000:257ff) for a thorough discussion on the meaning τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ.

⁵⁵ Brümmer (2008:147) correctly states that the Spirit of God opens the eyes to discern the acts of God.

The Spirit inspires the hearts but also illuminates the understanding. Only the eyes of faith can see Jesus as the Son of God in whom the forgiving love of God is manifested.

as revealed by the “Spirit of God”, special discernment is needed – something that can only be given to a spiritual person by the Spirit of God. Paul, who can be regarded as a spiritually mature man (cf. 2:4; 3:1,2), writes as follows in 2:2: “For I decided (ἔκρινά) to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” Superficially, (cf. 2:1-5), Paul appears to be an anti-intellectual. In fact, however, this is hardly the case, for we know that he received lengthy and intensive training in Jerusalem and Tarsus. Moreover, Paul was acquainted with the Greek quest for knowledge and wisdom (Acts 17:17). That said, he was not in the slightest bit interested in teaching the Corinthians the various methodologies which the Athenian thinkers had adopted and which humanistic philosophers of the day promoted. Instead, Paul makes it clear that he came to preach the gospel about the crucified Christ (1:23; Gal. 6:14) (Kistemaker & Hendriksen 2001:73).

Unlike some members of the church community at Corinth, who were eager to tell everyone how much they knew, Paul wants to limit his claim to knowledge; he knows only Christ the crucified - this is all he wants to communicate to them (Ellingworth & Hatton 1995:45f). Paul’s use of the verb ἔκρινά in 2:2 with regard to εἰδέναί ... εἰ μὴ denotes that Paul has already discerned that the “gospel” is the centre of the wisdom that the Spirit of God has revealed to him.

Again, in 2:13, Paul uses the verb συγκρίνοντες⁵⁶ in connection with the interpretation of spiritual things by those who are spiritual.⁵⁷ As already spelled out in section 4.3 this verb can be interpreted as: “spiritual truths (πνευματικὰ) came through spiritual expression taught by the Spirit who interprets (συγκρίνοντες) these spiritual truths to spiritual people (πνευματικοῖς).”

In 2:14 Paul switches to the verb ἀνακρίνεται in connection with the unspiritual person who is unable to discern spiritual things. In 2:15 he uses ἀνακρίνει⁵⁸ again, now with regard to the spiritual person who discerns all things but cannot be scrutinised (ἀνακρίνεται) by any unspiritual person. These three actions are closely related. The first two form a dichotomy, while the last one is consequential (because of the dichotomy). In 2:14-16a, Paul explains why divine wisdom is not received by the world. It is because the *natural man* (ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος) is not a reference to the weak Christian, but represents natural, physical existence that is dependent on human faculties without the aid of the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, such a person does not receive any gifts of the Spirit of God and is unable to understand (discern) them “because they are spiritually discerned (ἀνακρίνεται).” The verb ἀνακρίνειν means here “to investigate,” “to examine” (cf. 1 Cor. 10:25, 27).⁵⁹ The natural person analyses divine truth with his or her limited, earthbound talents and, not surprisingly, finds this truth inadequate (cf. Rom. 1:28) (Garland 2003:100-1).

56 From Danker (2000:953) three lexicographical possibilities exist: (a) to bring things together so as to form a unit, *combine* ... πνευματικὰ συγκρίνοντες *giving spiritual truth a spiritual form*; or (b) to draw a conclusion by comparing, *compare* (1 Cor 2:13, may also be classified here: *comparing the spiritual gifts and revelations* (which we already possess) *with the spiritual gifts and revelations* (which we are to receive, and judging them thereby); or (c) to clarify on the basis of a compatible relationship, *explain, interpret* (*interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit*, 1 Cor 2:13).

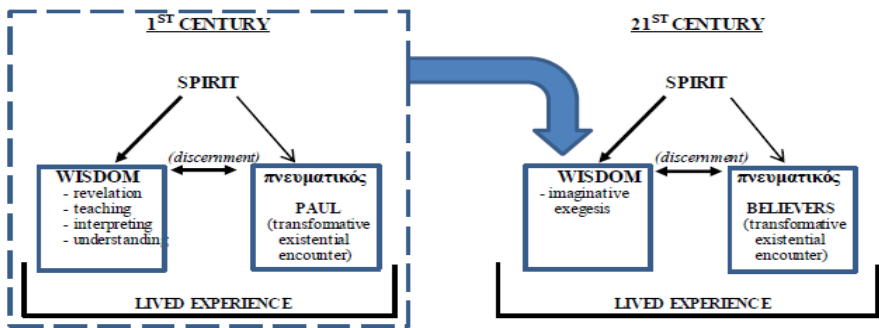
57 Already in 4.3 I have pointed out that the concluding phrase of this verse πνευματικοῖς πνευματικῶς συγκρίνοντες, where he uses this verb, poses a problem as far as interpretation is concerned (Gardner 1994:138). The discussion of the problem and its solution have already been dealt with under section 4.3.

58 It is a compound that signifies “looking through a series (ἀνά) of objects or particulars to distinguish (κρίνω) or search after.”

59 The verb ἀνακρίνω in 2:14 can then be translated as discern. NRSV renders the active (v. 15a) as *discern* and the passive (v. 15b) as *are themselves subject to scrutiny*; the NIV (and approximately REB) *makes judgments and subject to any man’s judgment*; NJB has *assess and be assessed*. In lexicographical terms the range of ἀνακρίνειν is wide. It may mean *to question* (Epictetus, *Dissertations* 1.1.20), *to examine* (as in *examine the scriptures*, Acts 17:11); *to scrutinise* or *to judge, to assess, to put on trial* (1 Cor 4:3-4; cf. 9:3; 1 Cor 9:3): *to conduct an examination* (Acts 12:19) (Thiselton 2000:273).

The last occurrence of ἀνακρίνεται is in the phrase: αὐτοὶ δὲ ὑπὸ οὐδενὸς ἀνακρίνεται (and they are themselves subject to no one else's scrutiny, 2:15); there was certainly a difference in the way in which Paul and certain Corinthians understood this expression. For some Corinthians, this phrase signified a certain *immunity* or *invulnerability* from correction or critique. For Paul, however, it signifies at the very least that there are depths and dimensions to life in the Spirit that the person who lives on an entirely human level (v. 14) simply cannot *comprehend*. Aspects of Christian existence remain an enigma, unless others share the same insight as given by the Spirit of God.

Kaiser (1981:301-19) adds a supplementary perspective in his interpretation of “discernment” (ἀνακρίνει) in 2:15. He includes “scripture”.⁶⁰ He continues: “For the believer, the Scriptures are a light on his path and a lamp before his feet (Ps 119:105). He knows that in God’s light he sees light (Ps 26:9).... He is able to distinguish truth from error ... and authenticity from pretence.” *Today* correct discernment of the wisdom of God is also only to be enabled by the Spirit to those who are spiritual, *not only* by way of inductive impressions, but also through the deductive activities of imaginative exegesis.⁶¹ The activity of the Holy Spirit must not be confused. His work does not offer the spiritual person a short route that avoids grammatical, syntactical, historical, cultural, and theological exegesis. There is no highway in interpreting the Scriptures and to perceive the wisdom of God. The Spirit does not inculcate a meaning or meanings beyond what He has already taught biblical authors when they combined spiritual truths with the appropriately taught spiritual words. However, on the other hand, the Spirit of God does, and indeed must, aid the spiritual Christian in assessing, appraising, and evaluating the word, value, application, and significance of a biblical truth with the reader’s need, personal condition and cultural conventions. No wonder, then, that Paul asserts that the spiritual man assesses (ἀνακρίνω) the totality of things – i.e. each one as it presents itself, including every situation, circumstance, and person he meets (Kaiser 1981:319). Using the above reasoning, the following diagrams, which I refer to as “the triangles of spirituality”,⁶² can be constructed for good sense.⁶³



60 The chief hermeneutic (interpreting principle) is that the Bible interprets the Bible.

61 Lombaard's (2008:139-153; cf. also Schneiders 2002:137ff) use of this phrase “imaginative exegesis” is very descriptive in terms of what really happens or should happen in doing exegesis.

62 These triangles are referred to as “spiritual triangles” because the event encapsulated in this diagram has a spiritual effect. Each triangle reflects a spiritual event which was caused by the Spirit and experienced by a spiritual person.

63 I got this basic idea from Lombaard (2008:139-153), but adapted it to the reasoning of this paper.

According to the “1st century” diagram, the Spirit communicates the wisdom of God to Paul (who is already spiritual, πνευματικός) via revelation, teaching, interpretation and understanding (see 4.3). Paul’s discernment of this wisdom of God creates within him a lived experience of a transformative existential encounter. Those who were spiritual in Corinth would also have experienced a transformative existential encounter when Paul communicated this wisdom to them. According to the “21st century” diagram, the Spirit also gives wisdom to spiritual persons through imaginative exegesis.⁶⁴ Their discernment of this wisdom of God also creates a lived experience of transformative existential encounters within them.⁶⁵ The first century “lived experience” of Paul creates a new lived experience in the lives of spiritual people today when they study Paul. In the 21st century the role and task of exegesis also contributes to the “revelation, teaching, interpretation and understanding” of divine wisdom.

The isolation of cultural and historical antiquities should not excuse the interpreter (spiritual person) from searching for their meaning and contemporary significance for the church. To dismiss all such material, on the basis that it is totally outdated, allows cultural and historical contextualisation to triumph. This will cause the obstruction of the concerns of the literary context in which those phenomena are found (Kaiser 1981:305).

To summarise: it is evident from 1 Corinthians 2 that Paul discerned “Jesus Christ, and Him as crucified” as the essence of the wisdom of God, the wisdom that was revealed through and taught by the Spirit of God to him (i.e. Paul) personally. He understood such an event of discernment as that “spiritual truths (πνευματικὰ) came through spiritual expression taught by the Spirit who interprets (συγκρίνοντες) these spiritual truths to spiritual people (πνευματικοῖς)”. As a result of this, Paul is convinced that the spiritual person can discern all things and therefore cannot be scrutinised (ἀνακρίνεται) by any unspiritual person. For the unspiritual person, however, this wisdom does not make any sense. For such a person the message of the cross is foolishness (1:8, Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν).

CONCLUSION

For Paul three constituents are required to discern the exclusive divine wisdom: the Spirit of God (τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ) who is the only one who can communicate it, a spiritual person (πνευματικός)⁶⁶ who is the only one who can receive and accept it and spiritual discernment (ἀνακρίνειν) as the only way to perceive it. These constituents, according to Paul, form an interwoven network that has to be considered holistically if we are to really understand his epistemology of discernment as described in the context of 1 Corinthians 2. In this research the coherence and close relatedness of these constituents have been pointed out.⁶⁷ The divine wisdom is, by its very nature, exclusive. Therefore, it can only be communicated by the Spirit of God. Paul negates the human involvement in the communication and discernment of the “wisdom of God.” This again requires a spiritual level before anyone can discern⁶⁸ this divine wisdom. According to Paul, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus (with practical related implications, 3:1-4) form the *nucleus* of this wisdom. Here it entails ultimately the soteriological-eschatological renewal of nothing less than the entire creation (2 Cor 5:17). For the natural person, one without the Spirit of God, however, this wisdom does not make any sense. For such

64 Exegesis can include “Scripture,” “tradition” as well as “circumstances.”

65 See Schneiders (2002:139-141) on *lectio divina*.

66 In a second article I will investigate the nature of the *spiritual person*.

67 See also last diagram.

68 A second article will investigate how spiritual maturity is related to spiritual discernment: spiritual maturity the matrix for the discernment of the wisdom of God (an exploration in Pauline discernment: part 2).

a person the message of the cross is foolishness.

During the first century, this discernment was not only based on pure knowledge (οἶδα), but also on acquired knowledge (γινώσκω). Today, such acquired knowledge is still needed before anyone can discern the wisdom that God communicates to the church through his Spirit.

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KEY WORDS

Literary context
Discernment
Wisdom of God
Spirit of God
Spiritual person

TREFWOORDE

Literêre konteks
Beoordeel/besluit
Wysheid van God
Gees van God
Geestelike mens

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‘Mag ik dood van God?’ Enkele gedachten over zelfdoding vanuit christelijk perspectief

ABSTRACT

Some reflections on suicide from a Christian point of view

This article offers some theological reflections on the problem of suicide in the context of a psychiatric disorder. How are we to evaluate this problem from the perspective of faith? It is argued that suicide in such cases can hardly be discussed in moral terms. On the basis of the so called ‘Augustinian eudaemonism’ it is shown that from a Christian point of view the value of human life does not depend on the individuals judgement, but ultimately rests in the love of God. This love provides for the believer the meaning in life in good times and in bad. When the believer can no longer find the meaning of life in God, due to suffering en disease, it is argued that the problem of suicide should be dealt with as a specific version of the problem of evil.

1. INLEIDING

Toen ik aansluitend aan mijn promotie in de godsdienstfilosofie ging werken als pastor in een psychiatrisch ziekenhuis, bleek mij al gauw dat deze studie mij nauwelijks had voorbereid op de omgang met patiënten en hun problemen. Althans, voor zover het de concrete bejegening betrof. Hier werden immers geen theoretische verhandelingen gevraagd, maar concrete levenshulp voor mensen op zoek naar steun en troost tijdens de (vaak langdurige) opname. Dit contrast werd zeer voelbaar toen ik op een morgen in een van de eerste weken op de nieuwe werkplek vanaf het treinstation naar mijn werkkamer in het ziekenhuis liep, en een patiënt me tegemoetkwam op weg naar het station. De man hield me staande met de vraag ‘Dominee, mag ik dood van God?’ en hij vervolgde meteen met de vraag ‘Als ik nu voor de trein spring, kom ik dan in de hel?’ Nu had ik juist in de jaren daarvoor uitvoerig nagedacht over het leerstuk van de hel (Van Holten 1999; 2002; 2003), maar geen van deze beschouwingen kwamen mij gepast of relevant voor in deze situatie. Hier telden andere interventies! De vraag naar God en suicide, en vooral de vraag of een mens zich buiten Gods genade plaatst wanneer deze zichzelf doodt, is mij daarna nog vaak en in verschillende bewoordingen door patiënten gesteld.

Het spreekt vanzelf dat het zelden gepast is om met een theoretische beschouwing te antwoorden op een concreet levensprobleem. Dit geldt bij vragen rond het levenseinde niet minder dan bij andere situaties in pastoraat en geestelijke verzorging. Hier is het veeleer de kunst om het antwoord te *zijn* in plaats van het antwoord te *geven*. Dat neemt niet weg dat suicide ook theologische en morele vragen oproept. Het is op deze laatste vragen dat ik wil reflecteren in dit opstel ter ere van de 80^e verjaardag van Vincent Brümmer, omdat ik meen dat in zijn werk aanknopingspunten te vinden zijn voor een begin van een antwoord op deze vragen. Met name zijn analyse van levensbeschouwingen en zijn opvattingen over het goede leven zijn

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behelpzaam bij onderhavig probleem.

Het zal duidelijk zijn dat het hier om een vorm van *second order* reflectie gaat. Daarom is het goed om de primaire context, namelijk de psychiatrie, in het oog te houden van waaruit het verlangen naar de dood op kan komen, en waarover het hier gaat.² De volgende casus uit het tijdschrift *Psy* kan daarbij helpen.³

Manita is een 34 jarige vrouw. Ze is gescheiden en heeft drie kinderen. De kinderen wonen bij haar ex, maar ze ziet ze regelmatig. Ze lijdt aan een borderline persoonlijkheid en ernstige smetvrees. Ze beleeft alles zo intensief dat het lijkt 'alsof haar hoofd een permanente videocamera is.' Het is om gek van te worden. Doordat Manita alle indrukken vasthoudt wordt ze doodmoe. Ze voelt zich vaak wanhopig, en doet een aantal pogingen zichzelf te doden. Tijdens haar laatste opname in een psychiatrisch ziekenhuis krijgt ze een relatie met een medepatiënt waarmee ze trouwt. Het gaat een tijdlang redelijk. Totdat haar situatie opnieuw verslechtert. Zij krijgt een nieuwe therapievorm aangeboden van haar psychiater. 'Het is haar laatste kans', zegt hij erbij, iets anders kan hij niet meer verzinnen. Echter, bij nader inzien blijkt de problematiek van Manita toch te zwaar voor de leefgroep waarin zij zou moeten verblijven. Als deze laatste strohalp haar ontnomen wordt, is Manita ten einde raad. Nu weet ze het zeker: ze wil niet meer. Het leven heeft voor haar zijn waarde verloren. Vanaf dat moment bereidt ze, over de periode van een aantal maanden, heel zorgvuldig haar eigen dood voor. Ze neemt per brief afscheid van haar kinderen en gaat langs bij haar moeder. Ze voelt zich heel schuldig, vooral naar haar kinderen, maar het verlangen naar rust is sterker dan al het andere. Ze verzamelt pillen, en zorgt ervoor dat haar partner, die haar steunt, niet juridisch belast kan worden met haar dood. Ze schrijft een brief die haar man voor moet lezen op de dag van haar crematie. Op de avond voor haar dood, neemt ze een doosje pillen in, ze wensen elkaar welterusten en vallen in slaap. De volgende ochtend is zij overleden. Na acht pogingen vindt Manita de dood. Haar man belt als eerst haar psychiater. Die raadt hem aan nog even te wachten met het bellen van de huisarts 'om het zekere voor het onzekere te nemen.' Terugkijkend op de periode zegt haar partner dat hij Manita geholpen heeft op een menswaardige manier te doen waar zij zelf bewust voor koos. 'Zij wilde dood en ik begreep dat'.

De casus roept verschillende vragen op: naar de rol van de patiënte zelf en haar echtgenoot, en naar de rol van de psychiater die zich, zo lijkt het, wel kan vinden in haar keuze. In dit opstel ben ik vooral geïnteresseerd in de *levensbeschouwelijke* vragen die de casus oproept. Waarin is de waarde van een mensenleven gelegen? Heeft de persoonlijke beleving van het individu hierin het laatste woord? En is er vanuit christelijk perspectief iets tegen om nee te zeggen tegen het leven als het naar het oordeel van het individu niet langer de moeite van het leven waard wordt geacht? In paragraaf 4 ga ik in op deze vragen. Aangezien het probleem van suicide in onze samenleving vooral het terrein is van de psychiater, zal ik vooraf kort ingaan op een recente richtlijn rond hulp bij zelfdoding in de context van een psychische stoornis (paragraaf 3). Dat suïcidaliteit in verband moet worden gebracht met een psychische stoornis is lang niet altijd zo geweest. Daarom is het goed ook iets te zeggen over de geschiedenis van het denken over zelfdoding en de wijze waarop daar de afgelopen eeuwen tegenaan gekeken is (paragraaf 2).

2 Harry Kuitert (1984:17-23, 150) laat goed zien dat de ene zelfdoding de andere niet is en dus ook om een andere beoordeling vraagt. Wellicht de beste weergave van zelfdoding in al zijn verscheidenheid in het Nederlandse taalgebied is nog steeds Brouwers (1983).

3 *Psy* is een tijdschrift over geestelijke gezondheid en verslaving, uitgave van GGZ Nederland. De casus betreft een samenvatting door ondergetekende van een interview met Reino van Luytelaar met de titel "Ze wilde dood en ik begreep dat" uit het mei nummer uit 2007:14-16. Voor andere ego-documenten die het ontwrichtende van een psychische stoornis voelbaar maken zie e.g. Kuyper (2001) Wieg (2002) en Solomon (2001).

2. HISTORISCH

Wij associëren zelfdoding met mensen die het leven moe zijn, het niet meer zien zitten, of anderszins psychisch gehinderd worden. Het gaat dan om mensen die niet aan een lichamelijke, terminale ziekte lijden met een te verwachten dood in de nabije toekomst. In zulke gevallen spreken we doorgaans van euthanasie in plaats van suicide. Opvallend genoeg echter, is de opvatting dat suicide en suicidaliteit als een uiting van psychisch disfunctioneren moet worden gezien relatief jong in de geschiedenis van het denken over dit probleem.⁴ Lange tijd is suicide in de Westerse wereld gezien als een *juridisch probleem*, als iets dat gold als een *misdaad* en daarom bij wet was *verboden*. Het heeft bijvoorbeeld tot 1961 geduurd tot in Engeland het verbod op suicide verdween uit het wetboek voor strafrecht. De achtergrond van dit verbod was gelegen in het feit dat zelfdoding gezien werd als een vorm van *moord* (vandaar de term 'zelfmoord'). Helaas voor de uitvoerenden van de rechterlijke macht was er in het geval van een geslaagde suicide niemand meer om te bestraffen. Maar het misdadig karakter van deze daad werd niettemin vaak tot uitdrukking gebracht door het lijk van de suicidant te ontfermen, de eigendomsrechten van nabestaanden verbeurd te verklaren, en een christelijke begrafenis te onthouden. Kortom, het beëindigen van het eigen leven werd lange tijd gezien als een misdaad (moord) en als zodanig bejegend. Dit klinkt natuurlijk zeer tegen-intuïtief, maar moet begrepen worden tegen de achtergrond van de dominante overtuiging in de 17^e en 18^e eeuw dat straffen vooral een afschrikwekkend doel heeft. Volgens Govert Bach kan de geschiedenis van het denken over zelfdoding worden weergegeven met de drie woorden 'zonde', 'misdaad' en 'ziekte': eerst verklaarde de kerk de suicidant tot (dood)zondaar, de overheid nam dit over en verklaarde hem tot crimineel, en in onze tijd verklaart de psychiater hem tot patiënt (Bach 1992:35). Lange tijd bestond er in het Westen een sterke synergie tussen kerkelijk en publiek denken. Wellicht dat dit bijgedragen heeft aan de opvatting dat wie zich suicideert zich buiten de genade plaatst: waar de rechterlijke arm niet verder reikt dan het hier en nu, had de kerk de mogelijkheid de strafwaardigheid van zelfdoding tot gelding te brengen in het hiernamaals.⁵

Het is met name onder invloed geweest van het werk van Jean Esquirol (1772-1840) en Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) dat suicide in de eerste plaats gezien is geworden als verbonden met een psychische ziekte, en daarmee als een product van een onvrijwillige en dus niet toerekeningsvatbare (ook in juridische zin) conditie van het individu. Onder invloed van deze zienswijze zijn wettelijke bepalingen die suicide strafbaar stellen in de Westerse wereld uit het strafrecht verdwenen. Wettelijke bepalingen ten aanzien van suicide zijn sindsdien verschoven van straf voor de suicidant of haar nabestaanden naar de vraag in hoeverre men iemands vrijheid mag inperken om haar (tegen haar wil) te belemmeren (= beschermen) het eigen leven te nemen.

3. PSYCHIATRISCH

Binnen de geestelijke gezondheidszorg in Nederland (GGZ) wordt sinds enkele decennia gediscussieerd over de vraag of hulp bij zelfdoding vanwege een psychiatrische aandoening gerechtvaardigd is. Psychiaters worden immers meer dan gemiddeld door hun patiënten geconfronteerd met de vraag om hulp bij hun doodswens. Lange tijd gold hier consensus dat een suicide ondernomen in psychiatrische toestand moet worden gezien als een daad van

4 Voor het volgende zie Paul Edwards (1998:224-230); Margareth Bapst Battin (2001:1850-1858); Govert Bach (1992:24-39).

5 De bron van deze gedachte is Thomas van Aquino die stelde dat zelfdoding een doodzonde is omdat je er geen berouw meer over kunt krijgen. Zie Kuitert (1983:52).

een verminderd of geheel niet toerekeningsvatbaar persoon. Bij suïcidaliteit werd met andere woorden uitsluitend levenshulp en geen stervenshulp gerechtvaardigd geacht (Van der Lijn e.a. 1994; Berghmans 2000) Zo stelde de Inspectie voor de volksgezondheid in 1991 dat een verzoek om hulp bij zelfdoding van een psychiatrische patiënt 'altijd negatief moet worden beantwoordt door een behandelend arts.' Vanaf de jaren '90 van de vorige eeuw worden binnen de GGZ echter vraagtekens bij deze aanname gesteld. Deze discussies hebben voorlopig geculmineerd in een richtlijn van de Nederlandse Vereniging voor Psychiatrie (Tholen e.a. 2009). In deze richtlijn wordt gesteld dat hoewel 'suïcidaliteit vrijwel altijd een teken van psychopathologie is' (25), het 'niet *per definitie* een psychopathologisch verschijnsel is' (28). Derhalve gaat het volgens deze richtlijn 'te ver om te stellen dat alle psychiatrische patiënten, als categorie, niet in staat zijn tot een weloverwogen keuze voor de dood' (33). In zeer uitzonderlijke gevallen is het mogelijk dat patiënten met een psychiatrische aandoening voldoen aan de criteria van ondragelijk en uitzichtloos lijden en een doodswens hebben die vrijwillig en weloverwogen is. Dat wil zeggen, die aan de in de richtlijn geformuleerde zorgvuldigheidseisen voldoen. Als voorbeelden worden genoemd patiënten met psychosen of depressies die in tussenliggende goede perioden hun wil kunnen bepalen, en sommige andere patiënten die ook tijdens een chronische psychiatrische toestand tot een dergelijk besluit in staat zijn (32). Volgens deze richtlijn bestaat er dus zoiets als een 'rationeel verlangen naar de dood'.

Er zij op gewezen dat deze hulp slechts in enkele gevallen per jaar wordt toegepast en dat geen enkele psychiater tot de uitvoering hiervan is verplicht. Zij heeft wel de plicht om door te verwijzen naar een collega. Het grootste probleem hier betreft de toepasbaarheid van de criteria 'vrijwilligheid' en 'uitzichtloosheid' of 'onbehandelbaarheid' op het lijden dat uit een psychiatrische stoornis voortvloeit (Van Loenen 2005:35-46). Kun je ooit uitsluiten dat een verdere therapie het lijden kan verlichten of dat een patiënt op termijn zal kunnen leven met zijn ziekte? Bovendien blijft de doodswens van een psychiatrisch patiënt altijd ook een symptoom van zijn stoornis, dus hoe vrij is men dan? Het is om deze reden dat sommige artsen van mening blijven dat een doodswens vanuit een psychiatrische stoornis nooit rationeel kan zijn en dat stervenshulp in deze context nooit gerechtvaardigd is.

4. THEOLOGISCH

In het licht van bovenstaande zal duidelijk zijn dat een *morele* beoordeling van suïcide in onze tijd op zijn best op de tweede plaats komt. Voor een morele beoordeling van een handeling is namelijk vrijheid een voorwaarde. En juist mensen die vanuit een psychiatrische toestand een suïcide ondernemen geven aan geen enkel alternatief meer te zien. Zo stelt Carlo Leget:

Mensen die onvrij zijn kunnen niet verantwoordelijk gehouden worden voor hun daden.

En daar zit precies een belangrijke denkgave bij suïcide. [...] In hoeverre kunnen we hier spreken van moreel handelen? In hoeverre heeft de ethiek überhaupt veel te melden wanneer we nadenken over zelfdoding bij mensen met een psychiatrisch ziektebeeld? (Leget 2011:94).⁶

Los van de vraag, echter, of een beoordeling in termen van goed of slecht aan de orde is, liggen hier wel theologische vragen. Wat valt er vanuit de bronnen van het christelijk geloof zelf te zeggen over dit levensprobleem? Hoe verhoudt zich suïcidaliteit in de context van een psychiatrische aandoening tot het ideaal van het goede leven zoals het christelijk geloof dat schetst? Ik denk dat de wat prozaïsche vraag van de meneer uit de eerste alinea van dit opstel precies hier op doelt.

Traditioneel wordt dit probleem aangevat door te wijzen op wat de bijbel en de kerkelijke

6 Zo ook: Kuitert (1983:59, 96, 153); Van der Wal (1996:32). Het is om de reden dat de Rooms Katholieke Kerk, hoewel zij zeer negatief staat tegenover een zelf gekozen dood, in zulke gevallen een kerkelijke uitvaart toestaat. Zie RKK documentatie (2005:39).

traditie hierover zegt. Dit zijn immers de bronnen van het geloof bij uitstek. Deze bronnen zijn al vaak hernomen en van commentaar voorzien. Voor wat de bijbel betreft is er grote consensus, ook onder meer orthodoxe commentatoren, dat bij die passages waarin mensen hun eigen leven nemen de verteller zich in geen van de gevallen waagt aan een morele beoordeling van de zelfdoding in kwestie (Battin 2001:1669; Kuitert 1983:121-140); Bach 1992:30; Van der Wal 1996:31-34). Voor het kerkelijke denken wordt doorgaans gewezen op de argumenten van Augustinus, Thomas en Karl Barth (zie Kuitert 1983: 41-68; Leget 2008).

In het vervolg van dit opstel wil ik de levensbeschouwelijke vragen rond zelfdoding op een andere manier te lijf gaan, namelijk redenerend vanuit de innerlijke structuur van het christelijk geloof en de visie op het goede leven die daarin gevonden wordt. De godsdienstfilosofie van Vincent Brümmer is hierin behulpzaam. In zijn *Wijsgerige Begripsanalyse* maak Brümmer duidelijk dat wanneer wij vragen of een handeling mag of niet mag, zinloos is of juist gewenst, wij zulke vragen nooit in het luchtledige stellen, maar impliciet of expliciet altijd binnen het levensbeschouwelijk kader dat wij accepteren.

Als redelijke mensen bepalen en beoordelen wij dus onze daden en gezindheden ten aanzien van die dingen en situaties die wij in het leven tegenkomen in het licht van onze normen en idealen. Meer in het algemeen kunnen wij zeggen, dat ieder mens zijn gehele levenswijze of *levenshouding* bepaalt en beoordeelt in het licht van het totale complex van normen en idealen die hij accepteert als richtinggevend voor zijn leven. [...] Uiteindelijk stellen en beantwoorden wij de vragen “wat moet ik doen?”, “wat moet ik nastreven?”, “wat is de zin van de dingen en situaties die ik tegenkom?” allemaal binnen een levensbeschouwelijk kader. (1989:140-141)

Voor ons doel van belang is hier dat deze analyse niet slechts inzichtelijk maakt hoe *morele* vragen levensbeschouwelijk ingekaderd zijn, maar ook hoe, meer in het algemeen, vragen naar de *zin* en *betekenis* van dingen en situaties verbonden zijn met de uitgangspunten die men accepteert. Zingeving stipuleert Brümmer als een gepaste houding of gezindheid:

Wij weten wat de *zin* is van iets, wanneer wij weten welke gezindheid wij ten aanzien ervan moeten hebben. Wij weten wat de *zin* van een situatie is, wanneer wij weten wat wij erin moeten doen. Wij weten wat de *zin* van het leven is, als wij weten welke doelstellingen en idealen wij in het leven moeten nastreven. (1989:132)

Verschillende godsdiensten en levensbeschouwingen leggen verschillende idealen van het goede leven voor. Iedere levensbeschouwing krijgt zijn innerlijke samenhang door een centrale gedachte of overtuiging waarin dat ideaal verwoordt is, en die als het ware op de bodem ligt van de levensvisie in kwestie. Brümmer noemt dit een *grondovertuiging*. Deze grondovertuiging structureert de verdere levenshouding van de aanhanger van een bepaalde levensvisie in de zin dat alle gezindheden ten aanzien van dingen en situaties in het leven hiervan afgeleid zijn of er logisch mee verbonden zijn (1989:142).

In zijn latere werk heeft Brümmer de grondovertuiging voor het *christelijke* ideaal van het goede leven inhoudelijk verder uitgewerkt aan de hand van het ‘Augustiniaans eudemonisme’ (1988; 1993; 1995). Volgens deze opvatting is de kern van het christelijk geloof de overtuiging dat God een persoonlijk wezen is met wie mensen in een relatie van wederzijdse liefde kunnen leven, en dat het participeren in deze relatie voor de christen het hoogste goed is en het grootste geluk met zich meebrengt. Deze overtuiging vormt de grondstructuur van het christelijk geloof en werkt als zodanig structurerend voor alle verdere leerstukken binnen de christelijke theologie. Hoewel Brümmer nergens expliciet ingaat op het probleem van de zelfdoding, heeft zijn analyse van de grondovertuiging van het christelijk geloof belangrijke implicaties voor de waarde en zin van het menselijk leven. Laat ik drie dingen noemen.

In de eerste plaats betekent dit uitgangspunt dat vanuit christelijk perspectief het hoogste

goed voor een mens gelegen is in het *participeren in een relatie*. Een mens vindt haar bestemming slechts in een wederzijds verbond van liefde (met God) waarin beide partners zich met elkaars belangen identificeren en zo het goede voor elkaar zoeken. Dit impliceert dat een mens voor haar geluk *op God gericht* is en niet aan zichzelf genoeg heeft. Als dat zo is, is een mens *afhankelijk* van de vrije keuze van God om in deze liefdesrelatie te participeren en zo zijn geluk te realiseren. God immers is ook een persoon die op basis van vrijwilligheid de relatie van zijn kant aangaat (1993:159-162). Volgens Harry Kuitert loopt er een lijn van de Stoa (3^e eeuw v.Chr.) via de verlichtingsfilosofen in de 18^e eeuw naar denkers tot op de huidige dag die suïcide als een ultieme uitdrukking van het menselijk recht op zelfbeschikking beschouwen (1983:41-78). Dit maakt dat men als onafhankelijk individu zijn leven in eigen hand neemt en ook zijn stervensuur bepaalt. In het licht van het hier geschetste ideaal is echter duidelijk dat voor een christen de hoogste waarde van het leven niet gelegen is in autonomie en zelfbeschikking, maar dat deze slechts een *voorwaarde* zijn voor een groter goed, namelijk het zich in vrijheid af kunnen stemmen op de (A)ander.

Bovendien heeft deze opvatting consequenties voor de wijze waarop ieder mens zijn zin en waarde vindt. Liefde impliceert een houding ten opzichte van de geliefde *onafhankelijk* van de conditie waarin deze zich bevindt. Liefde is naar haar aard gericht op de persoon als zodanig en niet op de persoon als drager van enkele (mooie of, bewonderenswaardige) eigenschappen (Brümmer 1993:153). Ongeacht hoe ik ben, stelt het christelijk geloof dat ik mijn waarde als mens niet zal verliezen als ik sommige van mijn eigenschappen moet kwijtraken, zoals bijvoorbeeld mijn lichamelijke of geestelijke vermogens. God heeft mij lief om *wie* ik ben en niet om *hoe* ik ben. Anders gezegd, het christelijk geloof impliceert de gedachte dat mensen in tel zijn, niet om wat ze kunnen, maar om wat ze zijn: door God geliefd. Deze liefde *verleent* waarde aan ieder mensenleven. Het is duidelijk dat dit ideaal haaks staat de ideologie van het voltooide leven die men vindt bij sommige voorvechters van vrijwillige euthanasie in onze samenleving. Zij beschouwen een zelfgekozen dood als de ultieme emancipatie wanneer het leven als afgerond ervaren wordt. Hier tegenin herinnert het christelijk geloof aan de waarde die het leven heeft, ook wanneer dat door gebrek of ziekte mislukt en onaf blijft en niet als een kunstwerk tot ontplooiing gebracht kan worden. Vanuit christelijk perspectief kan men hier de vraag bij stellen of onze samenleving voldoende uitdraagt dat ieder mens beminneenswaard is en een waardig lid van de wereld. Dit om geen andere reden dan dat God ieder mens *individueel* liefheeft als persoon en daarom onvervangbaar is en onmisbaar in zijn ogen (idem 1993:207-209).

In de derde plaats impliceert de gedachte dat de verbondenheid met God het hoogste geluk behelst een positieve bevestiging van de wereld in die zin dat de gelovige dankbaar is dat zij in de wereld *coram Deo* leven kan. Door de wereld te scheppen en door mensen te scheppen als autonome, vrije personen, scheidt God de voorwaarden voor het hoogste goed. In het licht van de relationele opvatting van ultiem geluk is duidelijk dat deze voorwaarden hier niet voldoende voor zijn, maar slechts een noodzakelijke voorwaarden vormen. Niettemin betekent in God geloven bevestigen dat de wereld van zodanige aard is dat hierin ultiem geluk mogelijk is. Zelfdoding is in het licht hiervan *prima facie* ongepast en ondankbaar omdat het een verwerping betekent van deze door God geschonken mogelijkheid. Vanuit het geloof bezien is het op zijn minst *onredelijk* om weg te stappen uit een relatie die als bron van het hoogste geluk wordt gezien (Brümmer 1988:109). Sommige Bijbelschrijvers, met name in het Oude Testament, onderkennen dit door de dood te zien als een groot kwaad, niet zozeer vanwege de eindigheid van het leven op zich, maar vanwege het afgesneden zijn van de gemeenschap met God (e.g. Ps. 116; Jes. 38:11).

Men zou hier tegenin kunnen brengen dat dit alleen opgaat zolang wij de wereld als goed kunnen *beleven*, maar dat deze positieve beoordeling van de geschapen werkelijkheid vervalst zodra een mens om wat voor reden dan ook de wereld niet langer als goed *ervaart*. Zo stelt Kuitert

dat mensen wel kunnen belijden dat het leven door God als een geschenk is bedoeld, maar dat dit niet betekent dat zij het ook altijd een geschenk moeten vinden. Het geschenk-karakter van het leven en de wereld hangt af van of de ontvanger het als zodanig beleeft en accepteert (1983:135-136). In feite wordt met deze tegenwerping gezegd dat de subjectieve beleving van het individu het laatste woord heeft om te bepalen of de wereld en het leven goed, zinvol en de moeite waard is. Het is zeer de vraag of dit juist is. Een levensbeschouwelijke stellingname is meer dan de subjectieve voorkeur van een individu of een verzameling individuen. Zij veronderstelt ook bepaalde feitelijke aannames omtrent de aard van de werkelijkheid die constitutief zijn voor de levensvisie in kwestie. Wie leeft vanuit de overtuiging dat de gemeenschap met God het hoogste goed is, veronderstelt derhalve dat de feitelijke aard van de werkelijkheid en daarmee onze handelingsmogelijkheden zo bepaald zijn dat wij dit hoogste geluk kunnen verwerven (zie Brümmer 1989:248-266). Vanuit christelijk perspectief is het dus mogelijk om te zeggen dat los van de vraag of men individueel een goed leven heeft, het goed is dat men leeft. Wijsgerig gezien verraadt deze tegenwerping een reductie van het ontologische (wat is of bestaat) tot het psychologische of epistemologische (wat ik weet of beleef). Maar wat is, is niet te reduceren tot wat ik weet of ervaar.

Het zal duidelijk zijn dat deze overwegingen weinig soelaas bieden aan mensen die om wat voor reden dan ook de lust tot het leven verloren hebben. Juist psychiatrische aandoeningen hebben vaak het karakter dat zij mensen beroven van het vermogen geluk en zin te beleven. Voor de gelovige kan dit gepaard gaan met geloofsverlies. C.S. Lewis geeft hiervan een treffend voorbeeld wanneer hij zich in een periode van rouw afvraagt 'Waarom is God in tijden van voorspoed zo duidelijk aanwezig, en zo totaal afwezig als Helper in tijden van nood?' (1989:9) Wie een dergelijke periode doormaakt slaagt er doorgaans niet om zich zijn eigen ideaal van het goede leven toe te eigenen – hoe graag men dat ook zou willen. Veelal verliest men op existentieel nivo de toegang tot de zin die het leven en de wereld normaliter hebben. Een christen is in zulke omstandigheden evenmin gevrijwaard van verlangen naar de dood als ieder ander. Wanneer mensen dit overkomt is dit ronduit tragisch, een ramp en een groot kwaad.

Voor wie levend vanuit het Augustiniaans eudemonisme een dergelijke periode door moet maken zijn hier grofweg twee (logische) mogelijkheden. Misschien is het mogelijk dat de gelovige trouw kan blijven aan zijn levensideaal en kan verdragen dat hij tijdelijk geen toegang heeft tot wat hij als hoogste goed beschouwt – net zoals andere bronnen van zin (e.g. sport, werk, relaties) tijdelijk gesloten blijven. Zoals we gezien hebben, is het vanuit christelijk perspectief mogelijk te beamen dat de wereld goed is ook al kan men dat op individueel niveau niet altijd ervaren. In dat geval zal de gelovige proberen zijn lijden zin te geven binnen het kader van zijn geloof. Hij zou bijvoorbeeld kunnen erkennen dat de *mogelijkheid* van kwaad en lijden innerlijk verbonden is met het hoogste goed in die zin dat God deze mogelijkheid schept als noodzakelijke voorwaarde voor de relatie van wederzijdse liefde. Immers, doordat God ons schept als vrije en verantwoordelijke personen zijn wij ook kwetsbaar. Bovendien kunnen wij misbruik maken van onze vrijheid door elkaar schade toe te brengen (en psychisch leed is daar niet zelden het gevolg van). Mogelijk zal de gelovige zijn ziekte ervaren als beproeving en aanvechting. Mogelijk zal de gelovige in lijn met sommige psalmisten zijn ziekte interpreteren als Godverlatenheid of zelfs straf. In al deze gevallen blijft de gelovige trouw aan zijn overtuiging dat de verbondenheid met God de zin van zijn leven bepaalt in goede en kwade dagen en worstelt met zijn lijden *coram Deo*.

Het is ook mogelijk dat door de ervaring van lijden de gelovige ertoe komt het advies van de vrouw van Job 'Vervloek God toch en sterf' (Job 2:9) in praktijk te brengen, en niet langer vast kan houden aan de overtuiging dat de wereld waarin de gemeenschap met God mogelijk is een goede wereld is. Het is mogelijk dat men – zoals de romanfiguur uit Dostojevski's *De gebroeders*

Karamazov – besluit niet deel te nemen aan de wereld waarin zoveel leed mogelijk is. Voor zover het hier een intellectuele keuze betreft, plaatst met zich dan buiten het kader van het christelijk geloof omdat het niet (langer) lukt om te midden van het lijden de zin van het bestaan te vinden in een persoonlijke omgang met God (Brümmer 1989:163-170). Voor zover het hier gaat om zinverlies dat door een psychiatrische stoornis is ingegeven, is het maar zeer de vraag of een andere bron van zin hiervoor in de plaats kan komen.

Tenslotte, wat valt er vanuit de hier verwoordde interpretatie van het christelijk geloof te zeggen over mensen die, geplaagd door een psychische stoornis, hun eigen leven beëindigen? Zoals ik in paragraaf 3 heb laten zien is het percentage patiënten met een rationele doodswens louter vanuit psychisch lijden bijzonder klein. Voor het overgrote deel zal gelden dat zij hun daad ondernamen in een minder dan volledig vrije toestand. Zoals uit de casus van Manita blijkt, kunnen wij mensen vaak begrip opbrengen voor het ondraaglijk leed dat uit een psychische aandoening voortvloeit en dat iemand slechts de dood als uitweg ziet. Voor God liggen alle harten open en geen geheim is voor Hem verborgen. Hij weet met welke intentie elke daad is gedaan. Zou voor God dan niet evenzeer gelden ‘zij wilde dood en ik begreep dat’? Volgens John Hick heeft elk mens recht op een ‘sufficient measure of grace’ in die zin dat ieder mens zijn wil ten aanzien van God in vrijheid moet kunnen bepalen. Wie dat door omstandigheden niet kan in dit leven moet volgens Hick na de dood alsnog die kans krijgen. In dit verband stelt Hick God voor als een hemelse psychotherapeut die een mens ook na de dood innerlijk vrij kan maken en tot het inzicht brengen dat het hoogste geluk alleen in gemeenschap met Hem gevonden kan worden (1966:377-385). Redenerend vanuit het Augustiniaans eudemonisme zou men tenslotte ook nog kunnen aanvoeren dat indien God participeert in de liefdesrelatie met de mens, de dood van ieder mens óók een verlies betekent voor God. Dit scheidt het vertrouwen dat God ook over de grens van de dood heen de relatie met zijn beminden zal willen voortzetten (Sarot 1994:144-146). Vanuit het christelijk geloof is er derhalve geen reden om te twijfelen aan Gods genade voor wie onder druk van een psychiatrische ziekte haar leven beëindigt.

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TREFWOORDEN

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Thinking about God today: Eavesdropping on four discourses

ABSTRACT

The article investigates the contemporary academic reflection on God and addresses the question as to whether there are new perspectives and sensibilities which destabilise the persistent classical theistic notion and prompt alternative constructions. A concern for speaking of God in a responsible and contextual manner forms the background of the study. Four major contemporary discourses, which have issued significant new challenges to the tradition doctrine of God, are identified and explored: those in Biblical Studies, Trinitarian Renaissance, Alterity Studies, and Philosophy of Religion. The article raises the question of an episteme of rhetoric which structurally addresses the constituent elements of a 'doctrine of God' and intimates that the present moment may be evidencing a new trajectory in the genealogy of God.

1. INTRODUCTION

Those who dare to think about God, those who are brave to bring this elusive mystery to speech, are confronted with the challenge: How do we do this? Is there a grammar to Christian utterance about the divine? What contemporary sensibilities constrain our speaking? What is the present state of academic reflection that may guide us? This is the *focus* of this article: the horizon for raising and expressing the question of God at this moment in time.

The background and *rationale* for theorising this include not only the continuous public interest in this reality, but also the imperative for theology to account for her central task. Arguably, reflection and speech about the Ultimate, the Transcendent, is the core activity of theology. A further reason can be added to these motivations for addressing the question about conditions for speaking: the widespread dissatisfaction with classical theism,² and the proliferation of alternative proposals. In short, are there significant developments which one should take note of when speaking about God?

This article is submitted to a volume honouring Professor Vincent Brümmer for a long career of intellectual activity which has been addressing ultimate questions. The prominence of God and, specifically, the emphasis on the personal nature of God, on love and later even on the trinity in his oeuvre remain a constant inspiration to others. His work motivated a generation of younger scholars to think more deeply about the nature of God.³ This article intends to contribute in a modest way to that similar goal of probing deeper into the mystery of God, and

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2 Numerous concerns have been raised about classical theism: for instance, it tends to closure; it is oblivious to diverse human experiences, especially of suffering; it is based on a dated metaphysics; it ignores its own potential ethical impacts, and there is a tension between the confession of the trinity and the exposition of the divine attributes.

3 In this regard, see the explicit comment by Prof Brümmer in his autobiographical sketch (2006:20).

as such wants to recognise the seminal influence of Professor Brümmer.

The notion of 'discourse' will be central in my *approach*, as it seems to me that the primary access in the academy to God is mediated by expressions of experience, by articulations of reflection and by eventual tradition formation. By doing this, the danger of a claim to unmediated access is avoided. Standing in my study in front of the bookcase with the collection of books on God, I get a number of impressions. There is not only a steady stream of new publications, but it is not too difficult to group the various works in categories. There is undeniably an enthusiastic interest in the God question,⁴ but it takes place along disciplinary lines or at least in academic communities with similar interests, presuppositions and methodologies. In the next section, I will mention the outstanding discourses and then describe the main features of only four, which I consider crucial for Christian theology.

Needless to say, my intention with the article is consciously modest. My contribution is at most an intimation of how this problem could be approached, at least by mentioning discourses which are not usually mentioned in the same space. Thinking about God in the present requires that one should overhear the various discourses which are taking place.

2. EAVESDROPPING ON DISCOURSES

The impression is often of a lack of intentional border-crossing or inter-discursive exploration. At least *eleven discourses* on God can be identified, and the following may form the most prominent: those on New Atheism, cognitive science of religion,⁵ Biblical Studies,⁶ Trinitarian Renaissance, alterity,⁷ faith-science,⁸ global Christianity,⁹ inter-religious dialogue,¹⁰ spirituality and mysticism,¹¹ postmodern philosophy of religion, and traditional systematic theology.¹² In this short article, attention will be paid to four of these discourses, namely Biblical Studies, Trinitarian Renaissance, alterity and postmodern philosophy of religion, which I deem particularly important for Christian Systematic Theology, and which may give an indication of possible new avenues for thinking about God. Although treatment will be fairly introductory, care will be taken to note some of the most important literature available in each discourse to enable, it is hoped, more detailed exploration.

2.1 Biblical Studies

Developments in the field of Old and New Testament studies are, for obvious reasons, important for theology in general. It would be more accurate to refer to discourses in the plural to convey the diverse approaches within Biblical Studies, especially in Old Testament. My impression is

4 Tracy (1994a) speaks about the "return of God in contemporary theology".

5 See Tremlin (2006).

6 This is diverse and will be discussed in section 2.1

7 This covers a wide range of reflection, including Feminist, Black, Liberation, and Postcolonial Studies.

8 This can refer to several interests. The discussion on *pantheism* is particularly noteworthy and prominent. See Clayton & Peacocke (2004).

9 The textbook by Kärkkäinen (2004) gives a clear introductory overview of, for example, those in Africa and Asia.

10 For some excellent essays, see Jeanron & Lande (2005). See also the volume on *Naming and thinking God in Europe today* (Hintersteiner 2007) which has excellent articles on God, giving not only various geographic reflections, but also global and inter-religious conversations.

11 For one insightful treatment from a Trinitarian perspective, see Hunt (2010).

12 This indication is awkward and not particularly satisfying. In this instance, I have in mind some earlier discussions on *eschatology* and God, and more recent controversies on *Open Theism* in Evangelical circles. For introductory discussions of the main developments, see Callen (2004).

that *methodology* could be a key avenue to gauge advances. The method selected for studying determines the field of focus, the set of questions and, finally, the kind of answers that could be expected. Method is an expression of deeper convictions of what the Bible is or what a specific testament signifies. A simple comparison of well-known works, such as Brueggemann's *Theology* or Albertz's *History of Israelite religion*, illustrates this well. If one adds the more recent work by Feldmeier and Spieckermann – *God of the living* – the problem becomes even clearer. The question of history vs. theology,¹³ and of the extent of intra-canonical unity and plurality form the basic divide in this set of discourses. Overhearing the conversation, I can identify at least *five* potential contributions in Old Testament Studies to the overall reflection on God.

The History of Religion approach with all its sophistication and attention to detail aspects¹⁴ has reinforced one overall impression: the *evolving nature* of Israel's conceptualisation of the divine resulting from interaction with changing social conditions. No single profile of the divine can be 'paused' in time, as if it can be sanitised from interaction with a social world riddled with conflict. When the word 'god' is uttered, a genealogical antenna is activated. The rise of monotheism is a prominent case in point.

More recent theologies – especially those by Brueggemann (1997) and Gerstenberger (2002) – give expression to this *internal plurality*, whether with the notion of tradition and counter-tradition or with theologies. These scholars persuasively argue and demonstrate that the Old Testament, as collection of literature reflecting diverging traditions with even conflicting construals of reality, presents complex portrayals of the divine. An a-historical deity, whose nature could be distilled and mastered in single adjectives such as 'holy', 'almighty', is something of the past.

The employment of narratological interpretative strategies has strengthened the case for the "kaleidoscopic nature of divine personality" (see Noll 2001): God appears now as a character with a *complex nature* in specific books¹⁵ and specific traditions.

It is striking how many voices have – increasingly – raised concern about the problematic nature of some of the divine images. Once the stranglehold of a generic portrayal has been released, the peculiar behaviour of the divine has started to crystallise. This *dark side* of Israel's deity is one of the typical features of her history.¹⁶

A number of scholars, such as Schwartz (1997) and Assmann (2010), have investigated the *performative effect* of the rise of monotheism. Exclusion, violence and monotheism are disturbingly related. The particular importance of these studies underlines the radical social significance of God-images; they are never innocent. The inherent ethical dimension of the human understanding of God deserves careful attention.

Turning to the New Testament, one encounters similar methodological intuitions. Several recent studies have redressed the lament of Dahl (1991) that God is a "neglected factor in New Testament theology". Not only has the God representation of various New Testament traditions been studied in depth,¹⁷ but new methodological explorations have also been suggested. The detailed and innovative study by Neyrey (2004), who advocates a social-scientific approach, should be mentioned.¹⁸ In his important recent study, Hurtado (2010:111f) argues strongly that

13 For an instructive treatment, see Lemche (2008).

14 For example, the origin of Yahwism, the emergence of monotheism, the Asherah tradition, and aniconism. The preface to Smith's revised work (2002) is exceptionally instructive.

15 For a narrative reading of God in the Book of Genesis, see Humphreys (2001), for one example.

16 The literature on this is growing. Siebert (2009) gives a detailed discussion of the various problematic texts and possible interpretative strategies.

17 For example, the Gospel of John has been a particular favourite for such investigation. See, for instance, the work by Thompson (2001).

18 The fruitfulness of this approach has, to my knowledge, not been sufficiently appreciated. For example,

the New Testament “express(es) a major reconfiguring of God-discourse”. He also refers to a “major innovation” encountered in the NT.¹⁹

2.2 Trinitarian Renaissance

The re-appreciation of the Trinitarian confession is one of the outstanding theological developments of our time. For some, like Grenz (2004:6), it could be even the greatest contribution of theology in the twentieth century. Three recent publications map the renewed interest in the trinity well,²⁰ giving a comprehensive overview of the many dimensions to this discourse. The significance of this so-called Trinitarian Renaissance is wide-ranging. It has not only re-opened established theological positions, such as the assumed difference between the East and the West, and the alleged one-sided influence of Augustine, but also encouraged consistent Trinitarian interpretations of the Christian dogmatic and social visions.²¹ Typical of discourse, this one likewise offers unanimous positions, and on certain crucial aspects allows the ways to part. It may be safe to refer to minimalists and maximalists, to distinguish between those who limit the meaning of the confession to Christology, and those who employ the confession as a regulative framework for doing theology as such.

For the focus of this article, it may be productive to enquire after the “point of Trinitarian theology” to use Jenson’s (1995) apt phrase. In the biblical narrative, the life of God is revealed to humanity, and this life is relational. Arguably, more than before, the identity of God in the Christian tradition, is conceptualised in terms of relationality. The roots to this conviction may be found in the philosophical “turn to relationality”,²² or in postmodern sensibilities.²³ Whatever the stimuli, the point of the new appreciation is to be found in this instance: ultimate reality is not monistic, but relational. The significance of this relational turn should not be devalued. One could argue for a third trajectory in theistic thinking: the first being the formulation of inclusive monotheism, the second substantial trinitarianism, and now a third mutation – thinking along different categorical and metaphysical lines.

The disruptive effect of Trinitarian thinking on generic notions of the divine may be the *critical significance* of this discourse. It destabilises ingrained and ossified understandings of what is referred to when one utters the word ‘god’. Rethinking the attribute tradition may be one of the important consequences of this discourse.²⁴ Interestingly, consistent Trinitarian thinkers have realised that divine perfections should be re-envisioned. For instance, Barth in surprising moves has highlighted “space” and “beauty” in his systematic treatment of God.²⁵ The Trinitarian turn opens avenues for truly creative and contextual construals, which may be

he discusses the construal of God in Romans in light of Greco-Roman philosophy which structures the doctrine of God according to epistemology, physics and ethics. The indebtedness of the NT to the Judean and Greco-Roman world is stressed by Neyrey. For instance, the nature of true deity in Hebrews (see 7:3) draws heavily on Greek philosophy – Jesus is a divine figure, because he fulfils the typical requirement with his eternity (see 2004:241f).

19 The major factor in the NT, according to Hurtado, is the inclusion of Jesus as a distinguishable figure along with God in early Christian devotion.

20 See especially Emery & Levering (2011) - *The Oxford handbook to the Trinity*; Phan (2011) - *The Cambridge companion to the Trinity*, and Woźniak & Maspero (2012) - *Rethinking Trinitarian theology*.

These volumes represent the most recent state of scholarship and give excellent overviews of this multifaceted discourse.

21 For an excellent and concise discussion, see Kärkkäinen (2009).

22 See Shults (2005:5-9).

23 See the excellent treatment by Cunningham (2003).

24 Gunton (2002) discusses this at length. Krötke (2001) is an outstanding treatment of the attribute tradition.

25 See Barth (1957:461-490, 640-677.)

legitimate extrapolations of traditional positions and hermeneutically responsible speaking to new conditions. For example, the notions of 'hospitality'²⁶ or 'vulnerability'²⁷ belong logically to the tradition of God as relational, and suggest constructive possibilities for speaking about God in our time.

Trinitarian thinking not only harbours a surplus of meaning for contextual speaking, but also heightens the very mystery and hiddenness of God. In the East, Trinitarian confession has been coupled with a strong impulse towards apophatism. It stimulates at once the imagination and motivates new speaking, but leads also to silence and adoration. The new interest in the mystics and their understanding of the divine should not escape notice.²⁸

2.3 Subaltern Voices

Decentring and disrupting of intellectual perspective may be considered as one of the truly significant advances of academic endeavour of the twentieth century. The faces of the other,²⁹ the subaltern voices so long suppressed, have acquired a privileged space and have transformed thinking irreversibly, also about the divine. A host of intellectual prophets have become iconic to convey the basic thrust at stake in this intellectual revolution – Levinas, Spivak, and Said.

The re-imagining of God, advocated by Black, Feminist and Liberation theologians, is widely known and need not be conveyed in this instance. Work such as McFague's *Models of God* and Johnson's *She who is* have become theological classics.³⁰ The central place accorded to *experience* and to the role of *language* and its performative effects distinguishes this discourse markedly from traditional and classical theism. The divine is not only named in new and creative ways, but is rethought in relation to historical suffering and justice. The typical image of the impassible God has been radically destabilised.

The critical contribution of much of this work of the past forty years is to be found, in my opinion, in the *epistemological rupture* manifested in the God construals.³¹ Classical theism was based on an implicit a-historical framework, immunised from larger social conflicts and, in most cases, legitimising these very social configurations. The innocent image of God, resulting from a seamless move from Bible to dogmatic proposition, has been shattered. Not only does the Bible represent the divine in complex and pluriform ways, but the very act of representation is also fraught with gender, racial, and economic interests and concerns. The epistemological transformation of the traditional doctrine of God inevitably raises questions about whose knowledge, and knowledge to what effect? The re-imagining of God cannot avoid the pervasiveness of power and corresponding social visions.

Apart from this central tenet about the epistemic, another fundamental perspective emerges. Not only has the naming of God from new experiences and with alternative language been placed on the theological agenda, but also the question about *God and alterity* as such. To what extent do our images resist otherness, and to what extent do they enable us to negotiate

26 For an ambitious discussion, see Newlands & Smith (2010).

27 For a general treatment of vulnerability, see Culp (2010). The work could have been much more emphatic on God's vulnerability, and not focus so exclusively on human vulnerability.

28 See Hunt (2010).

29 The overlap between this discourse and the postmodern elements of the next should not be missed. For an incisive discussion of "the real face of postmodernity ... is the face of the other", See Tracy (1994b). Henriksen (2010) gives a good treatment of the link between postmodern thinking and developments in philosophy of religion, especially with reference to Westphal and Caputo.

30 The recent work by Johnson *Quest of the living God* (2008) gives an excellent overview of the various approaches in this broad discourse - the "Liberating God of Life", the "God acting womanish", the "God who breaks chains", and the "Accompanying God of Fiesta".

31 For an excellent discussion of this, see the article by Frostin (1985).

and embrace it? At stake in this case is the crucial interplay between notions of the divine, *self-construction* and *social vision*. For example, notions of holiness could result in self-understanding of uniqueness with terrifyingly violent social programmes. The overlap between this discourse and the previous one on the Trinity should not be overlooked. Social trinitarianism is attractive for this reason: it does not only locate otherness in the eternal life of God, but also furthers a corresponding notion of identity in terms of relationality.³² Authentic selfhood is construed in terms of mutuality and self-donation. No direct line is suggested in this instance between an understanding of God and a specific social programme. The danger of this has been pointed out too many times, especially in critiques of social trinitarianism. However, the causal link between notions of transcendence, the divine, God, self and society cannot be easily dismissed, irrespective of how complex this interplay may be. When contextual theology is pursued, also in a country such as South Africa, with social and relational pathologies, the question of God and alterity should be addressed.

2.4 Postmodernism and Philosophy of Religion

The so-called 'turn to religion' is one of the fascinating developments of the late twentieth century, especially by philosophers who are not known for their particular religious affinity. This complex phenomenon cannot be treated in this article; suffice it to state that there are various trajectories to this, and the intellectual interest is motivated by different interests, some by social-ethical and others by more metaphysical considerations. In this instance, I am interested in one specific sub-discourse – the postmodernist, one which is emphatically responsive to Heidegger's notion and critique of onto-theology. This includes conversations by scholars such as Marion, Caputo, and Kearney, and one which has generated a set of terminology which, I believe, could be fruitful for thinking about the divine. The problem, which Heidegger identified, is the long tradition which determines in advance by way of a specific metaphysic how God will enter thinking. God is the end of a long chain of being, the Supreme Being, the *causa sui*. Philosophy makes the rules which God will play. At stake in this case is the concern to honour alterity, to avoid reducing it to an object: "onto-theology involves the sacrifice of divine alterity" (Westphal 2004:16).³³ Only radical Otherness allows for self-transcendence which, in turn, becomes a resource for self-transformation. If the Other is within my grasp and control, there could be no disruption of the self.

Jean-Luc Marion's book *God without being* has acquired the status of a classic as response to over-coming onto-theology. His work³⁴ is an attempt to think God 'otherwise than being', in excess of onto-theology. His phenomenological approach, which premises primacy of givenness, is an alternative to the tradition of metaphysics. Radical givenness is irreducible, unconditional and absolute, and prior to any form of category. Marion subsequently advanced the notion of the 'saturated phenomenon'. Kearney's project to think God after metaphysics is aptly described as atheism: a return to God after the atheistic critique of the traditional God of onto-theology.³⁵ For him, God is a self-surpassing possibility whose *posse* exceeds his *esse*. Kearney does not subordinate possibility to actuality as is done in classical metaphysics. 'Possibility' is not mere potency, but is eschatological. God should be thought as the one who is to come, in the form of

32 Volff (1998:408ff), in particular, has articulated this emphatically. He refers to the "Trinitarian construction of identity" (:420). Rieger (2008:145) voices a particular additional insight with reference to pneumatology: as self-effacing God, whose selfhood lies precisely in empowering others, the Spirit embodies a new way of being person.

33 Westphal attended in various publications to the problem and challenge of onto-theology. For an excellent discussion of Heidegger's notion, see 2004, chapter 1.

34 For an exceptional discussion of the philosophical structures of his thought, see James (2012:17-38).

35 See his work *Anatheism* (2010).

promise. His work *The God who may be* is an imaginative proposal to think God not in terms of the actual, but in terms of the impossible. Caputo, who has been instrumental in leading a series of most important debates at Villanova University, especially between Marion and Derrida, has produced his own programmatic statement with *The weakness of God*. As alternatives to traditional notions of God, he emphasises God as event and as weak force. For him, God cannot be placed in a pre-established ontological framework. Events are uncontainable and associated with advent. God is anarchical and disturbing, and as weak force does not legitimate the forces of this world, and is not its stabilising centre, but rather the very subversion thereof.

The 'impossible' has emerged as a key common category to convey these postmodern intuitions and sensibilities.³⁶ An outstanding theologian such as Tracy, who has been an active participant in this discourse, has embraced this as a promising manner to name God. This convey not only the resistance to fit God into a modernist horizon of intelligibility, but also God's hiddenness, incomprehensibility and excessive gifting. This interpretation integrates various theological streams: a re-appreciation of the apocalyptic and apathetic traditions and a radicalising of the love motif.³⁷

This discourse, with its quest for avoiding the pitfalls of traditional metaphysics and the insistence on employing alternative modes of thinking, is a fruitful attempt to move speaking of God forward. Not only does it encourage more sophisticated ways to thinking about transcendence, but with notions such as gift, excess, weakness, and the impossible it also strives to avoid idolatry, which has always been prominent in serious God-talk.

3. CONCLUSION - WHISPERS OF A THEO-EPISTEME

One may need a musical metaphor to account for the various sounds in some form of melody. Whether it would even be possible to talk of conventional harmony is questionable. Some qualifiers should also be explicitly stated. My concern is that of the Christian systematic theologian, and not that of a philosopher of religion, and I am aware that my overview was selective and fairly brief. What follows is a hesitant whisper of elements of a *theo-episteme*.³⁸

1. The Christian imagination has never been without a sense of the complexity of speaking about God. Arguably, the twentieth century has heightened this and no responsible theologian will venture into an academic exposition without sophisticated self-reflexivity. Thinking and speaking about God requires an explicit awareness of one's underlying cosmology, metaphysics and its categories, methodology, philosophy of language, and epistemology. The shifts in the twentieth century intellectual horizon render a continuation of traditional God-talk untenable. For instance, the understanding of character in narrative, the status and function of metaphor, the implication of relationality, and the permeation of knowledge with power require a new form of discourse.
2. Creative portrayals are not an option, but an imperative in new social conditions. The awareness of the plurality of biblical traditions and genealogical shifts in the Judean-

36 See, for example, the work by Gutting (2011) which argues that French philosophy since the 1960s has been primarily concerned with *thinking the impossible*.

37 Tracy has stated his position in a large number of publications. For an outstanding summary of his understanding of the Impossible, see especially 2011:124-127.

38 A comprehensive episteme will arguably account for what the *referent* is, i.e. what reality is referred to; for *epistemology*, how do we know; for *rhetoric*, what language is employed; for metaphysics, what conceptuality is used; for a *divine symbolics*, what identify the unique divine perfections; for *agency* – what is the divine-world relationship; for *discursive functions* – what role “God” plays in discourse, and for the particular *social generative situation*.

Christian consciousness not only warrant, but also require new theo-imaginings. A refusal to name the divine mystery in each new social situation may amount to idolatry, because the inexhaustible riches of God are inhibited.

3. God's life has salvific power in each new situation. Naming God contextually should intentionally aim at performing divine liberation and healing linguistically. Identifying the divine reality has had historically decisive effects on human self-understanding. The performative quality of human speech makes all thinking and speaking about God expressly ethical. Speaking about God and new construals of God have a political task, for example, matters such as reconciliation, justice and embrace of the other should be considered.
4. The Trinitarian identification of God has been disruptive of generic speech about the divine. The enduring contribution of this trajectory in the theo-genealogy is to keep the issue of the nature of the referent open. When we say 'god', what do we refer to?³⁹ A mastery of this question, of closure of this fundamental human question will amount to ultimate hubris. The question of the nature of the referent is the question of the final mystery of life. The critique of onto-theology may always remind us of this. Human categories should always be tentative. Two hundred years from now, how will we refer to the Transcendent?
5. The function of 'God' in discourse requires careful consideration.⁴⁰ Reflection on this is usually neglected. God functions not only causatively as agent, but also mimetically to motivate by example. Discursively and rhetorically 'God' is used as warrant to reinforce legitimisation. Finally, there is a heuristic function: from a theo-centric perspective, God could serve as final explanation for issues such as origin, beauty, and so on. These functions can easily be discerned in discourse. With the growth of human knowledge and science, these may become increasingly problematic.
6. The hiddenness of God deserves renewed theological investigation, and recent interest in this is a productive development. The issue of the nature of the referent underlines the importance of this. Neglect of appreciation of the divine's ultimate mystery, excess and inexhaustibility usually and easily results in banal atheistic critique.
7. The suggestions to signify the nature of the divine in terms of relationality, love, gifting, event, and excess, in short - the impossible, may generate a grammar for a theo-symbolics. Thinking and speaking about God, with such human words may reveal our own mystery and destiny. And our responsibility.

As final horizon of life, as ultimate mystery, God will never allow human reflection to come to rest. Recent discourses have heightened the sense not only of complexity and of the imperative of new and creative imaginings, but also of the ethical task of theology to perform God in language to enable reconciliation and justice. While doing this, the astonishment at God's hiddenness will remain the theologian's constant agony and joy.

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³⁹ Wright (2009:444) explicitly raises the provocative question: "By the way, what is God?"

⁴⁰ See my article (2010) for an exploration.

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De redelijkheid van de christelijke theologie

ABSTRACT

The reasonableness of Christian theology

For many years Vincent Brümmer (* 1932) was the youngest professor in the theological faculty of the University of Utrecht (1967-97). His was not only a boyish style, but he also reformed profoundly the philosophical training in the department of philosophy of religion and ethics. His analytical approach to philosophy of religion influenced very much doing philosophy of religion in The Netherlands and abroad, but we have not only questions of meaning, but also issues of truth. The history of religion and theology, of culture and society, of the sciences and the humanities between the century of the New Testament and about 1800 show immense influences elicited by the Christian faith. There is also the history of the philosophia Christiana pointing out that the best possible Person must exist and that the best possible Person acts in the best possible way by coming into his world as God incarnate. We know who He is, because only Jesus cracked the reality of the life and thinking of the archaic and ancient religions and philosophies.

1. VINCENTIUS OCTOGENARIUS

Het is wennen. Vele, vele jaren was Vincent Brümmer – ik blijf de *Umlaut* eren – de jongste hoogleraar van de theologische faculteit van de Universiteit Utrecht. Ik heb het altijd betreurd, dat hij op zijn 65^{ste} met emeritaat moest gaan. Als de oude traditie dat een hoogleraar op zijn 70^{ste} emeritus werd, in 1997 gegolden had, zou Vincents leven er nog transparanter hebben uitgezien: 35 jaar vóór Utrecht en 35 jaar als hoogleraar in de godsdienstwijsbegeerte in Utrecht. Ik durf ook te stellen, dat als Vincent Brümmer in 2002 – en niet in 1997 – met emeritaat gegaan was, de geschiedenis van Utrechts theologische faculteit en die van de Nederlandse Kerk geheel anders verlopen zouden zijn. Dan zou kerkelijk Nederland veel gelukkiger geweest zijn en zou *Theologie Utrecht* nog bestaan hebben. Nu is hij *octogenarius*.

Op 30 juni 2012 overleed plotseling tot grote ontsteltenis van allen die hem omringden, mijn grootse leermeester Bertus de Rijk (* 1924). In 2013 zouden we elkaar 50 jaar gekend hebben. In het jaar van *Vincentius octogenarius* kennen Vincent en Jean Brümmer en ik elkaar 45 jaar. In 1966 werd Vincent benoemd tot de opvolger van Loen (1955-66) – christenwijsgeer bij de gratie Gods.¹ Hervormd Nederland had dat niet verwacht en ik haastte mij om Vincents proefschrift over Dooyeweerd te gaan bestuderen. Begin januari 1967 kwamen de Brümmer naar Nederland.

Na een paar weken vroeg ik als laatste student van Loen bij Prof. Brümmer een gesprek aan. Het werd het begin van honderden gesprekken. Er waren half januari 1967 nog geen colleges en ik deed dat verzoek schriftelijk – toen nog de enige toelaatbare methode in professoraal

1 Zie Van Peursen ²1959:475. De *Christelijke Encyclopedie* bespreekt amper personen, die bij verschijnen nog in leven waren. Zie ook Brümmer, 2000.

Nederland. 1967-68 moest nog losbranden! Prompt kreeg ik een briefje terug met als toevoeging: "U kan telefonies bevestig." Van het Nederlands heeft Vincent zich – in tegenstelling tot Jean – nooit veel aangetrokken. Die maandagavond in januari 1967 werd een onvergetelijke avond. Ik belde om acht uur in Overvecht – dan de noordelijke nieuwbouwwijk van Utrecht – aan. Datzelfde jaar zouden de Brümmer's nog naar Bilthoven verhuizen: het beroemde adres *Laurillardlaan 3*. Professoren hadden toen in het algemeen niet veel tijd voor studenten – "zonde van de tijd". Om half tien dacht ik onrustig: "Ik moet nu wel aangeven, dat ik wil vertrekken". Om half elf had ik zelfs deze wellevendheid vergeten. Om twaalf uur nam ik schuldbewust afscheid. Al spoedig ontdekte ik, dat ik onder dat schuldgevoel niet gebukt hoefde te gaan. Reeds in november van dat unieke jaar werd ik voor 20 uur in de week studentassistent bij Prof. Brümmer en na mijn doctoraalexamen in september 1969 was ik op 1 oktober medewerker voor godsdienstwijsbegeerte. Dat was een bevoorrechte positie en ik kijk er met grote dankbaarheid op terug. Dat werk zou ik tot 1 september 1984 blijven doen. In 1981 ben ik bij Vincent gepromoveerd. Er zouden nog vele promoties volgen. Het was een fantastische tijd, maar in de zomer van 1984 was ik ervan overtuigd geraakt, dat ik voor het theologische onderwijs van de Hervormde Kerk – in systematische theologie en symboliek – moest gaan werken.

Prof. Brümmer was, toen hij aantrad, niet alleen de jongste hoogleraar in de theologische faculteit van Utrecht, hij was ook jongensachtig – en dat zou nog lang zo blijven. De jonge Prof. Brümmer deed bijna alles anders dan zijn oudere collega's dat deden en sommigen moesten daaraan wennen. Zo hield Vincent er niet van om alleen op stap te gaan en sleepte hij mij mee naar alle mogelijke vergaderingen, waar ik eigenlijk niets te zoeken had. Ik heb mijn ogen uit mijn hoofd gekeken en er zeer veel van opgestoken. Zo kwamen we eens Wim van Unnik tegen, die ons luidkeels groette: "Daar gaan de peripatetici." In tegenstelling tot de meeste collega's besteedde Vincent zeer veel aandacht aan zijn colleges en hij gaf ook glashelder college. Hij introduceerde tevens andere wijsgerige stof door ons vertrouwd te maken met de Engelse en Amerikaanse analytische wijsbegeerte. In plaats van de onbegrijpelijke Hegel en Heidegger bestudeerden we nu de glasheldere Hospers en Chisholm. Het wijsgerige onderwijs werd op een geheel andere leest geschoeid. Het is allemaal nog in *Wijsgerige begripsanalyse* na te proeven (Brümmer ³1989). In de loop van de decennia daarna heeft Vincent Brümmer een zeer eigen oeuvre opgebouwd, maar de unieke kwaliteit van de wijsbegeerte in het theologische kandidaats en die van het godsdienstwijsgerige doctoraal waren voor zijn studenten en leerlingen het grootste en belangrijkste geschenk.

Het analytische project in de godsdienstwijsbegeerte heeft de laatste veertig jaar zeer veel opgeleverd. Dat geldt voor Nederland, waar Hubbeling en Brümmer het voortouw genomen hebben, en dat geldt ook internationaal, waar de *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* al veel effect gesorteerd had (Flew & MacIntyre 1955). Daardoor is er veel nieuw inzicht in de aard van het christelijke geloof en van de christelijke theologie gegroeid, maar hoe zit het nu met de waarheid en de bewijsbaarheid van de waarheid van de christelijke theologie? Dat wens ik in deze bijdrage aan de orde te stellen.

2. FIDES QUAERENS INTELLECTUM

Geloof en theologie mogen zich niet opsluiten in eigen kapelletjes. Zij moeten uit hun schulp kruipen en het theologische perspectief naar buiten uitdragen. Dit houdt in, dat de theologie haar perspectief naar wijsbegeerte en wetenschap dient te verleggen. De ontgrenzing die de wetenschapsfilosofie kan bieden, opent de toegang naar een nieuwe *wetenschappelijke* stijl. Daarvoor moet men wel met de identiteit van de theologie vertrouwd zijn. Een onwetend christen is een hulpeloos christen. Een onwetende theoloog is een onmachtige theoloog, maar

een onwetende wijsgeer is ook een onmachtige wijsgeer.

Wat is de *hard core* van de theologie, wijsbegeerte en wetenschap van het Westen? De godsleer is het stormcentrum, maar waarom was de godsleer het stormcentrum? Het christelijke godsbegrip wordt door de andere godsdiensten en de antieke *philosophia* uitgesloten, en als het christelijke geloof niet in staat is om met een eigen alternatief te komen, kan het hoogstens irrationele waarheid bereiken en irrationele waarheid is waarheid, waarvan men geen *weet* heeft. In de Latijnse Kerk leefde het geloof echter van een ander ideaal en een geheel andere ontdekking – Anselmus' ontdekking van *fides quaerens intellectum*. *Het geloof* kan echter alleen vruchtbaar en consistent doordacht worden, als *de werkelijkheid* geheel anders doordacht kan worden dan de antieke filosofie ons leert, maar *de werkelijkheid* kan alleen anders gedacht en bedacht worden, als men geheel anders leert te *denken*. Daarom staan we stil bij het historische draaipunt en laten we daarna de nieuwe geschiedenis die erom heen ligt, de revue passeren.

Het historische draaipunt

Het andere denken moest eerst uitgevonden worden. Het is in de scholastiek sinds de generaties van Lanfranc († 1089) en Anselmus († 1109) ontwikkeld: in de *logica modernorum*, die enkele eeuwen lang consistent wordt uitgebouwd.² Cultuurhistorisch ligt de sleutel in het opmerkelijke feit, dat het Latijnse denken in de middeleeuwen een andere koers gaat varen dan het antieke denken en ontologisch ligt de sleutel in het opmerkelijke feit, dat een geheel nadere ontologie uitgevonden wordt: de contingentie-ontologie. Alle antieke filosofieën en alle religies in de archaische tijd en in de oudheid gaan uit van de vooronderstelling: *alles is noodzakelijk* en dan zijn ook alle standen van zaken noodzakelijk. Niet-noodzakelijke standen van zaken kunnen er niet zijn. Het christelijke denken van de middeleeuwen ontkent dit niet alleen, maar in het contingentie-denken krijgen ook vele woorden een andere betekenis, in de trant van wat Obbink Utrecht heeft ingeprent: “Wel dezelfde woorden, niet dezelfde waarden!” Zo komt dit denken ook met nieuwe begrippen voor *noodzakelijkheid* en *contingentie*.

Met de ontologie van de contingentie van de werkelijkheid is veel gemoeid. Als de antieke filosofie het bij het rechte eind gehad had, zou de christelijke geschiedenis van geloof en evangelie kansloos geweest zijn. Daarom lagen grote *philosophoi* als Plotinus en Porphyrius er ook niet wakker van. Omdat er veel mee gemoeid is, is het belangrijk te beseffen, dat de *philosophia* het bij het verkeerde eind gehad kan hebben. Het is belangrijk in te zien, waarom de antieke filosofie het niet bij het rechte eind had. Als het zo is dat in termen van de antieke filosofie de geschiedenis van Jezus onmogelijk is, sluit – omgekeerd – de werkelijke Jezusgeschiedenis de mogelijke waarheid van de antieke filosofie ook uit. Deze geschiedenis is historisch de spil, waarom alles draait. Het nieuwe Latijnse denken van de middeleeuwen wordt door haar opgeroepen.

3. HISTORISCHE VERNIEUWINGEN

De wetenschapsgeschiedenis moet tot de geschiedenis van de wijsbegeerte – inclusief die van de antieke filosofie – verbreed worden. Antiekfilosofisch denken stelt zich de verklaringsvraag niet aan het eigen adres. Het is *kosmos*-denken, dat diametraal tegengesteld is aan de moderne natuurkunde. Datzelfde geldt voor de relatie tot het christelijke geloof. De moderne natuurwetenschap heeft dit kosmosdenken niet uit zijn centrale rol getild. Dat staat op conto van de geschiedenis van het Evangelie. Wie de geschiedenis van theologie en wijsbegeerte uit de wetenschapsgeschiedenis wegdrukt, kan de ontwikkeling van de wetenschap niet begrijpen, want de wetenschapsgeschiedenis vestigt de blik op de universiteitsgeschiedenis. Daarmee

2 Zie Vos 1980 over De Rijk 1977. Zie ook Vos 2006a:558-65.

komen de twaalfde en dertiende eeuw – de eerste eeuwen in de geschiedenis van de universiteit in de geschiedenis van het denken van de mensheid – binnen het gezichtsveld. We komen nu in scholastiek vaarwater.

De wetenschapsgeschiedenis staat niet op zichzelf. De gehele geschiedenis van onze cultuur bevestigt haar. De eigenlijke vraag is, wat voor *wereld* onze wereld zonder Pasen geweest zou zijn. Op het moment dat men beseft, dat de geschiedenis geen noodzakelijk verloop kent, doet zich de vraag voor, hoe we kunnen verklaren, wat er allemaal op contingente wijze gebeurd is. Er is de grote vraag: *Waarom?* Waarom zijn de ploeg en de molen uitgevonden, waarom de wetenschap en de zakdoek, de brug en de tunnel?

Om het geheim van de latere geschiedenis te kunnen begrijpen moet men zich in de statica van de oudheid verdiepen. Het christelijke geloof heeft veel van de ontwikkelingen tussen 300 v. Chr. en 400 n. Chr. kunnen profiteren, want wetenschappelijk en technologisch, filosofisch en theologisch heeft de antieke cultuur toen amper stappen vooruit kunnen doen. Niet alleen de godsdienstige, maar ook de culturele dynamiek moest bijna helemaal van het christendom komen. Dat geldt ook voor de middeleeuwen. De enorme rol die soms aan andere factoren wordt toegekend, komt niet uit de pen van geleerden, die iets van de middeleeuwse geschiedenis afweten.

De *geschiedenis* zou zonder Pasen eenvoudig gebleven zijn, want de statica van de oude wereld zou niet doorbroken zijn. De logica van de nieuwe ontdekkingen zou nooit uitgevonden zijn. De wind van de nieuwe uitvindingen zou nooit opgestoken zijn.³ Dan zou de boodschap nog steeds geweest zijn: *Nooit iets nieuws*. Nu werd het: *Altijd iets nieuws*, want de tijd is vervuld – door het Koninkrijk – en daardoor wordt een nieuwe geschiedenis geboren. In Jezus' leven ligt de geschiedenis open. De wereldgeschiedenis wordt Jezus-geschiedenis, want Hij is het, die geschiedenis maakt. Het oude gaat in Hem voorbij. Hij is het, die de geschiedenis heeft uitgevonden.

Er is veel rijkdom in de geschiedenis die door de geschiedenis van Jezus is opgeroepen. Door het christelijke geloof kwamen persoonlijke verantwoording en verantwoordelijkheid centraal te staan. De boodschap van *bekering* riep een kritische ethische positie op. Heiliging is een individuele zaak. Het archaische leven en het antieke denken kenden geen individualiteit, en ook geen heiliging (De Rijk 1980). Vernieuwingsbewegingen gaven keer op keer krachtige impulsen. Zonder Jezus zou het ook nooit tot een nieuw besef van zorg voor de ander gekomen zijn. Er zouden geen verzorgingstehuizen, centra voor ouden van dagen en ziekenhuisjes uitgevonden zijn, zoals christenen dat in de tweede helft van de vierde eeuw in Cappadocië en Klein-Armenië gedaan hebben. Medische zorg zou een fantoom gebleven zijn. Willibrord en Bonifatius zouden nooit geboren zijn en dus ook niet in de Lage landen verzeild geraakt zijn.

De strijd tegen de honger leidde in Frankrijk en de Nederlanden al vroeg tot nieuwe aanzetten in de landbouw, die in de loop van de twaalfde tot de vijftiende eeuw een nieuwe agrarische cultuur hebben opgeleverd. De ijzeren ploeg werd uitgevonden en het paard zette zijn schouders eronder. Vele monden konden nu worden gevoed. Godsdienstig revival en culturele dynamiek sloegen de klok. Tallozen sloten zich bij de monastieke vernieuwingsbewegingen aan. De antieke filosofie liet geen enkele ruimte voor het christelijke geloof, maar dat geloof schiep niet alleen in de middeleeuwse scholastiek een nieuw denken, maar kwam ook met nieuwe schooltypen, zodat bibliotheken opgebouwd konden worden en de strijd met het analfabetisme werd aangeboden, doordat men nu op grote schaal leerde lezen en schrijven.⁴

3 Zie AVos 2006b, en Vos 2008. Zie voor de bewijsbaarheid van centrale christelijke geloofsovertuigingen Vos 2006, de hoofdstukken 13-14 en 16.

4 Het middeleeuwse brongebied van de moderne natuurwetenschap wordt schitterend belicht door Grant 1977, 2001 en 2009, Hannam 2010.

Zonder deze Jezusgeschiedenis zou ons ook de techniek bespaard gebleven zijn. De molen en de schroef, de bril en het uurwerk verschijnen op het toneel. De natuur wordt geontmythiseerd en de arbeid bevrijd. *Arbeid adelt* is het nieuwe christelijke ideaal. Er wordt nu gewerkt, en er wordt nagedacht. De culturele dynamiek, die uit het christelijke geloof voortkwam, zou zonder dat geloof nooit ontketend zijn. Het zou bij de antieke *statica* gebleven zijn.

Het middeleeuwse denken ontdekte: analyseren, afleiden, argumenteren. De scholastiek is de grote vooronderstelling van het exacte denken. De universiteit wordt geboren en groeit en bloeit. Zonder de geschiedenis van het *fides quaerens intellectum* zou het nooit tot exacte wetenschap gekomen zijn. We zouden het zonder Copernicus en Galilei, zonder Huygens en Boerhave hebben moeten doen. Het zijn niet alleen christenen geweest, die talloze nieuwe uitvindingen op hun naam schreven – Galilei en Kepler, Beeckman en Huygens, Boyle en Newton –, maar het kwam ook nog eens juist uit hun geloof voort. Het beeld dat de westerse intellectueel van de geschiedenis van Europa heeft, ligt onder een dikke laag stof van onwetendheid en irrationaliteit bedolven. De westerse *intelligentsia* weet niet veel, ook al is het niet moeilijk om ons wetenschapshistorisch van al deze zaken op de hoogte te stellen. Door deze onwetendheid heeft men nog nooit van het echte Europa gehoord, omdat men geen idee van de geschiedenis van Europa heeft, want wie de geschiedenis van Europa niet kent, kent Europa niet.

Kortom, zonder Jezus Christus zouden we nog ongeveer leven als ten tijde van Jezus, *per pedes apostolorum*. We zouden ronddolen zonder wapens tegen kou en honger, ziekte en epidemieën. In de Lage Landen zouden we nooit verder dan hunebedden en moerassen, de wind en het water gekomen zijn. Duisternis en moerassen zouden ons nog steeds omringen.

4. EEN AUCTORITATESCULTUUR

Waarom is het niet eenvoudig het vernieuwde denken in de cruciale teksten uit de middeleeuwen op het spoor te komen? Het aspect dat voor ons cruciaal is, ligt in het feit dat men in een *auctoritatescultuur* geheel anders met teksten omgaat dan in een historische cultuur. Een *auctoritatescultuur* wordt allicht als een autoritaire cultuur geïnterpreteerd, maar dat komt, doordat men niet weet wat een *auctoritas* is en hoe zij functioneert. Het gaat er dus allereerst om meer inzicht te krijgen in wat een *auctoritatescultuur* is.⁵

De middeleeuwse cultuur was een *auctoritatescultuur*. Een *auctoritas* is geen *autoriteit*, maar een *tekst*: een gezaghebbende tekst. In de oudheid treffen we heilige boeken aan – overigens niet eens zoveel, maar wat er vooral toe doet, zijn de teksten die het onderwijsprogramma bevolken. Voor antiek en middel-eeuws besef hebben deze vaststaande teksten van het curriculum altijd gelijk. Ze functioneren als het ware als *heilige boeken*, maar welk gelijk bevatten ze?

Men was, ook al in de late oudheid, van oordeel dat een gezaghebbend auteur zijn gezag ontleende aan het feit dat men *zakelijk* op hem kon bouwen. De term *auctoritas* was bij de Romeinen van oorsprong een juridische term en verwees o.a. naar het schriftelijke bewijsstuk, dat borg stond voor een zakelijke (privaatrechtelijke) verhouding, omdat het deze konstitueerde. Nu is het merkwaardig dat men *autor* afleidde van *authentica*, dat de betekenis had van geloofwaardig, iets-echts-zeggend; de auteur (*autor*, *actor*) was dus iemand wiens meningen of beslissingen, op grond van zijn [...] positie, gezaghebbend waren.⁶

Voor middeleeuws besef constitueert een intellectuele *auctoritas* geen waarheid: de Waarheid is onafhankelijk van de mens en een *auctoritas* constitueert haar niet, maar representeert haar: “Hij (de *autor*) heeft het ware gezien en verwoord, en daarom is hij geloofwaardig en zou men zakelijk gesproken dom doen door geen acht op hem te slaan (*ibidem*).

⁵ Met opzet gebruik ik het meervoud *auctoritates* om aan te geven dat het om iets anders gaat dan *auctoritas*, dat men ook met *autoriteit* kan vertalen.

⁶ De Rijk 1977:116.

Een *auctoritas* is dus geen externe steunverlener, maar zelf een stuk rationele waarheid: *auctoritas* is niets anders dan een...

“...blootgelegde rationele waarheid (*rationis aperta veritas*), die ter wille van het nuttig gebruik voor het nageslacht op schrift is gesteld.”⁷

Wat kan men nu wel en wat niet, van zulk lezen van teksten verwachten? Het negatieve antwoord moet luiden, dat men er niet van verwachten mag, dat deze teksten *historisch* benaderd worden: we vinden er geen historische interpretatie van de auteurs uit het verleden, het gaat om een “pre-historisch” lezen: het historisch lezen is zich pas in het tweede kwart van de negentiende eeuw gaan ontwikkelen. Het positieve antwoord focust op het geïntendeerde waarheidsgehalte, dat men aan het licht brengt, en deze waarheid is de eigen waarheid, die de middeleeuwse auteurs in de vaststaande teksten vinden (De Rijk 1977:116–17). De auteurs lezen hun eigen waarheid – en hun eigen goedheid – in de teksten in (Vos 2006a:528–39).

De middeleeuwse cultuur was een *auctoritates*-cultuur. De traditionele visie ziet echter de *auctoritas* als een externe steunverlener waarop men zich beroept, zodat men niet zelf hoeft na te denken. Men plaatst de gezagsstructuur van zo’n cultuur tegenover de *Verlichting*, waarin men de onmondigheid achter zich zou laten. In Schoutens *Grote sterrenkundigen* wordt de traditionele visie helder verwoord:

“Nieuwe geestesstromingen hebben het werk van Copernicus voorbereid en mogelijk gemaakt. Hierdoor werd veel autoriteitsgeloof ondermijnd en begon men te twijfelen aan de dogma’s van Aristoteles” (Schouten 1950:18).

Men ziet het middeleeuwse denken als een denken, dat bevangen gebleven is in de patronen van de antieke filosofie en in “de dogma’s van Aristoteles” vastgeroest zat: men volgde slaafs de niet-christelijke oudheid en scholastiek is een vorm van aristotelisme. Oorspronkelijk was de wijsgerige mediëvistiek zelfs van mening, dat er in de middeleeuwen helemaal geen filosofie kon voorkomen, omdat geloof filosofische rationaliteit uitsluit, maar onder invloed van de katholieke neoscholastiek werd de protestantse visie vooral, dat middeleeuws denken aristotelisch is geweest (Vos 2006a: hoofdstuk 15). De traditionele visies zien echter de historische werkelijkheid over het hoofd. In wijsgerige en theologische teksten wordt weliswaar het *Aristoteles dicit* eindeloos herhaald, maar we moeten in deze teksten niet naar de historische Aristoteles vragen. We zouden vele middeleeuwse Aristotelessen kunnen onderscheiden: Alberts Aristoteles en Thomas’ Aristoteles, de Aristoteles van Zeger van Brabant, Peckhams Aristoteles, Hendrik van Ghents Aristoteles, Godfreys en Duns’ Aristoteles. Zelfs één auteur kan verschillende Aristotelessen hebben: Thomas’ Aristoteles van het *Scriptum*, zijn Aristoteles van de *Summa theologiae* en de Aristoteles van zijn “commentaren”; Duns’ Aristoteles van het *exponere reverenter* in zijn *Sententiae* “commentaren”, in contrast met de Aristoteles van de directe confrontatie in *Lectura* I 8 and *Ordinatio* I 8, en de Aristoteles van zijn *expositio* en de *Quaestiones super libros Metaphysicorum*. Het zijn natuurlijk helemaal geen “Aristotelessen” – zij weerkaatsen eenvoudig de vele manieren van het lezen van Aristoteles in een *a*-historischel *auctoritates* cultuur.

Het is nu verhelderend om te vragen, hoe John Duns Aristoteles’ filosofie evalueert. De *philosophi*, die Aristoteles volgen, vertegenwoordigen het denken van vroeger dat niet christelijk was: de *philosophia* gaat ervan uit, dat de werkelijkheid noodzakelijk is, maar hoe ziet Duns zichzelf? Hij is een *christen* (*catholicus*) en een *theoloog* (*theologus*) en de *theologia* vertegenwoordigt het denken van nu en van de toekomst: de werkelijkheid is contingent. Dat is precies het tegenovergestelde. Het gaat hier om een nieuwe wijsbegeerte en om een nieuwe theologie (Vos 2006a: hoofdstuk 14).

7 De Rijk 1977:116. “Authenticus” betekent dan “waarde en waarheid bevattend.” Zie voor het universitaire arsenaal van gezaghebbende teksten omstreeks 1300 De Rijk 1977:117-24: “De gezaghebbende teksten”.

In deze cultuur treffen we een verborgen dynamiek aan. Zij wordt door een dynamiek gekenmerkt, die gewoonlijk over het hoofd wordt gezien, want zij verbergt zich in teksten die in hun oorspronkelijke betekenis geheel andere inhouden bevatten. De middeleeuwse auteurs vinden niet de waarheid van de oorspronkelijke auteur in zijn teksten, maar hun eigen waarheid. Zij lezen de *authoritates* zoals zij de Bijbel lezen: als *Fundgrube* van waarheid. Wat de Bijbel betreft, exegetiseren zij niet. Zij zouden niet eens weten wat het woord “exegetiseren” betekent. Dat gaat niet alleen voor Thomas van Aquino en Duns Scotus op, maar ook voor Calvijn, Voetius en à Marck. Exegese is iets van de negentiende eeuw. In de middeleeuwse theologische en wijsgerige teksten vinden we dan ook precies het tegenovergestelde van wat het traditionele onderzoek erin vond: een christelijke herhaling van de antieke filosofie. We ontdekken er de fundamentele emancipatie van de denkpatronen van de antieke filosofie. Een nieuw denken wordt geboren: *fides quaerens intellectum*. De historische wijsbegeerte en theologie brengen ons dus met de wijsgerige traditie van het *fides quaerens intellectum* in aanraking. In dit licht ontdekken wij een andere doordening van systematische vragen als: a) Is alles noodzakelijk? b) Bestaat God? c) Wat is de relatie tussen God en de Incarnatie?

5. DE STELLINGNAME VAN DE ATHEOLOGIE

In het onderzoek naar de a-theologie kunnen we verschillend te werk gaan. We kunnen bewijzen geven aan de hand van wat ons eigen denken verworven heeft, maar we kunnen ook werken met wat opponenten zelf naar voren brengen. A-theologen (filosofen die er aanspraak op maken te kunnen bewijzen, dat het atheïsme het bij het rechte eind heeft en dat God dus niet bestaat) bestrijden het christelijke geloof, maar het zijn ook noodzakelijkheidsdenkers. Hun visie houdt in:

“Als God niet bestaat, dan is de werkelijkheid noodzakelijk.”

Hieruit volgt krachtens *modus tollens*:

“Als de werkelijkheid *niet* noodzakelijk is, dan is het *niet* waar dat God *niet* bestaat.”

Hieruit volgt weer:

“Als de werkelijkheid contingent is, dan is het waar dat God bestaat.”⁸

Is de werkelijkheid contingent? Is het noodzakelijkheidsdenken te weerleggen? Kunnen we aantonen, dat de werkelijkheid contingent is? Als we zo’n bewijs kunnen overleggen, tonen we vervolgens met behulp van *modus ponens* aan, dat God bestaat. Daarbij gaan we dan niet van het eigen standpunt uit, maar van de stellingname van de oppositie, die zich bij de grondpositie van de antieke filosofie aansluit: *Alles is noodzakelijk*. In plaats van de antieke filosofie historisch te benaderen kan men haar ook logisch beschouwen door te opperen, dat haar grondslag onwaar zou kunnen zijn. Wie waren nu van mening, dat de aristotelische metafysica niet onwaar kan zijn? In elk geval was Aristoteles zelf dat van mening – met de antieke aristotelianen –, de grote islamitische filosofen zoals Avicenna en Averroës, en ook de neothomistische neoscholastiek was die optie toegedaan. Aan het neothomisme is al te zien, hoe ver modern katholiek denken van het middeleeuwse denken kan afstaan. Theologisch is dit ook belangrijk, omdat veel protestantse theologie in de moderne tijd zich hierbij heeft aangesloten.

Wij nemen *nu* echter aan, dat het *niet* zo is, dat Aristoteles onomstotelijk gelijk heeft. Als we aannemen, dat het mogelijk is, dat iets onwaar is, verwerpen we dat het *onmogelijk* is dat het niet waar is. Zo’n verwerping hoeft ons niet te bevreemden. Wie zo niet te werk gaat, kan nooit iets kritisch aan de orde stellen. We zetten de eerste stap: we opperen de hypothese, dat het mogelijk is, dat Aristoteles het *niet* bij het rechte eind heeft:

“Het is mogelijk, dat *Alles is noodzakelijk* niet waar is.”

⁸ Immers is *p* noodzakelijk of niet-noodzakelijk en als *p* niet noodzakelijk is, is *p* contingent, en de dubbele ontkenning mogen we elimineren.

Het is dan mogelijk, dat *niet* alles noodzakelijk is, en dat er feiten en proposities zijn, die niet noodzakelijk zijn. De waarheid van $2 + 2 = 4$ is noodzakelijk en de niet-noodzakelijkheid van een propositie moet dus anders van aard zijn dan de status van $2 + 2 = 4$ of “Als Socrates rent, dan loopt hij.”

Zulke voorbeelden vormen de proposities *Socrates loopt* en *Socrates rent* zelf, want als “Als Socrates rent, dan loopt hij.” noodzakelijk is en de proposities *Socrates rent* en *Socrates loopt* logisch anders van aard zijn dan *Als Socrates rent, dan loopt hij*, zijn ze dus *niet noodzakelijk*. Dan zijn ze *contingent (= niet-noodzakelijk)*.

Deze argumentatie stoelt alleen op de basislogica en haar modale uitbreiding en basislogica wordt aan alle universiteiten van de wereld onderwezen. Wat we voor *Socrates loopt* hebben laten zien, geldt ook voor vergelijkbare proposities als *Irma studeert theologie* en *Imre studeert wijsbegeerte*. Als *Socrates rent* niet noodzakelijk is, geldt hetzelfde voor alle standen van zaken die van de geschiedenis deel kunnen uitmaken. Het noodzakelijkheidsdenken heeft geen gelijk: de geschiedenis is contingent. Als contingentie zelf noodzakelijk is, heeft Aristoteles het helemaal verloren, want als contingentie zelf noodzakelijk is, is zij niet uit schakelen. Dan zit men aan de contingentie vast en zit men ook aan de contingentie van de werkelijkheid vast. Daar helpt geen atheïstisch lieve moederen meer aan. Wat noodzakelijk is, is *niet* niet-noodzakelijk te maken en daarmee is het onaantastbaar.

“De contingentie van de geschiedenis is zelf noodzakelijk” en de noodzakelijkheid van de werkelijkheid ook niet door Aristoteles en zijn bondgenoten te redden. Wat niet uit te schakelen is, is ook niet door Plato en Aristoteles, Hegel en Marx, Richard Dawkins en Herman Philipse en hun bondgenoten te elimineren.

De werkelijkheid is contingent en haar geschiedenis is contingent en samen met de waarheid van “Als de werkelijkheid contingent is, dan is het waar dat God bestaat” hebben we reeds geconcludeerd: “God bestaat.”

Als de geschiedenis contingent is, zijn alle gebeurtenissen van de wereld contingent, want de wereld is de totaalverzameling van alle gebeurtenissen, maar als de wereld contingent is, kan zij zichzelf niet verantwoorden. Zij kan niet in zichzelf rusten. Iets wat op contingente wijze war is en contingent is, moet contingent gedaan zijn en daarom moet het ook contingent gewild zijn. We hebben echter gezien dat de *a*-theologie zelf oplevert: God bestaat. Er is dus iemand, die haar gewild heeft. Wie uitvoert, wat Hij als wereld wil, is de Schepper en alleen God kan de Schepper zijn. *Ergo*: God bestaat als Schepper en de Schepper bestaat!

De incarnatie

Er valt nog meer te zeggen. Jezus Christus is het Licht op de berg. Zijn diepe ontferming is zo origineel, dat het antieke daglicht haar niet kon verdragen. Zij is zo fundamenteel, dat de wereld zonder zijn barmhartigheid en *misericordia* een hel gebleven zou zijn. Zijn culturele revolutie raakte voelen en willen, denken en doen. Zij schiep een *andere zede* en een *andere rede*.

God kan alleen maximaal goed *zijn* – dat is de clou van Anselmus’ *Proslogion* – maar wie maximaal goed *is*, *handelt* ook optimaal goed in wat Hij doet. Wie zo handelt, laat niet varen het werk van zijn handen – dat is de clou van Anselmus’ *Cur Deus homo?* Dus: gegeven dat onze werkelijkheid is zoals zij is, mag zij zich in een incarnatie in de geschiedenis verheugen, waarin God zo goed mogelijk *handelt* en Hij handelt zo goed mogelijk door zelf te komen.

Onze geschiedenis mag zich in Gods zorg verheugen en in een incarnatie, waardoor God zo goed mogelijk *handelt*. Hij handelt zo goed mogelijk door zelf te komen. Er is maar één geschiedenis, die hiervoor kandidaat kan staan. Dat is de geschiedenis, die de grondslag van het archaische en antieke leven en denken gekraakt heeft. Wie het daarmee eens is, kan hem niet kraken, want die wil hem niet kraken. Daarin speelt de wil ook helemaal geen rol, want alles

staat er in het teken van de noodzakelijkheid – in een wereld, die in statica en noodzakelijkheid zit vastgeklemd.⁹ Daardoor valt er niets te willen. Daar viel niets te willen, maar toen kwam Hij die zei: Ik wil!

Het is ook de *enige* geschiedenis, die deze grondslag gekraakt heeft. Deze geschiedenis is dus de enige kandidaat en zij is de geschiedenis van Iemand. Wij weten, hoe deze kandidaat heet en wie deze kandidaat is. Het was *Eén tegen allen*, maar Hij overwon:

Mijn Heer en mijn God!

Rabbouni! Jezus, de Heer, de Opgestane! Ook zo is de wereldgeschiedenis met de geschiedenis van Jezus verbonden en zo blijkt, dat de Opgestane de Heer is. De moderne kritiek ziet de werkelijke “evidence” over het hoofd. Zij neemt het historische denken ook niet ernstig, maar omdat de Opgestane de geschiedenis serieus neemt, schiep Hij zelf een weelde aan “evidence.” Die “evidence” heeft een overduidelijke boodschap:

Rabbouni! En: Mijn Heer en mijn God!

Rabbouni! Jezus, de Heer, de Opgestane!

Het Koninkrijk van God incarnate

Omdat wat doorslaggevend is, op Jezus' woorden en daden gegrondvest is, moeten we ons ook geheel naar Zijn wil richten! Dat verdient Hij! De zaak van het christelijke geloof is ijzersterk, maar toch is wat christenen verdedigen, vaak onhoudbaar. Het is dan ook zaak om ons ootmoedig en nederig tot Hem te wenden, de Rots van ons behoud. We moeten ontdekken, dat het christendom een berouwgodsdiensdienst is (Vos 2001). We mogen ook de klassiek christelijke theologie van de AA-lijn herontdekken als de adequate vertolking van het christendom als berouwgodsdiensdienst.

De geschiedenis zelf schuift *God incarnate* naar voren. Op het vlak van het denken zien we, dat de *fides quaerens intellectum* zich van de antieke filosofie emancipeert. De geschiedenis van de wetenschap laat zien, dat haar perspectief erom vraagt, dat een nieuw denken en een nieuwe wijsbegeerte nodig zijn. Ook de geschiedenis van de moderne wetenschap maakt duidelijk, dat zij niet zonder Jezus' geschiedenis van de grond kon komen. De geschiedenis van de gehele wetenschap legt de nodige gebieden bloot en verbreedt het perspectief naar het geheel van de werkelijkheid. Daarin speelden christelijk geloof en theologie de hoofdrol. Het wetenschappelijke perspectief moet het christelijke perspectief omhelzen. Het christelijke perspectief omhelst het wetenschappelijke.

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⁹ Zie §2.

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'Memory, History, and Justice: In search of conceptual clarity'²

ABSTRACT

How should we reconfigure the relationship between memory and history as two distinguishable yet interconnected epistemological routes to knowing the past? This article seeks some conceptual clarity on the intricate and complex interrelation between memory and history, also in conversation with some questions that arise from contexts associated with historical injustice. With this purpose in mind, the article engages especially the later work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur's response to the memory-history problem is not to view memory and history as adversaries, but to view them as conjoined and complementary as we grapple with the past and the temporality of our own lives. In light of this affirmation of the dialectical relationship between memory and history, the article further emphasises some aspects that are important to consider in the search for a responsible historical hermeneutic.

INTRODUCTION: MEMORY, HISTORY AND JUSTICE

In the "Preface" to his monumental work *Memory, History, Forgetting* the French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes that this book grew out of some private, some professional and some public preoccupations. Under the rubric of "professional consideration" he refers to the fact that this book is a prolongation of an uninterrupted conversation with professional historians who have been "confronting the same problems regarding the ties between memory and history."³

The ties that bind history and memory – these two ways of retrospection, of looking at or engaging the past – indeed raise some serious and challenging problems and questions. Without doubt the relationship is complex, given (among other things) the fact that both "memory" and "history" have multiple senses. Therefore one needs to give at least some indication of what one means when using these terms, albeit that one should also recognise their conceptual fluidity. In addition, one should affirm the boundaries and the interconnectedness between memory and history. Memory and history are not to be conflated in our discourse and practice, although they overlap in some significant ways. Geoffrey Cubitt puts it well in his book *History and Memory*:

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2 This article is dedicated to Prof. Vincent Brümmer in celebration of his 80th birthday. I first met Prof. Brümmer in 1992 when I attended his doctoral seminars as a student in Utrecht, and I remember vividly his emphasis on the need to be clear and coherent in one's reasoning. One can rightly say that his own impressive and influential oeuvre exemplifies the search for conceptual clarity, for the sake of love and life. A first draft of this paper was read at an international conference on "Memory and Historical Injustice" in Melbourne, Australia in February 2012.

3 Ricoeur, P 2004, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), xv. For the original French text, see Ricoeur, P 2000. *La Mémoire, L'histoire, L'oubli* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil).

“History and memory are proximate concepts: they inhabit a similar mental territory ... (W)e can see them as conceptual terms that have constantly interacted with each other, moving in and out of each other, circling each other warily or amorously, sometimes embracing, sometimes separating, sometimes jostling for position on the discursive terrain that is their common habitat.”⁴

Given the fact that memory and history are connected concepts, and that there is often tension and even conflict between these two ways of knowing the past, it is not easy to conceptualise the relationship between memory and history. The difficulties involved in reflecting on the ties that bind memory and history have not discouraged scholars from venturing into this slippery terrain, though, and it has been said that “(f)ew topics in recent years have elicited as much interest among historians as the relationship between memory and history.”⁵ The so-called “turn to memory” in historical scholarship (a turn that is noticeable across academic disciplines, making memory studies “a peculiarly busy interdisciplinary arena”⁶) has emphasised the need to gain greater clarity on the close but complex relationship between memory and history.

This article seeks some conceptual clarity on this intricate interrelation between memory and history, also in conversation with some questions that arise from contexts associated with historical injustice. With this purpose in mind, the article engages especially the later work of Paul Ricoeur, albeit that there is much to be gained from positioning Ricoeur’s reflections on memory and history against the backdrop of his philosophical project as a whole.

In the preface to *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur mentions another, more public, preoccupation that has informed this book:

“I continued to be troubled by the unsettling spectacle offered by an excess of memory here, and an excess of forgetting elsewhere, to say nothing of the influence of commemorations and abuses of memory – and of forgetting. The idea of a policy of the just allotment of memory is in this respect one of my avowed civic themes.”⁷

The concern for the “just allotment of memory” is also shared by those who want to reflect responsibly on South Africa’s apartheid past. Discussions on memory and history – and their interrelation – do not occur in a historical vacuum and they become especially poignant in contexts saturated with narratives of historical injustice. The work of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers a fitting example to consider in this regard. If one wants knowledge of the work of the Commission one can turn to the official report (published in seven volumes or on official websites). This report is and will be, without doubt, an important and in many ways indispensable source for historians who want to embark on some or other kind of historiographical project connected to South Africa’s apartheid past. There are of course many traumatic memories and painful stories not included in the official report. Furthermore, the written or recorded sources that have found their way into the “archive” are not to be equated with the testimonies themselves or the events these testimonies point to. While the value of documents such as the official report can hardly be overstated, it is nevertheless important not to limit the work and legacy of the Truth Commission to the “documented history,” just as South Africa’s apartheid history cannot be viewed only through the lens of the official Truth Commission report. For a responsible historical engagement with South Africa’s apartheid past, a careful and critical interaction with documented history is extremely important. However, there are many memories not represented (or even misrepresented) in these sources. Hence

4 Cubitt, G, 2007, *History and Memory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 4, 5.

5 Hutton, P 2000, “Recent Scholarship on Memory and History,” *The History Teacher* 33/4: 533-548, 533.

Cf. Gardner, P 2010, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory* (London: Routledge), 90.

6 Cf. Cubitt, *History and Memory*, 4.

7 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, xv.

the need for, and value of, oral history projects. In both documented and oral history, moreover, questions (often implicit questions) regarding the relationship between memory and history keep on coming to the fore.

One of the interesting more recent reflections on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is the book entitled *There was this Goat: Investigating the Truth Commission Testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile* by Antjie Krog, Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopana Ratele. This book offers an illuminating engagement with the testimony of Notrose Konile, the mother of Zabonke Konile, who was killed in what came to be known as the Gugulethu Seven incident. Antjie Krog, well known for her haunting observations as reporter on the work of the Truth Commission reflected in her book *Country of My Skull* (1998), attended the hearing of Konile on 23 April 1996 and was struck by her seemingly incoherent testimony. The details do not concern us directly here, although I can mention that the title of the book is taken from a part of Notrose Konile's testimony, which was recorded as follows: "I had a very – a very scary period, there was this – this goat looking up, this one next to me said oh! having a dream like that with a goat looking at you is a very bad dream."⁸ Years later Krog revisited this testimony with two colleagues from the University of the Western Cape, Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopano Ratele, who were then lecturers in the Xhosa and Psychology Departments respectively. They met regularly to discuss Konile's testimony and it became clear to them that the testimony in the official report is incomprehensible as it stands, and in order to make sense of it, you need to make use of indigenous language and knowledge systems. By tirelessly exploring the gaps and inconsistencies in Konile's testimony, and drawing on their respective disciplines, Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele indicate how a greater understanding of language and cultural contexts can challenge stereotypes and reductions. They observe: "As there were slippages in the interpretation of Mrs Konile's testimony, the valuable information with regard to her feelings and aspirations could not reach many of the Truth Commission officials and the audience. Slippages in translation can lead to misinterpretation and misrepresentation of a testifier, while intimate cultural knowledge can lead to a fuller and more just interpretation of a mother-tongue testimony that could restore the dignity of the testifier."⁹

I briefly recall this book because it offers a powerful reminder that one should guard against views that overestimate the ability of documented historical sources to represent the past. This is not to say that documents and written sources are not extremely important for historical investigation, but the inherent vulnerability of the archive should be acknowledged. But does this mean that we should rather privilege memory as a more reliable way of gaining knowledge of the past? Can one privilege memory over above history or is these two intentions of the past, to follow Ricoeur's position, undecidable."¹⁰ And if so, for what reasons?

MEMORY OR HISTORY?

Before entering into a more detailed engagement with Ricoeur's thoughts on memory and history, it might be worthwhile to bring the differences, overlaps and tensions between memory and history sharper into focus. David Lowenthal comments helpfully in this regard:

"Memory and history are processes of insight; each involves components of the other, and their boundaries are shadowy. Yet memory and history are normally and justifiably distinguished: memory is inescapably and prima-facie indubitable; history is contingent and empirically testable."¹¹

8 Antjie Krog, Nosisi Mpolweni and Kopana Ratele, *There was this goat: Investigating the Truth Commission Testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), 13.

9 Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele, *There was this goat*, 55.

10 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 385.

11 Lowenthal, D 1985, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 187.

Memory and history thus point to two distinguishable yet interconnected epistemological routes to knowing the past.¹² History is based on empirical sources in a more direct way, although memory is shaped by accounts of the past by others (that is “history”). In a similar vein, history relies on eyewitnesses and their testimony (that is “memory”). Despite the connections and overlaps, the world of memory appears quite different from the world of history.

Philip Gardner uses some vivid images to describe these different worlds. He links the world of memory to the brightness of day in which we move around in an assured way because we can see our surrounding (although we may make mistakes in what we believe we have seen). The world of history is different, since the sun has already set, and to navigate this dark space we need artificial light as a substitute for the sun. We must therefore look elsewhere for illumination, “to the archive, to the documents of history, without which the events that happened before our time would remain unlighted.”¹³ Gardner not only views the movement from history to memory in terms of the metaphor of “light”, but also views it as a question of distance and scale. Whereas history has to bridge the distance, difference and dislocation between present and past, the past and the present are already more intimately connected in the case of memory, with the agency of the individual playing a central role. In addition to describing the difference between memory and history in terms of images of light and distance, Gardner refers to the movement from history to memory as a movement from silence to sound: “In terms of sources it takes us from the document to the voice. In terms of method, it takes us from reading to listening.”¹⁴

One might refine Gardner’s description of the differences between the world of memory and the world of history, but his discussion is helpful to emphasise that we are dealing with two distinct ways of representing the past. Other features of the difference between memory and history can be added. Alan Megill, for instance, has argued that memory – however one defines it – has the character of being “immediate” and that we do not have adequate grounds for challenging what somebody remembers, while history, on the other hand, is different since it brings evidence into play.¹⁵ For Megill the blurring of history and memory is therefore deeply problematic, and the task of the historian “ought to be less to preserve memory than to overcome it or at least to keep it confined.”¹⁶ Attempts not to conflate history and memory and to respect their boundaries are certainly helpful. But, on the other hand, it also seems problematic to cast memory and history in two opposing camps, the one being private, passive, subjective and value-related, and the other public, active, objective and fact-based. Over against these dichotomies and antinomies one can also point to the fact that Ralph Samuel has rightly argued “that memory, so far from being merely a passive receptacle or storage system, an image bank of the past, is rather an active shaping force ... and that it is dialectically related to historical thought, rather than some kind of negative other to it.”¹⁷

In the discourse on memory and history and their relation a certain tension is often highlighted. From the side of those who privilege memory over history, “history” is viewed as pretending to make value-free objective claims about the past that do not do justice to particular

12 Lowenthal rightfully reminds us: “‘Knowing the past,’ as Kubler says, ‘is as astonishing a performance as knowing the stars’; and it remains no less elusive for being well documented” (*The Past is a Foreign Country*, 191).

13 Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory*, 89.

14 Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory*, 90.

15 Megill, A 2007. *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 22.

16 Megill, *Historical Knowledge*, 37. Megill therefore argues that a critical historiography, although it is informed by memory, has to stand at a distance from memory: “In short: history both needs memory and needs to go beyond memory” (*Historical Knowledge*, 40).

17 Samuel, R 1994, *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso), x.

memories and identities. Those who privilege history over above memory are, in turn, sceptical of the way in which memory in their view functions in an arbitrary way without means to check its validity. In short, history seems to be vulnerable to questions of identity, while memory seems to be vulnerable to questions concerning truth claims. Gardner states the matter succinctly:

“If memory settles upon identity, it opens itself to the perils of wilful manipulation or organized forgetting. If history settles only upon its own claims to truth, it closes its eyes to its own boundedness. If history deprecates memory, it lays waste to its wellspring. If memory ignores history, it squanders its credibility.”¹⁸

The dialectic between memory and history therefore remains, and a responsible engagement with the past is probably best served by allowing space for this tension to be creative and constructive, viewing both modes of retrospection with suspicion and trust. In conversation with Ricoeur, this article explores further why one cannot decide which one of these two epistemological routes to the past has priority. Ricoeur’s response to the memory-history problem is not to view memory and history as adversaries, but to view them as conjoined and complementary as we grapple with the past and the temporality of our own lives.¹⁹ With this in mind, we now turn more directly to Ricoeur’s thought.

RICOEUR ON MEMORY AND HISTORY

Memory, History, Forgetting presents Ricoeur’s mature thought on memory and history, and their dialectical relationship. However, the concerns of this book are not new, since – as Ricoeur has noted in his “intellectual autobiography” – much of his previous work is marked by a concern for “a sense of history.”²⁰ The strong continuity between the themes that announce themselves in *Memory, History, Forgetting* and Ricoeur’s earlier work should thus be noted, and it is profitable to read this book against the backdrop of his whole philosophical oeuvre.

Our concern in this paper is not to give a detailed discussion of Ricoeur’s extensive discussion of the themes of memory, history and forgetting. The main argument is rather that Ricoeur’s thought is valuable to keep the necessary tension between memory and history creative, as well as to view both memory and history – as two distinct but interconnected modes of representing the past – with suspicion and trust. However, before turning to these matters, it might be valuable to represent in very broad strokes something of the main intention and argument of *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur grapples by way of an innovative framework and extensive discussions of the relevant literature with questions relating to the importance of – and difficulties associated with – the quest for the representation of the past.²¹ Although

18 Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory*, 115.

19 Cf. Gardner, *Hermeneutics, History and Memory*, 97.

20 Ricoeur observes: “Of course, the question of history comes up as early as 1949 in ‘Husserl and the Sense of History’; the same question also returns in other guises: the status proper to the history of philosophy, objectivity and subjectivity in history, the sense of history in general, the place of violence and non-violence in history, the sense of history and Christian eschatology, progress, ambiguity, hope, and so forth. The first collection of my articles, *History and Truth*, bears the mark of this constant concern for the ‘sense of history.’” See Hahn, L E 1995, *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (Chicago: Open Court), 39. And in the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, we can add, Ricoeur deals extensively with the way in which history and fiction, when taken together, offer the reply of a poetics of narrative to the aporias of time. Cf. Ricoeur, P 1988, *Time and Narrative, volume 3* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 99-240. For corresponding material, see Ricoeur, P 1984, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (The Aquinas Lecture, 1984) (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press).

21 Just before the table of contents in *Memory, History, Forgetting* there is a picture of a baroque bronze

this book resists easy summary, the broad argument of the book is presented in three clearly defined, but interlinked, parts. The first part of the book is, as the title suggests, devoted to a discussion of memory. Ricoeur's *phenomenology* of memory begins with an analysis of the object of memory (*le souvenir*) and goes on to deal with a given memory (*anamnesis*, recollection). The discussion then moves to memory as it is exercised (reflective memory), with reference to the use and abuse of memory. This section also includes a discussion of individual and collective memory. The second part of the book can be viewed as an *epistemology* of history. Here Ricoeur discusses the three phases of the historical operation: the stage of testimony and the archives (the documentary phase); the phase of explanation and understanding; and the historian's representation of the past on a scriptural level (the representative phase). Throughout this discussion Ricoeur is interested in the historian's intention to produce a truthful reconstruction of the past. The third part of the book is framed within a *hermeneutics* of the historical condition. In this section Ricoeur argues for a critical philosophy of history that is "attentive to the limits of historical knowledge that a certain hubris of historical science transgresses time and time again."²² In addition, this section contains a meditation on forgetting. The epilogue of the book deals with what Ricoeur terms "difficult forgiveness." Although *Memory, History, Forgetting* has – apart from the epilogue – three clearly distinguishable sections, Ricoeur emphasises that the sections do not constitute three separate books, but can be seen instead as three masts with interlocking but distinct sails that belong to the same ship setting off on a single itinerary. There is a common concern that "flows through the phenomenology of memory, the epistemology of history, and the hermeneutics of the social condition: the problematic of the representation of the past."²³

Given the focus of this paper on the dialectical relationship between memory and history, it is worthwhile to attend briefly to Ricoeur's discussion of this matter in a chapter on "History and Time" in the third section (on "The Historical Condition") of *Memory, History, Forgetting*. As already mentioned, Ricoeur argues that one cannot give priority to either memory or history. In the process he considers what he views as two intersecting and competing developments. On the one hand, there is the claim to dissolve the field of memory into history (which includes the development of a history of memory). On the other hand, there is the attempt of memory to historicise itself. Therefore Ricoeur is concerned with two questions, namely "Is Memory just a province of history?" and "Is Memory in charge of history?"²⁴ Ricoeur implicitly answers both

sculpture from the Wiblingen monastery in Ulm, Germany (it is also used on the cover of the French text). The heart of the problem and argument presented in *Memory, History, Forgetting* is well captured in this thought-provoking sculpture. Ricoeur offers a commentary in an adjacent note: "It is the dual figure of history. In the foreground, Kronos, the winged god. An old man with wretched brow: his left hand grips a large book, his right hand attempts to tear out a page. Behind and above, stands history itself. The gaze is grave and searching; one foot topples a horn of plenty from which spills the cascade of gold and silver, sign of instability; the left hand checks the act of the god, while the right hand displays history's instruments: the book, the inkpot, and the stylus." Ricoeur does not interpret this sculpture in more detail, but one can argue that Kronos as an old man represents the fleeing of time into the past. History, the other figure in the sculpture, holds the instruments for conquering time. With the passing of time, the past moves into oblivion and becomes, on a fundamental level, inaccessible to us. Nevertheless, we try to gain access to the past and interpret it, which is made possible by the fact that traces remain in memory. Through the writing, recording and reading of history, we try to represent – to make present again – the past by attending to these traces. It is between the fallible power of memory and the force of forgetfulness that Ricoeur places his critical philosophy of history/historiography.

22 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, xvi.

23 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, xvi.

24 See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 385-392. In dealing with the question "Memory, just a province of history?" Ricoeur mainly engages with an essay by Krzysztof Pomian entitled "De l'histoire,

questions, as can be expected, in the negative. The unending debates between the rival claims of history and memory need not, however, end in a paralysing aporia. Therefore Ricoeur writes: “the *history of memory* and the *historicization of memory* can confront one another in an open dialectic that preserves them from the passage to the limit, from that *hubris*, that would result from, on the one hand, history’s claim to reduce memory to the level of one of its objects, and on the other hand, the claim of collective memory to subjugate history by means of the abuses of memory that the commemorations imposed by political powers or by pressure groups can turn into.”²⁵

This quotation makes Ricoeur’s intentions clear. The hubris of history (that reduces memory to one of its objects) should be countered. On the other hand, the abuses of memory – the danger of too much memory – should be kept at bay. This requires prudent consciousness, a prudence that respects, among other things, what Ricoeur calls “the uncanniness of history.”²⁶

TOWARDS A RESPONSIBLE HISTORICAL HERMENEUTIC?

It is clear from the brief discussion above that Ricoeur affirms the need to maintain the dialectical relationship between memory and history. For Ricoeur memory is the matrix of history, and as such one cannot conceive of history without memory. This is not say that history is merely an extension of memory, but the stance that memory and history are antithetical should be rejected. In addition, the way in which history as a mode of responsible retrospection can police the abuse of memory ought to receive due emphasis.

In the Introduction to this article brief reference was made to some of the challenges involved for an historical engagement with South Africa’s apartheid past, and the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as one response to the reality of historical injustice in South Africa. For the historian working on these themes both documented and oral sources are important and this implies the need for some understanding of the complementary and conflicting relationship between memory and history. On a methodological level the nuanced work of Ricoeur provides valuable conceptual clarity in order to address these challenges in a responsible manner. In this section of the article I would like to limit the discussion to two aspects – much more can and should be said – that are especially pertinent en route to a responsible historical epistemology and hermeneutic in dealing with the past in contexts marked by conflict, violence and historical injustice, as well as by the concomitant search for reconciliation, truth and justice.

A first aspect relates to the need to emphasise the vulnerability of memory (while at the same, paradoxically, affirming the capability of memory). A second aspect relates to the importance of underlining the reality of the historical past through a careful historical or historiographical operation (while at the same time highlighting the mystery or strangeness of the past in the light of our historical condition).

The vulnerability of memory

The fact that memory plays an important role in the historical process is uncontested. The value of the plea for (collective) memory – made by scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs, Yosef

partie de la mémoire, à la mémoire, objet d’histoire,” while his main conversation partner in dealing with the question “Memory, in charge of history?” is the literary critic Richard Terdiman.

25 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 392, 392.

26 Cf. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 393. Under the heading of “The Uncanniness of History” Ricoeur adopts Freud’s notion of *Unheimlichkeit* in his discussion of the influential work of Maurice Halbwachs, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi and Pierre Nora. Ricoeur concludes his informative discussion by saying that “the ‘uncanniness’ of history prevails, even as it attempts to understand the reasons why it is contested by commemorative memory” (*Memory, History, Forgetting*, 411).

Yerushalmi, and Pierre Nora – as a challenge to reductive understandings of historiography can hardly be overestimated. But we should also keep in mind that memory is a slippery and ambiguous notion. Even a committed advocate for memory such as Yosef Yerushalmi writes at the start of his justly acclaimed book *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*: “Memory is always problematic, usually deceptive, sometimes treacherous ... We ourselves are periodically aware that memory is among the most fragile and capricious of our faculties.”²⁷ Memory is indeed at once fragile and potent. The ambivalent potential of memory – also for contexts associated with the public legitimisation of historical injustice – should be noted, for, as W. James Booth perceptively observes, “Memory has fuelled merciless violent strife, and it has been at the core of reconciliation and reconstruction. It has been used to justify great crimes, and yet it is central to the pursuit of justice.”²⁸

Ricoeur too is deeply aware of what he refers to as the vulnerability of memory, acknowledging in the process the possible abuses of memory. According to Ricoeur, the abuses of natural memory²⁹ occur on three levels, namely the pathological, therapeutic level (referred to by Ricoeur as “blocked memory”), the practical level (described as “manipulated memory”) and the ethico-political level (termed “obligated memory”).

On the therapeutic level Ricoeur refers to the vulnerability of memory in the light of what he calls wounded or even sick memory, linking blocked memory to words like “traumatism,” “wound,” “scar” etc. Ricoeur’s discussion here – which engages two of Freud’s influential essays, namely “Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten” (“Remembering, Repeating, and Working-Through”) and “Trauer und Melancholie” (“Mourning and Melancholia”) – is worth considering in the important discourse that brings memory into conversation with notions such as “trauma,” “narrative” and “forgiveness.” In lives and communities scarred by violence and injustice, the presence of blocked memory can indeed be something that needs to be worked through, hence the call by many for “the healing of memories.”³⁰ Ricoeur makes a further important remark about “symbolic wounds” that requires serious consideration, especially in post-conflict situations: “What we celebrate under the title of founding events are, essentially, acts of violence legitimated after the fact by a precarious state of right. What was glory for some was humiliation for other. In this way, symbolic wounds calling for healing are stored in the archives

27 Yerushalmi, Y H 1982, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press), 5.

28 Booth, W J 2006, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), ix.

29 Ricoeur also refers in his phenomenology of memory – before turning to natural memory – to the abuses of what he calls “artificial memory.” See *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 58-68.

30 For some important perspectives engaging South African contexts, see the essays by an interdisciplinary team of scholars collected in Goboda-Madikizela, P and Van der Merwe, C 2009, *Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press). As the “Preface” notes, this collection “explores the relation between trauma and memory, and the complex, interconnected issues of trauma and narrative (testimonial and literary). It examines transgenerational trauma, memory as the basis for dialogue and reconciliation in divided societies, memorialisation and the changing role of memory in the aftermath of mass trauma, mourning and the potential of forgiveness to heal the enduring effects of mass trauma” (xi). For a valuable earlier collection of essays that includes some theological and ethical perspectives, see Botman, H R and Peterson (eds.), R M 1996, *To Remember and to Heal: Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau). For an important recent publication on dealing with the past in an intercultural context, see Diawara, M, Lategan, B, and Rösen, J 2010, *Historical Memory in Africa: Dealing with the past, Reaching for the future in an intercultural context* (New York: Berghahn Books).

of the collective memory.”³¹

Ricoeur places on the practical level – the level of manipulated or instrumentalised memory – the important problem of memory and (personal and collective) identity. He is especially interested in the way in which memory is mobilised in the service of the quest and demand for identity. As he writes elsewhere, “the diseases of memory are basically diseases of identity.”³² The fragility or vulnerability of memory is therefore interconnected with the fragility of identity.

In addition to the abuses of blocked and manipulated memory, Ricoeur discusses possible abuses on an ethico-political level as he engages the emotional topic of the alleged “duty to remember.” For Ricoeur it may even be that this duty to remember “constitutes, at one and the same time, the epitome of good use and of abuse in the exercise of memory.”³³ In this context Ricoeur brings the notion of justice into play: “The duty of memory is the duty to do justice, through memory, to an other than the self.”³⁴ Here, as in Ricoeur’s project as a whole, some clear ethical concerns presents themselves.

Moreover, we should note that Ricoeur does not approach memory merely from the viewpoint of its deficiencies, but also in the light of its capacities.³⁵ For our reference to the past we have no other resource than memory itself. Consequently, Ricoeur emphasises that our acknowledgement of the unreliability of memory must be interwoven with the admission that memory is our one and only resource to signify the past character of what we declare we remember. The deficiencies of memory should thus not be viewed from the outset as pathological and dysfunctional, “but as the shadowy underside of the bright region of memory.”³⁶ As Ricoeur states: “To put it bluntly, we have nothing better than memory to signify that something has taken place, has occurred, has happened *before* we declare that we remember it.”³⁷ This implies, in our view, that any reflection on the relationship between memory and history should not minimise the tension brought to the relationship by a strong emphasis on memory as an essential category in the attempt to offer a reliable representation of the past.

The reality of the historical past

One can say that Ricoeur views memory with both suspicion and trust. The abuses of memory are clearly acknowledged, but the deficiencies of memory are not a reason to view memory as a mere province of history or to take refuge in the dream of historical objectivity. The objectivist historical mentality with its over-confident claims regarding value-free, dispassionate and “objective” accounts of the past, on the basis of an inflated confidence in the power of primary

31 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 79.

32 Ricoeur, P, “Memory and Forgetting” in Kearney, R & Dooley, M (eds), *Questioning Ethics: Contemporary Debates in Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999), 7.

33 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 87.

34 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 89.

35 The themes of fallibility and capability are important for Ricoeur’s philosophical project. See, for instance, his earlier work *Fallible Man* (Chicago: Regnery, 1965). In an interview with Sorin Antohi, Ricoeur refers to a move in his philosophical anthropology from fallibility to capability: “In the intermediate book between *Memory, History, Forgetting* and *Time and Narrative*, namely, *Oneself as Another*, the central concept is man as he is able and capable. What man *can* do: I *can* speak, I *can* narrate, I *can* act, I *can* feel responsible ... therefore my last book on memory, history and forgetting is related not to fallible man but to capable man, this is to say that man is capable of making memory and making history” (Ricoeur, P & Antohi, S, “Memory, history, forgiveness: A dialogue between Paul Ricoeur and Sorin Antohi.” *Janus Head* 2005: 8/1, 17). See also Mechteld Jansen’s chapter on “Fragiliteit: Breekbaarheid en Kwetsbaarheid” in Jansen, M M 2002, *Talen naar God: Wegwijzers bij Paul Ricoeur* (Dronten: Uitgeverij Narratio), 222-273.

36 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21.

37 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 21.

sources to provide access to the past, should be resisted. While one must rightly challenge a certain form of objectivist historiography, since there is no way around subjectivity, we should remember too – as Paul Ricoeur has already argued in his early essay “Objectivity and Subjectivity in History” – that “there is good and bad subjectivity and we expect the very exercise of the historian’s craft to decide between them.”³⁸ Although the debate surrounding objectivity in history can easily become stale, it is important to keep in mind that the “sources” do not tell the complete story and even the best archives offer us a limited window onto the past.³⁹ Access to archives and primary sources does not absolve us from the task of *interpreting* the sources and placing them within meaningful interpretive frameworks and narrative configurations.

In *Memory, History, Forgetting* Ricoeur – who has a stake in the autonomy of historical knowledge in relation to what he calls “the mnemonic phenomenon”⁴⁰ – engages the non-chronological movement from the archive to historiography (as the writing of history) as he seeks to provide a coherent epistemology of history. In the process he embarks on an extensive description of what he calls, following Michel de Certeau, “the historiographical operation.”⁴¹ Without giving a detailed discussion here,⁴² we can mention that Ricoeur describes the historiographical operation as consisting of three phases. These three phases are not seen by him as three distinct chronological stages, but as “methodological moments, interwoven with one another.”⁴³ The first phase of the historiographical operation (the documentary phase) ranges from the reports by eyewitnesses to the constituting of archives, which aims at establishing documentary proof. But these documents in the archives are themselves derived from the testimony of memories. Thus history starts with testimony, and testimonies are collected, preserved and consulted in the archive. Towards the end of his discussion of the documentary phase, Ricoeur asks rhetorically whether documentary proof is more remedy than poison for the constitutive weakness of testimony. This question points to the need for the explanation/understanding phase,⁴⁴ since there are no documents produced or consulted without some prior questions, and no questions are generated without an explanatory project. The third phase that Ricoeur discusses in his portrayal of the historiographical operation is that of the historian’s representation in written form. To mark the specificity of the third phase, Ricoeur prefers not to speak of historiography, but of literary or scriptural representation. Such representation

38 Ricoeur, P, *History and Truth* (Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1965), 22. For Ricoeur “subjectivity” does not merely refer to the historian’s subjectivity, but also to the idea that “the *object* of history is the human *subject* itself” (40).

39 For a critical engagement with the notion of “the archive” see Derrida, J, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Cf. also Vosloo, R R. “Archiving Otherwise: Some Remarks on Memory and Historical Responsibility”. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* XXXI/2, 2005: 379-399.

40 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 136.

41 Ricoeur acknowledges that his use of the term “historiographical operation” has been influenced by Michel de Certeau’s contribution to the project edited by Jacques le Goff and Pierre Nora under the title *Faire de l’histoire*. See Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 136. For a revised version of De Certeau’s essay, see De Certeau, M, *The Writing of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 56-113.

42 For a more extended discussion of Ricoeur’s description of “the historiographical operation,” see Vosloo, R R 2011, “The writing of history as remedy or poison? Some Remarks on Paul Ricoeur’s Reflection on Memory, Identity and ‘the historiographical operation’” in Jonker, L (ed.) 2011, *Texts, Contexts, Readings: Explorations into Historiography and Identity Negotiation in Persian Period Jehud* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck Verlag), 11-30.

43 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 137.

44 Ricoeur refers to the second phase of the historical operation as the explanation/understanding phase, because he wants to challenge the dichotomy that is often created between explanation and understanding (as famously posed by Dilthey in the nineteenth century).

must understand itself as “standing for” (*représentance*, the German *Darstellung*), thus it has intentionality. This intended “something” makes history the learned heir of memory. In this process of intentional representation, narrative form plays an important role. Ricoeur also acknowledges the rhetorical aspect of staging a narrative. Ricoeur is also interested in the confrontation between historical and fictional narrative. What is at stake for Ricoeur in his discussion of the respective relationships between representation and narrative, representation and rhetoric, and representation and fiction, is the capacity of historical discourse to represent the past. This intentional aim, the “standing for,” of history is important as it indicates the expectation that historical knowledge constitutes attempted reconstructions of past events. This is the contract between the writer and the reader. Unlike the contract between a writer of fiction and his or her reader, the author and the reader of a historical text “agree that it will deal with situations, events, connections and characters who once really existed, that is, before the narrative of them is put together.”⁴⁵

The brief discussion above points to Ricoeur’s affirmation of what can be called, following the title of his “Aquinas lecture” (1984), “the reality of the historical past.”⁴⁶ Although Ricoeur affirms the role of narrative in both historical-scholarly and literary representations of the past, the difference between history and fiction should be respected. This implies, among other things, that critical history (via a coherent and responsible epistemology) has a role to play alongside, and sometimes in conflict with, memory. While memory is the matrix of history, it is not the master of history. The “autonomy” of history should be acknowledged. At the same time the affirmation that history seeks to represent the “reality” of the past should not lead to the type of over-confidence that does not duly respect the mystery or the uncanniness of the past. The messy and recalcitrant nature of the past ought to challenge any attempt that presumes to equate our historical representations with the past. The strangeness of the past should keep haunting history, with historians even underlining this strangeness on a more conscious level (also as they engage contexts marked and scarred by historical injustice). In this regard a remark in the book *There was this goat* comes to mind. Grappling with the irregular and marginalised testimony of Mrs Konile before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the authors comment: “These ‘strange’ testimonies underline the importance of refraining from ‘un-strange-ing’ the strange – to allow it to be strange – but within its original logical and coherent context. Accommodation of ‘strangeness’ would keep the spaces of tolerance open for many people emerging from contexts of conflict and estrangement.”⁴⁷

CONCLUSION: THE RECEPTION OF MEMORY TAUGHT BY HISTORY, AND THE WITNESS TO JUSTICE

An analysis of Ricoeur’s discussion of the relationship between memory and history clearly reveals that he does not want to privilege any one of these modes of retrospection, but that he wants to affirm their dialectical relationship. Memory is not a province of history and history is not merely historicised memory. The convincing power of *Memory, History, Forgetting* lies in part in the way in which Ricoeur is able to maintain this tension within the context of the threats posed by our “being-in-time”-ness and forgetting. For any responsible historiographical project Ricoeur’s engagement with these themes hold much promise. The question can be asked, though, whether the relevance of Ricoeur’s treatment of memory, history and forgetting stretches beyond the writing of history.

45 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 275.

46 Cf. Ricoeur, *The Reality of the Historical Past* (1984).

47 Krog, Mpolweni, Ratele, *There was this goat*, 100.

With this question in mind, a lecture Ricoeur presented in English under the title “Memory, history, oblivion” in March 2003 at a conference on “Haunting Memories? History in Europe after Authoritarianism” at the Central European University in Budapest makes for interesting reading. In this lecture Ricoeur engages critically with his own focus in *Memory, History, Forgetting* on the *writing* of history (in line with the lexicon definition of historiography). In Ricoeur’s words:

“What I am proposing today is a shift in the prevailing standpoint, a shift from writing to reading, or, to put it in broader terms, from the literary elaboration of the historical work to its reception, either private or public, along the lines of a hermeneutics of reception. This shift would give an opportunity to extract from their linear treatment in the book some problems which clearly concern the reception of history rather than the writing of history and to emphasize them. The issues at stake clearly concern memory, no longer as a mere matrix of history, but as the *reappropriation* of the historical past by a memory taught by history and often wounded by history.”⁴⁸

Ricoeur then elaborates on what he views as the most interesting consequences of this shift concerning the relationship between memory and history. This relationship is now treated not in a linear but in a circular way, with memory now appearing twice in the course of the analysis, first as the matrix of history (from the standpoint of history-writing), and later as the channel of the reappropriation of the historical past. This is not to disregard the linear account in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, since without this movement no reappropriation of the past is possible. However, Ricoeur points to the importance of memory as the reception of the historical past.

This focus on memory as the reception of the historical past has some important implications. In closing I would like to point to the fact that, among other things, it reminds us that questions regarding the relationship between memory and history cannot be separated from certain ethical concerns, hence the need for an ethics of memory and history.⁴⁹ Some important questions therefore present themselves, such as: Whose memories of the past are remembered and privileged? Are those recalling the memories or witnesses of the past today engaging those memories through history (i.e. through a responsible historical epistemology and hermeneutic)? Are those witnesses today who are receiving or reappropriating memories from the past themselves witnessing for justice? With whom – and in which communities and as part of which tradition – are we grappling with our interwoven and often contested constructions of the past?

In our Introduction we referred to Krog, Molweni and Ratele’s investigation of the testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile, who through her seemingly incoherent testimony occupied a specific space in documented history (with her name not included in the index of the Truth Commission’s website and whose name is misspelt in the official transcriptions). Yet they witness to her memory by trying “to understand this unmentioned, incorrectly ID-ed, misspelt, incoherently testifying, translated and carelessly transcribed woman.”⁵⁰ This reminds us that we should be sensitive to the way in which representations of the past have led to exclusion and victimisation. As Ricoeur comments: “We need, therefore, a kind of parallel history of, let us say, victimisation, which would counter the history of success and victory. To memorise the victims of history – the sufferers, the humiliated, the forgotten – should be a task for all of us.”⁵¹

In our continual reflection on the relationship between memory and history, we are therefore continually challenged to narrate the historical past other-wise. In this process we would do well

48 Ricoeur, P, “Memory, history, oblivion”. See www.fondsriceur.fr, 1,2.

49 See, for instance, Wyshogrod, E, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Margalit, A, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Carr, D, Flynn, R T and Makkreel, R, *The Ethics of History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2004).

50 Krog, Mpolweni, Ratele, *There was this goat*, 4.

51 Kearney and Dooley, *Questioning Ethics*, 10,11.

to remember the words of Isak Dinesen that Hannah Arendt uses at the beginning of the chapter on "Action" in *The Human Condition* (and that Ricoeur is also fond of quoting): "All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them."⁵²

KEY WORDS

Memory

History

Justice

Ricoeur

Historical hermeneutics

⁵² Arendt, H 1958, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press). Cf. Ricoeur, "Memory, history, oblivion," 9.

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Paper dolls: Vincent Brümmer's notion of autonomy

ABSTRACT

Autonomy is what may be called a “chromosomal doctrine” insofar as it has a profound, non-reciprocal shaping effect on other doctrines within a theological system. This article provides a case study in chromosomal doctrine from the theology of Vincent Brümmer. The analysis detects two strands in Brümmer’s notion of autonomy and ways in which they shape Brümmer’s concept of God as a “vulnerable” relationship seeker. Specifically, Brümmer interprets “two-way ability” as a condition of autonomy, and autonomy as a condition of “a relationship of love.” These two strands lead Brümmer to the conclusion that “God necessarily assumes vulnerability in relation to [His creatures].” This study proposes a modification of Brümmer’s notion of autonomy to avoid reducing creatures to indifferent agents, while maintaining God’s unique power to reform human hearts. Can the Creator cause his creatures to love without violating our autonomy or turning us into ‘Paper Dolls’?

Autonomy is what may be called a “chromosomal doctrine.” The metaphor holds insofar as certain notions occupy such a rudimentary level within a theological system that they predictably shape many doctrinal contours of that system (with an almost *genetic* determinism). Such theological chromosomes often carry a ‘one way’ causal power akin to biological chromosomes. As chromosome pairs 15 and 19 in humans may play a strong role in causing one’s eye color (without one’s eye color, in turn, shaping those chromosome pairs), so certain doctrines seem to largely determine the hue of other doctrines in a non-reciprocal way. For example, a theologian who makes a Platonic distinction between the *real* us and our transitory material bodies would likely manifest hues of docetism as his Christological vision forms. His docetism did not make him a Platonist; his Platonism made him a docetist. Evidence for the existence of such chromosomal doctrines can be found in the fact that theology develops into more-or-less coherent and distinct systems through the centuries (some systems as diverse from each other as a lion from a tuna fish). Different chromosomal doctrines will generate a whole other “animal.” This article offers a case study in chromosomal doctrine from the theology of Vincent Brümmer. Specifically, we explore Brümmer’s notion of autonomy and its powerful shaping effect on his concept of God as a “vulnerable” relationship seeker.

1. THE TWOFOLD STRUCTURE OF AUTONOMY

As chromosomes are composed of DNA strands, we may ask: what are the “DNA strands” within Brümmer’s chromosomal doctrine of autonomy? In *The Model of Love*, Brümmer posits “two-way ability” as a necessary condition of autonomy:

Since choice is always between alternative courses of action, doing something out of choice entails the two-way ability to do both what one chooses to do and to act otherwise as well. For this reason freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism: one cannot choose to

do the unavoidable since the unavoidable leaves no alternative but to do it.¹

Brümmer clarifies his notion of autonomy as a form of indeterminism, or a “libertarian” view of free will. In the libertarian view of free will as spelled out by Brümmer (along with ancient Greek philosophers and many contemporary theologians²), an agent has an irreducible power to act as a first-mover to perform or refrain from performing a given action. If we lose this “two-way ability” (or what has been branded “the ability to do otherwise,” “the power of contrary choice,” or Harry Frankfurt’s technical term, “the Principle of Alternate Possibilities”), then we are no longer “autonomous” in Brümmer’s meaning of the term.³

To “two-way ability” Brümmer adds a second strand in his doctrine of autonomy. He posits autonomy as a necessary condition of meaningful love relationships. He illustrates this with lyrics from the song ‘Paper Doll’:

I’m goin’ to buy a paper doll that I can call my own,
A doll that other fellows cannot steal.
And then those flirty flirty guys
With their flirty flirty eyes
Will have to flirt with dollies that are real.
When I come home at night she will be waiting.
She’ll be the truest doll in all the world.
I’d rather have a paper doll to call my own
Than have a fickle-minded real live girl.

Brümmer observes,

Far from being a love song, this is a lament on the absence of love. In the words of Sartre: If the beloved is transformed into an automaton, the lover finds himself alone—alone with his paper doll. It is clear that a relationship of love can only be maintained as long as the personal integrity and free autonomy of *both* partners is upheld.⁴

Brümmer defines autonomy as the antithesis of coercion. An agent is either autonomous or coercively reduced to an “automaton,” and automatons do not make good lovers. While other DNA strands exist in Brümmer’s chromosomal doctrine of autonomy,⁵ these two strands—autonomy as a “two-way ability” that forms a necessary condition for a “relationship of love”—form the focus of the present analysis.

What shaping effect does this twofold structure of autonomy have on Brümmer’s theology? How might it “color” his understanding of God as a relationship seeker? Says Brümmer:

Since love is a reciprocal relation, God is also dependent on the freedom and responsibility

1 Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 45.

2 For an extensive bibliography of libertarian free will in Hellenistic thought and contemporary analysis see Thaddeus Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil: Does Authentic Love Require Free Will?* in *Currents of Encounter*, vol. 41 (Amsterdam: Rodopi Editions 2011), 13-18.

3 Harry Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 (1969) 829. A small handful of contemporary libertarians have broken with the mainstream libertarian view by denying PAP as a necessary condition for freedom. See David Hunt, “Moral Responsibility and Buffered Alternatives” in *Free Will and Moral Responsibility*, ed. Peter French and Howard Wettstein (Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 126-145.

4 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 161. Emphasis in original.

5 A third DNA strand in Brümmer’s notion of autonomy (and one that lies beyond the scope of this study), is autonomy as a *divine gift* (See *The Model of Love*, 162-63). In viewing autonomy as a divine gift, Brümmer aligns himself with long-standing traditions in Hellenistic philosophy (See Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 17 fn. 41-42).

of human persons in order to enter into a loving relation with them... Nevertheless, in creating human persons in order to love them God necessarily assumes vulnerability in relation to them.⁶

There is an inescapable element of risk for *anyone* seeking “a relationship of love” with autonomous agents, the risk that their active “two-way ability” will choose *against* the relationship. Brümmer is far from alone in his contention that love requires autonomy and autonomy requires vulnerability, *even for God*. This contention is behind John Sanders’ “God Who Risks,”⁷ Geddes MacGregor’s theory of divine *kenosis* in which God’s love “is the abdication of power,”⁸ and Simone Weil’s view of creation as an act of divine “abandonment” to make room for our “free and autonomous existence.”⁹ Brümmer adds:

[I]f God did not grant us the ability to sin and cause affliction to him and to one another, we would not have the kind of free and autonomous existence necessary to enter into a relation of love with God and with one another.¹⁰

Why does autonomy as a chromosomal doctrine manifest so consistently as what may be called the “trait doctrine” of divine vulnerability? An answer can be found by positing a scenario in which autonomy functions chromosomally *without* manifesting the trait doctrine of divine vulnerability. The theologian could simply deny that God seeks “a relationship of love” with his creatures. The relationally disengaged deity of Epicurus, Voltaire, and other deists could remain absolutely *invulnerable* before his autonomous creatures to the extent that he is apathetic about relating with them. Such a blocking mechanism is, of course, not present in any Christian system. Any Christian system must reckon with the reality of a God who *is* love and who uniquely (and even painfully) demonstrates His love in the person and work of Jesus. Once Brümmer’s twofold notion of autonomy operates at the chromosomal level of a theology, the theologian *must* embrace some doctrine of divine vulnerability if he seeks to understand God as a God of love.

2. THE RELATIVITY OF AUTONOMY

Many biblical passages seem difficult to square with a doctrine of divine vulnerability. The God of Isaiah 46:10 says, “My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.” Job says of God, “I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted” (Job 42:2). The Psalmist sings to a God who “does all that he pleases” (Ps. 115:3) and Paul’s worshipped a God who “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11). Such passages about a seemingly *invulnerable* God ought to open us to ask: Is it possible for humans to be autonomous and God to be loving, without requiring that He “necessarily assumes vulnerability”?¹¹

On Brümmer’s twofold view of autonomy, no such possibility is open. Since Brümmer’s autonomy requires “two-way ability,” we must have the power to resist all of God’s pursuits for our hearts, and God “necessarily assumes vulnerability in relation to [us]” (emphasis added). Are other accounts of “autonomy” available to the Christian theologian that do not lead “necessarily” to divine vulnerability? To approach this question and to further clarify

6 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 162-63.

7 See John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

8 See Geddes MacGregor, *He Who Lets Us Be: A Theology of Love* (New York, NY: The Seabury Press, 1975), 333.

9 Simone Weil, *Gateway to God* (London: Fontana Press, 1974), 80.

10 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 163.

11 Affirming the invulnerability of God is compatible with a God who genuinely grieves at His creatures’ self-destructive choices. For analysis see Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 83-101.

Brümmer's perspective, we must recognize the relativity of the term autonomy (and its synonym "freedom"). "Autonomy" and "freedom" (which I am using interchangeably) are abstract nouns seeking a concrete object bridged by the preposition "from." An agent can have freedom *from* a debilitating disease (often expressed shorthand as "health"), freedom *from* work (expressed shorthand as "vacation"), freedom *from* parental control (expressed shorthand as "college"), or freedom from the luxury of doing things your own way (expressed shorthand as "marriage"). Robust accounts of freedom require us to specify what precisely the agent is free *from*. It is this vast relativity of freedom, an abstract noun that can be linked by the preposition "from" to such a diverse range of objects that gives the notion its perennial and pan-cultural appeal.

"Freedom from *x*" in the above contexts is synonymous with the first strand of Brümmer's notion of autonomy, namely, "two-way ability." Freedom can be expressed formally as:

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from some object, *X*, to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *X*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

We can apply this formula to Brümmer's notion of autonomy by stipulating *X* in four distinct ways:

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Machine] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *the physical world*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Gunman] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *coercive persons*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Heart] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *his internal character propensities*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Some agent, Jones, has freedom from [the Reformer] to do some action, *A*, if relative to the cumulative causal powers of *divine action*, Jones can still choose *A* or refrain from choosing *A*.

Failing to specify "two-way ability" with these relative clauses may cause us to overlook significant ways in which an agent can be simultaneously free and not free with regard to the same action. Consider a case in which a friend offers Jones a mug of ale. It is *logically possible* for Jones to have Freedom from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer, while lacking Freedom from the Heart. Relative to the physical world, coercive persons, and divine action, Jones can drink or refrain from drinking. He is free insofar as mechanistic physical factors do not determine him to drink. He is free insofar as his friend does not hold him at gunpoint forcing him to drink. He is free insofar as God has not predestined him to drink. It is possible for those three freedoms to be co-exemplified, while simultaneously Jones' internal character propensities are such that he cannot refrain from the mug of ale. Perhaps the beliefs, desires, and aversions that form his "Heart" leave Jones no alternative but to drink.

Would Jones still have "freedom" in such a scenario? Recall Brümmer's claim that, "freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism: one cannot choose to do the unavoidable since the unavoidable leaves no alternative but to do it."¹² Jones does not meet Brümmer's libertarian conditions of freedom. However, this conclusion overlooks significant ways in which Jones is free with regard to drinking the offered ale. Perhaps Jones has had his head filled at the university

12 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45.

with Jacques Monod's *Chance and Necessity* in which "man is a machine."¹³ Perhaps he has rationalized hurtful moral patterns in his life with the view that, as a biological robot, he just cannot help it. Jones' Freedom from the Machine is significant to the extent that he can take responsibility for his actions and is no longer reduced to "a digestive tube" (Pierre Cabanis), "a being purely physical" (Paul d'Holbach), "a bulb with thousands of roots" (G.C. Lichtenberg), "a package of tepid, half-rotted viscera" (Louis Ferdinand Celine), or "just an aggregate of trillions of cells" (Jean Ronstand). Such Freedom is highly significant, *even if Jones lacks Freedom from the Heart*.

Or perhaps Jones was raised in an authoritarian, prohibitionist home. Being offered ale where he can express his heart's strongest desires without any Gunmen forcing him to refrain is a significant freedom *regardless of whether or not he can choose contrary to his strongest desires*. Indeed, Freedom from the Gunman is highly significant to slaves or citizens living under tyrants. Such freedom is so significant that many are willing to have their own blood shed in resistance to Gunmen. They do not pay the ultimate price for Freedom from the Heart—two-way ability *relative to their own desires* – but for Freedom from the Gunman – two-way ability to express their own desires *relative to coercive authorities*.

On this relative analysis of freedom, the answer to whether Jones is free is both 'yes' and 'no.' Yes, Jones has Freedom from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer since the causal forces of the physical world, coercive agents, and divine action leave room for Jones to exercise two-way ability. On the other hand, we may consistently answer 'no,' given Jones' lack of two-way ability relative to his own Heart. On this relative view, it is logically possible for both determinism and indeterminism to hold true in a single agent with regard to the same action. This compatibility can be seen in the fact that the two claims below do not entail a logical contradiction:

C1: Jones *necessarily* drinks the ale *relative to his own heart*.

C2: Jones *freely* drinks the ale *relative to the physical world, coercive agents, and divine action*.

The advocate of libertarian free will has two foreseeable moves at this point: First, he could argue that C1 and C2 do entail a logical contradiction. Yet the logical contradiction only emerges if we strip C1 and C2 of their relative clauses. A more promising libertarian response would be to accept C1 and C2 as logically consistent, but deny that, *on the whole*, Jones is significantly free. This response can be seen in the words of libertarian, Clark Pinnock:

It is not enough to say that a free choice is one which, while not externally compelled, is nonetheless determined by the psychological state of the agent's brain or the nature of the agent's desiring. To say that Harry stole the candy bars because he wanted them is obvious—the question is, could he have refrained from stealing them in spite of his desire? The idea of moral responsibility requires us to believe that actions are not determined either internally or externally.¹⁴

Pinnock clarifies that a libertarian account of "two-way ability" requires more than mere Freedom

13 Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 180.

14 Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 149. For similar libertarian accounts see Robert Kane, *Free Will and Values* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 53; and J.P. Moreland and Scott Rae, *Body & Soul* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 126.

from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer. It requires the agent to also exercise Freedom from the Heart. “Harry” only freely steals candy bars if “he could have refrained from stealing them in spite of his desire.” Given these requirements, we can see why the libertarian would not consider Jones significantly free when offered ale. Since his Heart leaves him no alternative but to drink, Jones cannot be considered a significantly free agent. A libertarian understanding of “two-way ability” (the first strand in Brümmer’s notion of autonomy) entails Freedom from the Heart.

3. “TWO-WAY ABILITY” AND TOO MUCH AUTONOMY

Returning to our genetic metaphor, chromosomes are made up of DNA strands, which are themselves composed of four base sequences (a particular arrangement of adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine, or A-G-C-T). We can detect a similar four base sequence in the “two-way ability” strand of Brümmer’s notion of autonomy. Because “freedom of choice is incompatible with determinism”¹⁵ Brümmer’s strand of “two-way ability” requires *all four* freedoms above (e.g., if Jones only has Freedom from the Machine, the Gunman, and the Reformer, but lacks Freedom from the Heart, then Jones is determined and, thus, lacks “freedom of choice”). Brümmer’s “two-way ability” strand may be pictured as an M-G-H-R sequence (Freedom from the Machine, Gunman, Heart, and Reformer). In the remainder of this analysis, I argue that the Freedom from the Heart and the Reformer (i.e., the H and R in his Brümmer’s strand of “two-way ability”) carry significant problems. I will argue that a M-G sequence (“two-way ability” understood as Freedom from the Machine and the Gunman, but *not* Freedom from the Heart and Reformer) affords us with an alternative notion of autonomy that does not generate such problems.

I begin with the H-base in Brümmer’s sequencing of “two-way ability.” Upon closer look, Freedom from the Heart seems to leave the agent autonomous not only from forces *outside himself*, but also from those *within himself* in a problematic way. To illustrate the problem let us grant Jones Freedom from the Heart. Jones’ friend offers the mug, at which point Jones’ “self” (with all of its desires for ale, his aversions to thirst, his propensities for merrymaking, his deliberations about wanting to unwind after a long day at the office) begins to culminate as a pro-ale choice. If these internal factors *determine* Jones to reach for the mug, then he no longer possesses Freedom from the Heart (and cannot be autonomous in Brümmer’s sense of the term). Jones must remain autonomous enough from that “self” to resist its pro-ale push.

Suppose that this “deeper self”¹⁶—the Jones who remains autonomous enough to resist the push of pro-ale Jones—does, in fact, choose to go along with the desires of pro-ale Jones. Did this autonomous Jones himself have desires that were in favor of pro-ale Jones? Was autonomous Jones himself *pro* (in favor of) pro-ale Jones? If not, then why, from such a state of indifference, did autonomous Jones go along with pro-ale Jones? If so, then Freedom from the Heart requires us to posit a still-more-autonomous Jones who can resist the push of this pro-ale Jones. Where the story goes from here is predictable. We are left with either a Jones who is truly autonomous from all desires, who is *pro-nothing* and, thereby, profoundly indifferent, or a Jones who is pro-pro-pro-pro, *ad infinitum*. Neither agent seems to be a prime candidate for making significantly free choices.¹⁷

15 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45.

16 See Susan Wolf, *Freedom within Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 14.

17 The libertarian may reply that Jones may still choose *for* a desire. However, there is a qualitative difference between *desirously choosing* and *desirelessly choosing for a desire*. In the first case, precluded by libertarianism, the desire is an intrinsic property of the agent. In the second case, the desire does not

Gottfried Leibniz and Harry Frankfurt clarify this critique of Freedom from the Heart. Leibniz illustrates Freedom from the Heart as follows:

One will have it that the will alone is active and supreme, and one is wont to imagine it to be like a queen seated on her throne, whose minister of state is the understanding, while the passion are her courtiers or favourite ladies... [The queen] can vacillate between the arguments of the ministers and the suggestions of her favourites, even rejecting both, making them keep silence or speak, and giving them audience as it seems good to her.¹⁸

We may add detail to this Leibnizian picture with Frankfurt's distinction between first and higher-order desires,¹⁹ and reach the following scenario: Suppose we place Jones on the throne. A first-order desire—the desire to drink the offered ale—makes a case from King Jones' courtyard. If the King uses his active power to royally endorse this first-order desire, then he either desires to choose the first-order desire or he does not. If not, then King Jones is indifferent toward his courtiers that beckon him to drink. If, on the other hand, he *does* desire to choose this first-order desire, then Brümmer's notion of "two-way ability" demands that this second-order desire is itself resistible. For this second-order desire to be resistible, King Jones must preside over it in such a way that he may royally endorse or reject it. Thus, the second-order desire moves outside of King Jones the choice-maker, and into the courtyard with all other desires. If he chooses in favor of that second-order desire, then he either desires that second-order desire or he does not. If not, then we have slipped back into indifference. If so, then that third-order desire must be resistible (in which case it joins ranks with all other desires in the courtyard).

This tiresome story forces us into a dilemma in which either:

- 1) King Jones desirelessly (i.e., indifferently) chooses to royally endorse the first-order desire to drink. Or:
- 2) King Jones faces the impossible task of royally endorsing an infinite amount of higher-order desires.

Libertarians have opted for the first option. This explains why libertarians throughout history (e.g., Schopenhauer in his *Prize Essay*, Descartes in his *Meditations*, and Melabranche in his *Search After Truth*) have used the term "indifference" to describe their views. Although most contemporary libertarians jettison this term, Brümmer aligns himself with historic libertarians when he affirms that, "'liberty of indifference' ... should be taken as specifying a necessary condition for an adequate concept of moral freedom."²⁰

What happens, however, if we remove Freedom from the Heart from our concept of two-way ability? In this case, we can retain the agent's two-way ability relative to the Machine and the Gunman, but are no longer driven to the conclusion of an indifferent agent.²¹ The case for removing Freedom from the Heart from our understanding of two-way ability becomes more compelling when seen in relation to Brümmer's second strand of autonomy—autonomy as a condition for "a relationship of love." If autonomy requires Freedom from the Heart, and Freedom from the Heart, in turn, leads to an indifferent agent, then we face a problem in this

enter into the agent's innermost nexus of active power, and we are left with an indifferent agent.

18 Leibniz, *Theodicy*, tr. E.M. Huggard (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, [1710] 1985), 421.

19 See Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *Free Will*, 2nd ed., ed. Gary Watson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81-95.

20 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 45 fn. 7.

21 We can add that indifferent agents bear little resemblance to the moral agents we meet in the Bible. See Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 162-163.

second strand. Indifference becomes a *necessary condition* of love. Yet, as I argue elsewhere, “being a lover entails a desire for the welfare of the beloved.”²² Brümmer concurs in seeing “a policy of commitment in relation to the beloved” as a distinguishing hallmark of love relations.²³ A lover can no more be indifferent toward his beloved’s welfare than a Dodgers fan can be indifferent about the Dodgers’ Major League Baseball record. An indifferent agent does not merit the title of “true lover.”

To avoid the problem of indifference, let us consider Jones as a father who loves without Freedom of the Heart. If Jones loves his daughters, and yet his Heart as a father is such that he cannot refrain from loving his daughters, would we dismiss such love as inauthentic? We cannot easily dismiss such love. Suppose by contrast that Jones’ daughters craftily install some Artificial Affection hardware in his brain while he sleeps, a physical mechanism that *forces* him to exhibit love-behavior. The physical necessity and coercion in this scenario strip Jones of autonomy and his love of meaning. To the extent that Jones’ daughters remove their father’s Freedom from the Machine and Gunman, they find themselves alone with their paper dad.

Freedom from the Machine and the Gunman are essential components of the kind of autonomy that love requires. When we include Freedom from the Heart, however, agents become indifferent in a way that jeopardizes their ability to participate in meaningful love relationships. When we remove Freedom from the Heart, we have agents who can desire the welfare of their beloved while remaining autonomous in precisely the ways we want preserved in meaningful love relationships.

4. AUTONOMY AND DIVINE VULNERABILITY

I have offered a case for removing the problematic H-base from the “two-way ability” strand in a chromosomal notion of autonomy. I close with a deeper analysis of the R-base—Freedom from the Reformer as a condition of autonomy. Recall that Freedom from the Reformer expresses the agent’s two-way ability *relative to all divine action*. We have seen that Brümmer’s chromosomal doctrine of autonomy and his commitment to a God of love lead him to affirm a doctrine of divine vulnerability.

Consider God as He seeks a reciprocal love relationship with Jones. Is it possible for God to act so powerfully in Jones’ heart that Jones *cannot* reject a relationship with God *while Jones remains meaningfully autonomous*? This does not represent a real possibility in Brümmer’s theology and it is important to see why. For Brümmer, “It is still up to us as human agents to do God’s will, and if we decide not to do so (in spite of being enlightened, enabled and motivated) then God’s will is not done.”²⁴ To preserve two-way ability in the Brümmer’s sense, the agent must be able to resist all divine action.

Brümmer’s emphasis on two-way ability relative to divine action can be clearly seen in the way he handles Anders Nygren’s concept of divine *agape*. Brümmer argues that Nygren’s God... *...causes us to love him and each other. This seems to turn God into a kind of Heavenly Conquistador... Clearly such views take love to be a highly impersonal concept and the relationship of love to be a very impersonal manipulative one.*²⁵

The way in which Brümmer marshals support for his critique of Nygren’s “highly impersonal

22 Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 43.

23 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 159.

24 Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray? On Prayer and the Nature of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), 77.

25 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 159-60. Emphasis in original.

concept” is revealing. Brümmer appeals to Jean-Paul Sartre’s insight that, “The man who wants to be loved does not desire the enslavement of the beloved.”²⁶ Brümmer then cites the lyrics of ‘Paper Doll’ in which a man “laments” the “absence of love.” It is revealing that both of these examples occur on the limited plane of human-to-human relations. Sartre, an atheist, is not offering commentary of human-divine relationships, and Johnny Black was not writing ‘Paper Doll’ as a hymn about God’s interpersonal abilities. Is it possible that a valid insight on the level of human-to-human relationships becomes fallacious when applied to human-divine relationships?

Jones helps us elaborate on this question. Suppose Jones seeks reciprocal love from a certain available damsel, Jane. Jane’s autonomy entails Jones’ vulnerability. All of Jones’ attempts to woo Jane into a relationship cannot eliminate the risk that Jane will say ‘no’ to the relationship. Jones cannot tolerate that risk. He sets himself to the task *determining* Jane to love him. What means of determination are at Jones’ disposal? To guarantee his desired outcome, he can either abolish her Freedom from the Machine or her Freedom from the Gunman (or both). Of course, the moment Jones violates Jane’s Freedom from the Machine or the Gunman, he ceases to love her as a person and reduces her to a paper doll. If Jones is unwilling to resort to such deterministic tactics, then he must come to terms with the vulnerability that inevitably follows from her autonomy.

Jones’ limitation is our limitation. But is it possible that these limitations do not apply to God as He seeks relationships with His creatures? In approaching this question it is important to see that a God who, unlike us, can bring about love without reducing His lovers to dolls represents not only a possibility, but also an actuality in certain theologies. For Francis Turretin, God draws us into relationship with...

....strength [so] powerful that it may not be frustrated [yet so] sweet that it may not be forced... [God] so sweetly and at the same time powerfully affects the man that he cannot (thus called) help following [Him].²⁷

In this theological system we are led not to an affirmation of “divine vulnerability” or to God as a “Heavenly Conquistador,” but to a God whom Augustine describes as the “Delightful Conqueror.”²⁸ What if God seeks reciprocal love from Jones in this system? In Turretin and Augustine’s view, God is able to guarantee love from Jones in a way that Jones cannot guarantee love from Jane. God can effectively bring Jones to a point of love while sustaining Jones’ Freedom from the Machine and the Gunman.

Indeed, for many people such a God is not merely theoretical, but the God who hears and answers their prayers.²⁹ As J.I. Packer observes,

You pray for the conversion of others... I think that what you do is pray in categorical terms that God will, quite simply and decisively, save them: that He will open the eyes of their understanding, soften their hard hearts, renew their natures, and move their wills to receive the Savior... You would not dream of making it a point in your prayer that you are not asking God actually to bring them to faith, because you recognize that that is something

26 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 160.

27 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, tr. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James Dennison (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, [1696] 1994), 521, 525.

28 Augustine, *On the Forgiveness of Sins and Baptism*, 2.32 (cited in Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 2, 524).

29 In the famous Prayer of Saint Francis: “O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be loved, as to love.” Thomas á Kempis likewise prayed, “expand my heart with love, that I may feel its transforming power, and may even be dissolved in its holy fire! Let me be possessed by thy love, and ravished from myself” (*The Imitation of Christ*, tr. John Payne [Boston, MA: Gould and Lincoln, 1856], 175-76, 177).

He cannot do... You entreat Him to do that very thing, and your confidence in asking rests upon the certainty that He is able to do what you ask... On our feet we may have arguments about it, but on our knees we are all agreed.³⁰

Such prayers are offered neither on the premise of divine vulnerability nor of divine coercion, but on the premise that God can effectively cause us to love without reducing us to paper dolls.

With such prayers we see the need to draw a distinction between Freedom from the Gunman and the Reformer. When creatures exert human action to guarantee love from a fellow creature we become Gunmen. Because we lack the direct access to and definitive authority over our fellow creatures' hearts, we can only eliminate our vulnerability in relation to them by resorting to coercive force. Prayer assumes that God is not bound by this limitation. We would look suspiciously at someone petitioning her fellow creatures to do something to guarantee another's love response. We do not share the same suspicion toward someone who petitions her Creator to do something that would guarantee another's love response.

This distinction we draw in our practice we must also draw in our doctrine. It is precisely this distinction that seems missing in Brümmer's doctrine of "autonomy." This can be seen in Brümmer's assessment of the "Reformation theology" in which, "human beings cannot be agents in relation to God [but] merely objects of divine manipulation."³¹ In so caricaturing Reformation theology, Brümmer sees no middle ground between his theological system and an autonomy-abolishing system in which God acts as a divine manipulator. Brümmer continues:

God's agency is not coercive but enabling and motivating and therefore does not deny freedom, responsibility and personal integrity of the human agent... [This is] a matter of co-operation between two agents and not of one agent using the other as a tool.³²

God is *either* "coercive" and we are mere "tools," *or* divine action is limited to "enabling and motivating" in which case we remain "agents." Brümmer does not see a God who effectively reforms human hearts without trampling our Freedom from the Machine and Gunman as even a *logical possibility*. From Brümmer's analysis it seems as if Augustine, Calvin, Turretin, Jonathan Edwards, and Abraham Kuyper (along with contemporary theologians like D.A. Carson, R.C. Sproul, and Michael Horton) have sought no *via media* between a vulnerable God and a coercive God. From Brümmer's analysis it seems as if there is no biblical evidence for a God who efficaciously draws sinners into love relationships while not obliterating but *enhancing* their freedom.³³

The foregoing analysis of Brümmer's notion of autonomy helps us to see why he sees no such middle road. On the middle road of Reformation theology, the Creator-creature distinction allows that God can change hearts in ways that we cannot. In seeking to guarantee love from other agents, given our creaturely limitations, we can only become Gunmen, but never the Reformer. Our Creator, by contrast, can draw us irresistibly to love as the Reformer, but never as a Gunman. The salient distinction lies between whether the reciprocated love comes from the agent's heart as a *divinely reformed center of action expressing new supernatural desires now intrinsic to the agent*, or whether it comes from the circumvented heart as a *humanly coerced object expressing not the agent's own desires, but those externally imposed against the agent*. In the second case, the love becomes *less* authentic to the extent that human action coerces the Heart. In the first case, the love becomes *more* authentic to the extent that divine action reforms the Heart.

Given the way in which Brümmer has inseparably sequenced Freedom from the Machine,

30 J.I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), 15-17.

31 Brümmer, *The Model of Love*, 189.

32 Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray?*, 75, 76.

33 For exegetical analysis see Williams, *Love, Freedom, and Evil*, 3.2.

the Gunman, the Heart and the Reformer, the authenticity of such love cannot be granted. Such love can only be seen as authentic if we modify our chromosomal doctrine of autonomy from M-G-H-R to M-G. We must see agents as meaningfully autonomous when they enjoy Freedom from the Machine and Gunman while loving from an efficaciously Reformed Heart (as saints presumably love in heaven). If, however, we overlook the Creator-creature distinction in how we seek love,³⁴ then God's gracious and unique ability to reform our hearts without reducing us to dolls can only be seen as an act of "divine manipulation." In this case, the divine Reformer of Reformation theology will continue to be seen by those beyond that system as a Gunman (except, possibly, when they are "on their knees").

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KEY WORDS

Autonomy
Libertarian
Freedom
Love
Indifference
Vulnerability
Power

KEY WORDS (IN AFRIKAANS)

Outonomie
Liberalis
Vryheid
Liefde
Onverskilligheid
Kwesbaarheid
Krag

34 Brümmer does offer three ways that divine love differs from human love (*Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrines* [Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2005], 29-31). In light of this, my analysis is a friendly appeal for him to recognize one more difference.

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Doing theology through reception studies: Towards a post-postmodern theological hermeneutics

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I propose a new approach to the role of the Bible in systematic theology. I take my starting point in the contemporary clash between those who follow the Enlightenment disintegration of Scripture, and conservative attempts to do theology on the basis of Scripture as the infallible Word of God. Subsequently, I present my research project into the reception of John as a way of pursuing insights from all major stages of the history of theological hermeneutics. A deconstructive reading of pre-modern use of the Bible shows that it is much more sensitive to diverging voices in Scripture than is often assumed. Scrutinizing the reasons that pre-modern theologians have for privileging John over Paul or the other way around, brings up theological motives that become fresh material for doing theology today.

1. DEDICATION

This article is written in celebration of the 80th birthday of Vincent Brümmer, the ‘father of the Utrecht School’, among whose latest generations of students I myself number. During my undergraduate studies in Utrecht, I had the privilege of following a course he gave on the love of God. This course led to the publication of his work entitled *The Model of Love* (Brümmer 1993). By the time I was a graduate student, Brümmer was less active in teaching the younger students, so that I wrote no more than a single graduate paper in the philosophy of religion under his supervision, a paper on hermeneutics. Brümmer was only moderately happy with this paper, a circumstance that probably had to do with the quality of the paper, but also with something that affected the impact of Brümmer on my studies at Utrecht.

Although I was strongly attracted by the ‘Brümmer school’, there were two factors that shaped my particular way of being a pupil of the so-called ‘Utrecht School’. One such factor is that, almost from the beginning, I was fascinated not only by philosophical theology, but also by the continental philosophical tradition in which teachers from the Catholic Theological University (KTU) were engaged: Ilse Bulhof and Bert Blans introduced me to Gadamer, Dilthey, Heidegger and Derrida, (e.g. Bulhof & ten Kate 2000). The rather straightforward lines of reasoning produced within an analytic philosophical context, created a place within my heart for these thinkers next to the philosophical theological tradition.

A second shaping influence was my interest in the history of theology. It was Willem van Asselt who played an important role in awakening and reinforcing this interest, which had its roots in my traditional Reformed background (see Asselt et al. 2010; Wisse et al. 2010). What I sometimes missed in Brümmer’s work was a sensitivity to the meandering paths that historical processes can take. It often seemed as if the complexity of history could be reduced to a set of simple concepts from which the theologian then had to choose a few in order to get rid of certain

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inconsistencies in the tradition, thereby adding the finishing touches to a slightly defective but coherent story of Christianity.

Notwithstanding these two aspects, I was enormously fascinated by the philosophical theology that Brümmer and his pupils practised, and am still most grateful for having learned to use the tools of analytic philosophy in theology. Brümmer taught his students first and foremost that theology, especially systematic theology, cannot be content with a description of positions from the past, but has to say something in the present. This invited his students and gave them the confidence to engage in creative theological thought, rather than leaving them with the feeling that all those great thinkers from the past spoke the last word in theological matters. Almost from the very beginning of my studies in Utrecht, I felt attracted to this theological free spirit, although it admittedly took me some time to learn to formulate those creative ideas in such a way that others could understand and appreciate them.

The following paper testifies to my roots in and indebtedness to the Utrecht School of philosophical theology. My hope is that it will show something of an attempt to think independently, and not only to reproduce the past, but also to develop new theology from it for the future. My PhD thesis (Wisse 2003), as well as my later work on Augustine (Wisse 2011), both testify to the influence of these two aspects of my studies that accompanied my adhesion to the Utrecht School. The same holds true for the present paper. One may read it as my second graduate paper on the theme of hermeneutics, as it were, submitted to Brümmer some 18 years after the first, and reflecting much of what has happened in the time between that 1995 paper and my present theological work. I hope that my former master will appreciate it, at least more than the previous one.

2. INTRODUCTION

Doing systematic theology with the Bible in hand is something that nowadays cannot be undertaken without being accompanied with fierce disputes. On the one end of the spectrum, we find those who are often referred to as ‘biblicists’: these theologians, so it is charged, do not take any account of the results of historical criticism, and act as if the Bible forms a coherent whole from which everyone may take as it pleases him or her – at one time from Paul, at another time from John, and at yet another time from the Old Testament writings. In their view, theological claims can be substantiated from all of these writings, which together form the Word of God. On the other end of the spectrum are those who claim that every reference to the Bible bypasses the fundamentally historical and fragmentary character of the Biblical witness. Theology, so this second group argues, cannot go beyond the theology of John, of Paul, of the synoptics or of any other tradition that may be identified (cf. the interesting contribution by Smith 2011).

Mainstream systematic theology seems to move somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum. The writings of some seem to suggest that they do not consider the Bible to be all that important, and that they have a greater interest in bringing the Christian tradition in dialogue with philosophy or the sciences.² Others understand the Bible to be crucial to the practice of systematic theology, but prefer to take account of historical critical exegesis, and thereby bring their use of the Bible in conversation with the dominant voices of historical critical exegesis or ‘biblical theology’ (Pannenberg 1991; Berkhof 1999; and also van den Brink & van der Kooi 2012). Those who take a position somewhere in the middle of the spectrum experience constant

2 I have learned much during my stay in Germany (Heidelberg and Tübingen) and Belgium (KU Leuven), and, although I do not intend this as a value judgement, it is worth noting that Biblical material was hardly ever mentioned as a source for substantiating or refuting a theological argument in theological conversations.

pressure from two sides. Conservatives are unhappy with the way mainstream theologians use the Bible because they consider it to be too 'liberal'. The Bible, they fear, is no longer the true foundation of theological discourse. It has been broken up into pieces, and, in the end, the interpreter becomes the lord over the Bible rather than that the God of the Bible is the Lord of the interpreters. On the other hand, 'liberals', biblical scholars or non-believers see the use of the Bible for constructive theology either as a residue of ancient habits that are no longer plausible today, or else, and perhaps in greater measure yet, as an ideological attempt to justify one's ideas in the name of God without regard for the Bible's human and fragmentary character.

There is an additional factor in play, namely what we could call 'postmodernism'. Applied to hermeneutical questions, the term 'postmodernism' denotes a growing conviction that the meaning of texts depends partly or completely on the context and intentions of the interpreter, rather than the meaning encoded in the text and backed up by the intentions of the author of the texts. Various models have been developed in response to this claim, falling back either on a defence of authorial discourse interpretation, or on a reappraisal of the role of the community of readers in the interpretation of Biblical texts.

In this contribution, I would like to propose a new way of looking at doing theology with the Bible. In the following section, I will revisit the problems sketched above from a historical point of view in order to bring out the key aspects and virtues of the way the Bible was used in the history of Christian theology, or at least as emerges from a 'textbook account' of the history of the way in which the Bible was used. Thereafter, I will outline my current research project on the reception of the Gospel of John as an alternative way of looking at the use of the Bible in theology, both from a historical point of view and as a new way of doing systematic theology with the Bible through the lens of reception studies.

3. A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE OF THE BIBLE

In this section, I will give a rough and schematic outline of the way Christians used the Bible for theological purposes. This is done with a view to the final section, in which I will sketch my own approach to the use of the Bible in my project on the reception of John. In that final section, I will try to show how my project responds to and takes up elements from all stages of the Bible's use across the history of the Christian church. My project incorporates these elements and makes them fruitful for the analysis, but still takes them to a new level.

The first crucial stage in the history of Christian use of the Bible can be labelled the pre-modern, pre-Reformation stage. I will count the second stage, the Reformation phase, as a part of the pre-modern stage – although it justifiably could be called early modern as well – for reasons that I will explain shortly. The pre-modern, pre-Reformation stage thus encompasses the Early Church and the Middle Ages. What characterizes the use of the Bible during this stage is, positively speaking, that both text and reader belong to one and the same "world", as Hans Frei has called it in his *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (Frei 1974:2ff). One could consider the use of the Bible during this stage as being rather "naive" in the sense that later questions about the Bible as a foundation of "dogmatics" did not really enter into play yet, although various authors did at times ask questions or make remarks that would later be used for statements concerning the precise role of the Bible in theological discourse (for examples, see Fernhout 1994:86–106). In the terms of a metaphor taken from the present, one could say that using the Bible in the pre-modern and pre-Reformation period was like walking in a cloud, a word cloud in which all kinds of Bible verses floated around and passed by. The believer moves around in this cloud and picks a verse that suits his or her theological claim. In this cloud, Bible verses are connected through associative networks, which in turn are linked up and determined by theological considerations.

These considerations can be based on the literal meaning of the text, but also on a figurative reading of the text, depending on the occasion, theological context or authoritative tradition.

For example, when Augustine theologizes about seeing God, Matthew 5:8 (“Blessed are the pure in heart, ...”) is always in the background as a Bible verse, and on the basis of his conviction that purity of heart is impossible in this life, Augustine will often move to another much loved Bible verse to speak about how we live in faith on earth: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face, quoting Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:12. Although in this example no explicitly figurative interpretation is in play, it is evident that the way in which Augustine brings the two Bible verses together is rather creative and is motivated by specific theological presuppositions. In the Middle Ages, this associative use of the Bible came to be reinforced by the treatment of Bible verses as an anthology of verses which were taken out of their proximate or more remote biblical context. Bible verses functioned as orientation points within a web of practices (liturgy!), traditions and thoughts without a formal structure explaining why they needed to be used in this way.

Of course, in the context of certain doctrinal controversies, specific verses can be hotly disputed, and specific interpretations may begin to function as a watershed for determining one’s orthodox status. If a particular Bible passage is not in dispute, its interpretation will show itself to be rather malleable. However, the more the verses are subject to controversy, the more they will be pinned down to a specific meaning that is then also explicitly related to the intention of the human or divine author of the text. Augustine once again represents a good example in this regard because he can be at once very associative in his Bible interpretation, but also extremely strict in his reading of Paul in the context of the issue of grace, to mention only one example (in both the early *Ad Simplicianum*, as well as the anti-Pelagian *Enchiridion*). While he often appears to show little interest in the intention of the human Biblical authors, in the context of the Pelagian controversy he places a heavy emphasis on Paul’s intentions in writing his letters and suggests that these intentions alone can function as the criterion for interpreting him in the present.

The free-floating way in which the Bible was used before the Reformation also means that, although the Bible is often said to be infallible, it does not really function as an infallible basis for theology as it does indeed begin to do in the days of the Reformation. Augustine, for example, freely uses the *regula fidei* – i.e. essentially the Nicene creed – in his *Doctrina christiana* as a criterion for the correct reading of the Bible (Augustine 1996:177 [III, 10, 14]; for the way in which Augustine situates the reading of Scripture within the community of faith, see Wischmeyer 2007). In the Middle Ages, Scripture is certainly at the heart of liturgy, spirituality and theology, but at the same time, it had its place among the various other authorities that were at the disposal of theologians.

The most important change in this regard occurred in the Reformation, where the authority and use of Scripture became an explicit and key theme in a theological controversy (for a broader discussion, see Wisse 2013a; Wisse & Meijer 2013). This central role in the Reformation controversy is accompanied by a new way of reading texts in general, as well as a literary revolution related to an upcoming urban middle class and the discovery of book printing techniques. The idea arises that texts should be read in their original languages so as to enable one to come nearer to their original meaning. Not only for the Reformers Luther and Calvin, but already for Erasmus, the attempt to arrive at the original text and the original meaning of the texts is a deeply theological undertaking. Erasmus sees it as nothing less than the way to approach the God who speaks in the midst of a Church that has become addicted to all sorts of external practices which have nothing to do with the Spirit and will of God (Augustine 1986:90–93). For biblical humanism, the study of Greek and Hebrew does not mean the secularisation of

theology, but rather a theology oriented to discovering God in the study of the languages. Back to what God intended faith and theology to be!

Nevertheless, amidst the conflict between identities that the Reformation movement represented, the appeal to Scripture was also an attempt to establish Church and theology on new foundations. *Sacra scriptura sui interpres* was an attempt to free the reading of Scripture from external authority and to bind the use of the Bible to the intentions of both the human as well as the divine author – at least, this was how things were perceived in the controversy between defenders of the old and the new faith (François 2006). Still, it was an attempt to liberate the reading of Scripture, and, depending on how you look at it, the attempt was indeed successful. Nevertheless, the context in which the attempt was made, limited the scope of the *sola Scriptura* project. In the mainstream Reformations, the use of the Bible remained within the confessional boundaries of Nicene orthodoxy. Early in the Reformation, beginning already with the decades of the 1520s and 1530s, various radical Reformers admitted that a theology solely based on the Bible is impossible, because the Bible cannot bear that burden due to its internal inconsistencies (Hayden-Roy 1994:11-17). The early Luther, for example, acknowledges this when he speaks about the best books in the New Testament. In fact, one might defend the thesis that Luther never defended the notion of the Bible as the basis of the Christian faith, since he spoke of Christ, the living Word, as the centre of theology rather than a dead letter as a formal criterion (Kooiman 1977:152-161). Also noteworthy is that Scripture does not appear anywhere in the early Lutheran credal statements, or in Melancthon's *Loci communes*. Only in seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy do we encounter the development of something like a locus de *Sacra Scriptura*. If this is correct (more or less contra Muller 2003:65-69), it is the Reformed/Calvinist Reformation alone that develops the notion of Scripture as a formal basis for doing theology. Over the course of seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodoxy, this idea is increasingly formalised and attempts are made to prove that the Bible is a coherent basis for doing theology (Muller 2003:94–103).

However, it was in the course of this same seventeenth century that the first traces of a third stage in the use of Scripture appeared on the scene, as perhaps most clearly illustrated in Baruch de Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670:VII–VIII). One of the key characteristics of the modern use of the Bible is the way it broke the Scriptures up into scattered pieces. No longer could one read John through the lens of the synoptics or of Paul, nor could one accept Moses to have been the author of the Pentateuch. Consequently, the attempt to construct a true theology on the foundation of a unified Bible shipwrecked on the rocks of criticism as well. If what John says is different from what Paul says, and if what they have to say can only be understood in terms of what they mean within their original context, there is hardly any reason why systematic theology should be done on the basis of Scripture anymore. The only remaining possibility is to write a theology of John, of Paul or of Mark. Starting with Gabler's famous inaugural lecture of 1787 (Sandys-Wunsch & Eldredge 1980), biblical theology came on the scene to provide a sound historical account of themes that run through the Bible, but it was not intended to make a normative contribution to Christian faith. Dogmatics ended up as either an ordered formulation of what Christians believe, or else a rational philosophical reconstruction of theology in secular terms. Since modernity, systematic theologians who use the Bible connect to different strands in biblical scholarship, and attempt to navigate between the Scylla of a naïve use of Scripture as practiced in the 'pre-critical' era and the Charybdis of the total impasse that may follow from the consistent recognition of a variety of voices heard in the Bible.

When the case for a theological use of the Bible already found itself under great pressure in modernity because the text had been broken up into scattered parts, the a final blow was struck in the postmodern stage of the use of Scripture. The postmodern critique attacks not the biblical

text, but the reader of that text (for the theological use of Scripture, Kelsey 1975 is an excellent example). Whereas the modern approach to the Bible still presumed that one can know what the various biblical authors mean, a postmodern approach questions the possibility of interpretation altogether. Is there actually such a thing as an intention, or is there no more than a flow of texts interpreting one another in an endless play of signs? (For an extensive discussion and critique, see Vanhoozer 1998)

4. A PROJECT ON THE RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

The end of the previous section brought us to the double crisis in which the use of the Bible in systematic theology now finds itself, so that we must now consider how an attempt can be made to overcome that crisis. Upon assuming a post in dogmatics at VU University Amsterdam in 2009 and completing a monograph on Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity in conversation with contemporary theology in 2011 (Wisse 2011), I have started on a project on the reception of the Gospel of John in the history of theology (cf. <http://receptionofjohn.blogspot.nl>). The motive for this new project was not without an explicit connection to my project on Augustine's trinitarian theology. In my research on Augustine, I was repeatedly confronted with the fact that Augustine defends some form of 'natural theology'. Of course this 'natural theology' is not to be equated directly with what has been understood by this term since the attacks of Karl Barth, and yet there is in Augustine something like a natural theology that one will not find in most contemporary Christian systematic theology. Barth was the father of a type of systematic theology whose underlying intention it was to think through the whole of Christian theology in terms of revealed theology, in terms of God's revelation in Christ. The shape of Augustine's theology, in contrast, was determined by a duality between a natural capability of knowing God on the one hand, and the restoration of that capability through faith in Christ on the other (Wisse 2011:108–148; cf. e.g. Gibson 2009).

A conference in Hoeven, organized by NOSTER (<http://www.noster.org>) in 2008, where Adele Reinhartz spoke on the Gospel of John from a Jewish perspective (cf. Reinhartz 2002), made me realize that what I had begun to dislike in Barth, was not present only in Barth, but already in the Bible, namely in John. Allowing for some degree of overstatement, I can still say that it became clear to me that if any Gospel can be cited in support of an exclusively Christocentric theology, it is the Gospel of John. When Barth rejects natural theology and discusses the Barmen Declaration in Church Dogmatics II/1, he gives a place of prominence to John 14:6: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." (Barth 1975:II/1, 175-178; for a historical deconstruction, see Wengst 1985). This realization led to the birth of my current project on John. The students' interest was quickly awakened by this project, since it combined theology with the Reformed intuition and background that most of them shared: theology should be done on the basis of the Bible. What was more natural to them than to study the reception of the Bible in their favourite theologians? Calvin, Kohlbrugge, Luther, Athanasius, Barth, Ratzinger and others were examined for the way in which they receive the Gospel of John.

Practically, the research works as follows. For systematic theological works, we begin to explore where the authors use the Gospel of John, and which verses they use and do not use (for an example, see Wisse 2012). We create a database in which the references to John are listed. Subsequently, we study these databases in more detail to see what the theologian's favourite verses are, where these citations occur, and for which verses the thinker appears to show little or no interest. On this basis, we ask the question how each theologian's reception of John relates to his or her theology. What reasons do they have for their favourite verse(s), and why do they have an interest in ignoring others? Another approach takes its starting point in commentaries

or series of sermons on John, and studies how the theology of specific authors is interrelated with their interpretation of John, often in comparison with others.

The emphasis in my own research is on the reception of John in Augustine (Wisse & Dupont 2013), although it is increasingly extending to the period of the Reformation as well. To give one example from Augustine, in *sermo* 141 he preaches on John 14:6: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." It is fascinating to see how it is as if Augustine had read Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. Immediately after he introduces the theme of the sermon, he distances himself from John by saying:

You heard, among other things, when the gospel was read, what the Lord Jesus said: *I am the way and the truth and the life* (Jn 14:6). Everybody yearns for truth and life; but not everybody finds the way. That God is a kind of eternal life, unchangeable, intelligible, intelligent, wise, bestowing wisdom, this quite a number of philosophers even of this world have been able to see. The truth as something fixed, stable, unalterable, in which are to be found all the formulae of all created things, this they were certainly able to see, but from a long way off; they could see it, but from a position of error; and therefore they did not find the way by which they could reach so great, so inexpressible, so completely satisfying a possession. (Augustine 1992:410)

From John 14:6, Augustine then moves to Romans 1 so as to expand on what the pagans may know about God, returning to John 14:6 only at the end of the sermon. In this way it becomes clear how Augustine, noticing that John 14:6 could be read in the 'Barthian' sense, adapts the potentially problematic meaning of this text by bypassing that possibility and reading John through the eyes Paul. Sermon 229G provides us with another example where Augustine tempers the strong implications of 14:9 ("Whoever has seen me has also seen the Father") through the lens of the hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians, which in turn is read through the filter of a two-nature Christology (Augustine 1993:291).

In the Reformation, it is not only the questions of Christological exclusivism that bear interesting results. The Johannine prologue can be construed in the theology of the Reformation as an indicator that makes visible the lines that divide the various streams within the Protestant camp from each other (Wisse 2013b). The tension between a universal presence of Christ in the whole world on the one hand, and a particular presence of Christ to (predestined) believers alone on the other, marks the varying emphases that interpreters put on the different verses of the Johannine prologue. Universalists *avant la lettre* like Michael Servet or Sebastian Franck follow Erasmus in numbering 1:4 and 1:9 (the light enlightening every human being) among their favourite verses, while they conversely downplay 1:5 or 1:13 which speak about the darkness not comprehending the light or about birth from God being necessary to faith in Christ. The latter, however, are among the favourite verses of such Reformers as Bucer and Calvin, and, to a lesser extent, Luther. To mention only one other example: whereas Bucer and Calvin take pains to disarm the radical potential of 1:14 by reading 'The Word became flesh' as 'The Word assumed flesh' together with the Augustinian tradition, radical Reformers such as the Anabaptists, Servet and Franck maintain a robust reading of this verse and build their more radical or universal view of salvation on it.

5. DOING THEOLOGY THROUGH RECEPTION STUDIES

Now that we have seen something of the shape of the project, it is appropriate to consider how it relates to the 'textbook' account of the use of the Bible as outlined above and how it can be of help for doing constructive theology with the Bible today. My proposal is to take up elements from all key stages of the Bible's use in the history of Christianity and bring them together in a

new way. Many of the sub-projects that have already been carried out deal with the pre-modern use of the Bible. Authors such as Augustine or Athanasius seemingly do not care whether a text comes from John or from Matthew. Even Reformation theologians, in spite of their greater sensitivity to the differences between the Biblical authors, see the whole of the Bible and especially the New Testament as the authoritative Word of God. If these theologians were to be asked for their formal view of the Bible, they would reply that all the writings contained in it are the Word of God.

On the whole, those who accept the modern fragmentation of the Bible discard such theology as no longer useful for constructive theology. In order to overcome this impasse, I propose to take an element from the postmodern stage, and to approach pre-modern authors not so much through their formal affirmation of the authority of the Bible, as from a deconstructive hermeneutics of suspicion. Rather than looking at what they say, we look at what they do, and what they do turns out to be quite different from what they say.

Rather than leaving it at this deconstruction, however, we will continue with a positive appreciation of what the pre-modern authors do. In this attempt, we take up elements both from the Reformation and from the modern stage of the use of the Bible. Notwithstanding the claims of the pre-modern authors themselves to the contrary, we approach their use of the Bible from a modern frame of reference, that is, on the basis of the assumption that different biblical authors have different views and intentions, and that even within a single book, such as the Gospel of John, one can perceive tensions and favour certain strands in the biblical traditions over others according to their own cultural and theological contexts and convictions. We thus look at pre-modern authors through this modern lens, and we find that they were in fact much more sensitive to modern insights than modern biblical scholarship has presumed. When we read pre-modern authors deconstructively, it emerges that they in fact do not believe that everything in the Bible is true! On the contrary, quite often when they prefer Paul over John or *vice versa*, they play down the force of the one through an appeal to the other in much the same way as modern or postmodern authors would do with various competing Biblical traditions.

When pre-modern theologians are considered apart from the instrument of a deconstructionist reading, it appears as if they never put their cards on the table regarding their motives for privileging certain Biblical texts or traditions over others. Formally they never admit to a preference for one text or tradition, although such a preference can be inferred from their interest in allegorizing certain texts. What pre-modern theologians *say*, is not: "Look, in this passage I read John through Paul because I am in favour of natural theology." What they (for the most part) *say* or just *do*, is: "Look, this is the only true reading of the text; this is the intention of the Holy Spirit." What makes this practice so unfortunate is that the pre-modern authors thereby hide motives that from our modern or postmodern frame of reference are not bad motives at all. Because of their formal view of Scripture, pre-modern theologians do not allow themselves to be open about their motives for not accepting John 1:14, for example. Our deconstructive analysis of their Bible use in connection with the shape of their theology, however, allows us to discover why they implicitly do criticize or downplay John 1:14 – as when a radical reading of this verse implies that human beings can become God as radically as God became a human being. For these same pre-modern thinkers, such a reading comes down to an idolizing of human beings that contravenes a key text in the Old Testament, namely the Decalogue.

At this point, the constructive use of the deconstructive methodology becomes visible. Our deconstructive approach to pre-modern authors helps us to turn their motives into fresh material for theological discussion and systematic-theological reflection. The differences between the various Reformation readings of the Johannine prologue all of a sudden present us with a set of key theological options, with profound soteriological or ecclesiological implications for

today: a radical humanism in which neither church nor baptism are necessary (e.g. Servet and Franck), or a radical understanding of particular salvation and baptism in which believers receive eschatological bliss already in this life (e.g. Anabaptists). This fresh material therefore brings systematic theological reflection into a close relationship with both Scripture and tradition, where theological reflection breathes Biblical notions and traditions, brings them into collision with each other, counts their virtues and shortcomings, but constantly opens itself to the way in which the theological tradition appropriated these texts and traditions, bringing out the basic life options that are embedded in these traditions.

In this respect, although we approach pre-modern authors through a deconstructive method, we are able to moving beyond postmodern ways of reading as well. We do admit that readers have a decisive role in interpreting their authoritative traditions, but we do not admit that each theological interpretation of an authoritative text is as arbitrary as any other. In that sense, we take up pre-modern and modern views of interpretation, and reintroduce them within a postmodern frame of reference (Wisse 2003:146–157, 166–175).

An additional virtue of this approach is that it introduces a new relationship between systematic theology and historical scholarship. As the brief overview above has indicated, the modern approach to the Bible as a fragmented, systematic theology became increasingly alienated from and counterposed to historical methodology because it was supposed to speak normatively, but from a modern frame of reference could do so only by compromising the standards of historical research. Most of the research in the project on the reception of the Gospel of John has its place in the history of ideas and examines the use of the fourth Gospel through quantitative and qualitative analysis of texts, much in line with historical scholarship. Systematic-theological reflection is not alien to or distanced from it, but embedded in the research as the exploration of the way in which thinkers from the past confronted the challenges of their context through the reading of the Bible (cf. Wisse 2009).

Of course, the approach proposed above has consequences for the way in which systematic theology is done as well. In the end, it does not lead to a type of systematic theology in which a closed logical system is formulated. Rather, the function of systematic theology and its use of the Bible is to elucidate Christian ‘forms of life’ that interact with Biblical traditions and theological traditions, confronting believers in new contexts and situations with (established) ways of living the Christian life (Brümmer 1993:19–29). In such situations, systematic theology can offer fundamental options for bringing the current situation in conversation with the Bible and the tradition (Brümmer 1993:29–35). It can indicate where one finds these options in the Bible, where the opposite of such an option has its place in the Bible as well, why Christians in various contexts and situations opted for a particular option, and what the consequences of such options were. This then, helps contemporary Christians to situate themselves in the present, standing *coram Deo*, *vis-à-vis* Scripture, tradition, fellow Christians and themselves.³

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TREFWOORDE

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Johannes
Ontvangs
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